

Healthy Eating

6 Things That Happened When I Gave Up Dairy

By POPSUGAR Fitness
Topics: [vegan diet](#)



In my 20s, I was a french-fry, soy-ice-cream, pasta-and-bread-loving vegan. I ended up gaining 40 pounds and—surprise, surprise—always felt tired, foggy-headed, and on the brink of another cold. After six years, I started eating eggs and dairy, and I felt a little better, but that's probably because I was finally eating healthier, trying to lose all the weight I gained.

Fast forward 12 years to this summer. I was sitting on my couch, flipping through Netflix, and stumbled upon the documentary [Vegucated](#). It takes the stance that being vegan is better for the planet and kinder to animals, and after seeing some heartbreaking video footage, I felt compelled to eat more compassionately and ditch dairy on the spot. I had no idea how dramatically my life was about to improve.

Wait, Are These My Skinny Jeans?

Getting dressed one chilly September morning, I grabbed a pair of my favorite skinny jeans and they slipped right on! Since I tend to gain a little weight in the summer, I was expecting to have to wrestle with them for a bit, but they didn't feel tight whatsoever. I even slipped them off to check the label to make sure they were the right pair. Yeah, you bet I was smiling and feeling pretty awesome. Since having two kids, I'd been carrying around a few extra pounds that were holding on for dear life (really, my youngest is now two!), and ditching dairy made it happen in two months without any other change.

Bye-Bye Bloat

Know what the number one reason was for my Costco membership? Lactaid pills. Yep, I popped one every time I ate because even the tiniest drop of butter in a cracker could set me off. I wasn't always lactose intolerant, but it hit me hard when I went away to college, which was one of the reasons I went vegan back then. I couldn't leave my house without some trusty pills in my pocket, and I popped at least five a day. My body was telling me not to eat dairy and here I was devouring it every chance I got. And boy, did I pay the price. My belly was constantly bloated and I had more than my fair share of emergency bathroom runs. It seems obvious to anyone that you should stop eating the one thing that makes you feel horrible, but I guess I didn't realize just how bad I was feeling until I started feeling amazing.

What's That Amazing Smell?

Sinus surgery. That was the recommendation after years of chronic and painful sinus infections, extensive allergy testing, two CT scans, daily nasal sprays and antihistamines, twice-daily dates with my Neti Pot, months of heavy-duty antibiotics, and heartbreakingly having to find a new home for my two cats. The ear, nose, and throat specialist said it was one of the worst cases he'd seen, and said surgery to remove the congestion and widen my sinuses should be the next step. Talk about scared. There had to be another solution.

I'd heard that [dairy can contribute to congestion](#) but considered not being able to breathe or smell a fair trade for cheese. It's been two months of being dairy free, and now that fall is in full swing, I should be miserable with allergy stuffiness and sinus pressure. But I'm not. My doctor can't believe I haven't needed to refill my meds. I even went apple picking and could actually smell the cider donuts cooking (not that I could eat one!). I teared up. I had a moment right there in the apple orchard. And to think, I almost went through with surgery, when all I needed to do was say no to cheese.

Did You Change Moisturizers?

Seriously, someone asked me this, and I was thrilled. My skin has never been clearer. I didn't have a bad acne problem, but a pimple always seemed to be cropping up, which was pretty embarrassing for someone in their late 30s. My skin is smoother, softer, and has more of a natural glow. It makes sense, since [cow's milk contains growth hormone, fats, and sugars](#) (yes, organic milk too), which can aggravate the skin. There's definitely some strong data showing the correlation between dairy and acne, and although it can take up to six months for skin to heal, I noticed a difference within a month.

Smoothies, Salads, and Sweet Potatoes

Like most people, I tried to eat healthy, but when you're in a rush or tired from a long day, you grab the quickest thing. As a vegetarian, cheese was like its own food group to me, and admittedly, cheesy pesto paninis, creamy pasta, and pizza were always on the menu. I had to completely rethink my meals and found that with a little bit of prep, I was eating so much healthier. I made green smoothies for breakfast, salads for lunch, and got really creative with using tempeh, tofu, lentils, beans, whole grains, and all sorts of veggies. Ditching dairy meant that I made room for foods that were much more nutrient-packed, and I no longer felt heavy after meals.

Another Three Miles? Sure!

Eating healthier also meant I had more energy. Whether it was going for a run, bike ride, hike, or teaching a yoga class, I felt so peppy and fired up. I had more days in the past two months where I felt like I could keep going and going than I ever had when I was eating dairy. Maybe this is the reason [so many athletes go vegan](#).

Final Thoughts

I know what you're thinking. "I could never live without _____." So don't. If you want to avoid dairy but you could never give up pizza, then give up dairy except for pizza. I will say that for most of your favorite foods there are some pretty outstanding alternatives. My kitchen is constantly stocked with soy milk, soy yogurt, Earth Balance buttery spread, and my fave—almond milk ice cream. Personally, I wasn't a fan of vegan cheeses so I just leave it off my pizza or sandwiches, or [make my own using raw cashews](#). Please don't mourn for the cookies and pancakes you can't eat. There are so many [dairy-free recipes](#) that taste as awesome as ones containing milk and butter. Once you get used to cooking and eating in this new way, it'll feel just as easy as your diet feels now. If you can't go cold turkey, do what you can and gradually take milk out of your diet. If your experience is anything like mine, the benefits will speak for themselves, and you'll be inspired to eliminate dairy completely.

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