



Left: Dave at 335 pounds on March 18, 2016, day one of his new plan. (Note the empty salad bowl.)
Right: Dave at 205 pounds while at his niece's Victoria, B.C. wedding reception on July 13, 2019.

How a “Big Guy” Lost 130 Pounds, Kept It Off, and Regained His Health

I've been big for most of my life. I wasn't an obese child, but I was tall and always overweight, and I knew I stood out. I grew up self-conscious about being “that husky kid” in my classes, and I got used to being called “Big Guy” as an adult.

My parents were overweight and morbidly obese. Our house was well stocked, upstairs and downstairs, near the TV, and near our bedrooms with junk food we could help ourselves to whenever we wanted. We ate out often, especially when there were coupons, bargains, or any special occasion we created. Fast food, buffets, pancake houses, steakhouses, seafood, bratwursts, pizza, ice cream, sodas, theatre popcorn, chips, pastries... These were the traditions, rituals and staple foods I grew up with, and I worked in fast food and restaurants as a teenager.

I was probably at my healthiest weight right after high school and during my first three years in the Air Force. In my fourth year of enlistment, I was put on “the fat boy program” and had to lose eight pounds to be honorably discharged.

From there – work, college, marriage, kids, career – over the next thirty years, I got heavier. Whatever was cheap or convenient was a meal (or a meal between meals). Along the way, I tried losing weight with fad diets, liquid diets, supplements, fitness club memberships, jogging on my own, choosing “healthier” options, even daily testosterone injections to try and boost my metabolism. The losses were never more than twenty pounds, the regimens were unsustainable, and I'd gain it all back with a little more. By the age of 50 I began to feel like it was unavoidable – despite any of my good intentions and efforts, I was destined (or cursed) to be obese for the rest of my life.

In March 2016, at 335 pounds (6' tall), my doctor wanted to put me on medications for high triglycerides. I refused. I wanted an alternative. So we talked – for nearly an hour – about my history, my encroaching diabetes, and we came up with a plan. I agreed to do three things: 1) keep a food journal, 2) limit my daily calories to 2,800, and 3) go for a 30-minute walk every other day. At the end of our appointment I took my first step. I pulled out my wallet, removed all the fast food coupons I'd been carrying, and ripped them up in front of my doctor. We would meet again in July.

To the journaling, calorie counting and walking I added reading books and watching films about nutrition and food. I'd seen the film, *Forks Over Knives*, before, but this time I purchased my own copy of it and other films to watch repeatedly. I read books by nearly all of the authors featured in the films. I listened to their lectures online. Fortunately, my family found the topic of food and nutrition intriguing as well. Persuaded by my results and enthusiasm, my wife agreed to make changes to our kitchen and cooking methods. I even set up my office, so I could prepare and cook my own healthier meals at work. It was a total unlearning and reeducation. I learned that when I chose less processed, more calorie-dilute, plant-based alternatives, the weight came off – rapidly and almost effortlessly.

At the July follow-up, my doctor was amazed. In four months, I'd lost 60 pounds, and my triglycerides were excellent. At our November follow-up, I was down another 40 pounds. By January 2017, I decided to stop counting calories and fully embrace a whole food plant-based (WFPB) lifestyle.

There have been side effects. I don't snore anymore. I don't wake up in the middle of the night dealing with acid reflux. My naval hernia doesn't bother me anymore. My skin cleared up and became less oily. My legs are no longer swollen from edema. Allergic reactions from seasonal pollens and a few foods have disappeared. My blood pressure, lipids and blood test numbers are stellar. My bowel movements are faster, easier and regular. I haven't had a cold or flu in four years. I can crawl under my house, travel comfortably in airline seats, and find more (and cheaper) clothing options that fit. I wake up early wanting to run or walk for more than an hour each day. I have the energy to get up and down a lot without any trouble. My wife can wrap her arms around me completely. I am very grateful that she embraced my change in diet and lifestyle. She has reaped the health benefits as well. We love how much safer our kitchen is without animal products around and how easier it is to clean since cooking without oils. My wife and I make plant-based dishes to share at parties and potlucks. Every Sunday, I make a big pot of brown rice and a large bowl of bean salsa to serve at our church fellowship hour.

It's been over four years since that March 2016 talk with my doctor. I have kept the weight off! And I have slowly, steadily (with the occasional plateau) continued to lose weight without counting calories and without depriving myself of foods I love to eat.

Thirty-plus years of being the "Big Guy" have left some physical and emotional scars, but I'm certain that I am much healthier now at 56 than I was at 18. I have the numbers and experience to prove it.

Dave Wegener – May 2020