

# I Was Looking Death in the Eye—So I Lost 60lbs and Changed My Life

Published Mar 29, 2024 at 4:30 AM EDT

By **Kevin Dunn**

I was looking at dying young as a foregone fact of my life.

I suffered from a long list of major health issues including stage 3b kidney failure, Type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, high cholesterol, hypertension, and a history of pulmonary embolism.

After a back surgery in July 2023, I literally almost died.

The hospital gave me routine, long-acting morphine but my kidneys couldn't clear the morphine out of my body. When I became lucid, I saw the look on my family's faces.

Something had to change. I knew that I wanted to live longer and enjoy life.

Before that life-changing, look-death-in-the-eye moment, I was a trained chef who had begun specializing in vegetarian and vegan cuisine in the early 1990s to help counter a diabetes diagnosis.



Left and right: Kevin Dunn before and after his weight loss journey that transformed his health and confidence. **LESLIE DUNN**

Following a plant-based diet helped me for a time but I was completely insulin dependent.

My education at The Culinary Institute of America and my experience as an executive chef at Kellogg's and chef instructor at Grand Rapids Community College gave me a profound understanding of how food nourishes the mind, body and spirit.

I love food. I appreciate food and, on the whole, I was eating a balanced diet. But it wasn't enough. Being a professional chef for over 40 years takes its toll. It's a tough profession, especially for a diabetic.

When I left that hospital in 2023 I knew that having just diabetes alone or just high blood pressure alone or just high cholesterol was bad enough. All of them was recipe for disaster.

I had retired a year prior thinking I was about to kick off the best years of my life. Instead, I wondered how much time I had left as I struggled to even walk

Around then I was hearing more and more about weight loss drugs like Ozempic. I thought that using those drugs could be a way to quickly and easily hit the reset button.

Perhaps that was the solution. I could just take more drugs on top of all the other prescriptions I was already taking. I was a Type 2 diabetic after all; I was probably a good candidate.

My doctors did not agree.

In fact, they thought I should focus on the root causes that were making me so sick and wanted to support me in making lifestyle changes that I could implement for the rest of my life.

I wasn't sure I'd make headway but I also knew I had to do something. The memory of my family's ashen faces after my last back surgery was a powerful motivator. I agreed to try but I knew I'd need help.

My doctors at Corewell Health referred me to Nudj Health, a health company that would function as an extension of my doctor's office. I would work directly with their registered dietitians and health coaches and focus on my fitness and nutrition.

What I liked is that all of my progress was shared directly with my doctors. It was fully integrated. But that also meant I couldn't hide. No matter; I was ready to commit to making lifestyle changes.

The alternative was likely death.

On October 10, 2023, I took the first steps to completely transforming my life. I weighed 215lbs. My body mass index was 35. I needed insulin to survive and took about 20 pills a day for various chronic conditions.

My coach and I talked about my personal goals. Beyond just wanting to be alive, I wanted to feel better about myself and lose weight. I wanted to feel confident again when I caught my reflection in a store window. I wanted to once again fit into some of the clothes in my closet.

I started in the fitness and nutrition pathways with my coach. The registered dietitian said the programs were about 16 weeks long. That sounded like a reasonable amount of time to try something new.

I started slowly. At first, I could only walk for 15 minutes on the treadmill and 5 minutes on the elliptical.

I began to track what I ate, added more fiber. I thought more about meal frequency and timing throughout the day, started to vary my vegetables and whole grain intake, and made sure I was getting enough plant-based proteins in my diet.

All of this sounds easy but it was still a challenging journey and I wasn't perfect by any means.

At my first nutrition class, I weighed 215lbs. After eight weeks I had already dropped 23lbs. My energy was skyrocketing and my clothes fit! I couldn't believe it. My health team encouraged me to keep going.

There was no way I was stopping now!

My registered dietitian hosted virtual group classes twice per month and I made an effort to show up to every class and be an active participant. I also met with my health coach twice monthly, on the opposite weeks.

It kept me accountable and while in class it was fun to share some of my culinary knowledge with other class participants. I followed up with my doctor every three months to review my progress and ensure I was reaching my health goals.

After 16 weeks, I had lost 50lbs., but that was only one aspect of my progress. I was able to dig into harder workouts, which included resistance training and longer circuits.

While I still loved to cook elaborate vegetarian and vegan meals, I wasn't overdoing it. I became more mindful about the types of food I was putting into my body, why food was important for me, and how it could benefit and provide me with sustained energy.

Sure enough, my test results started to show that my health was dramatically improving. I reduced my insulin use by half and was taking half the number of daily pills. Initially, I was taking four blood pressure medications a day, now I take none.

The amount of money I'm spending on prescriptions has also dropped. I'm saving \$40 a month now, and that's a huge win. My kidney function is improving and my cholesterol is within a normal range.

The numbers don't lie. I feel great for a reason. My body doesn't have to work so hard to keep me alive.

I'm currently working out at the gym more than I have in decades, and I'm even enjoying it. My endurance allows me to hit 70 minutes on the treadmill and 45 minutes on the elliptical trainer six days a week.

I've lost almost 60lbs. At 156lbs and a body mass index of 24.4, I'm at a healthy weight.

I used to only go on very short walks with my wife. Currently, we walk two miles without stopping. And I'm shrinking in the best way possible. Just last year I wore a size 36 waist and XXL shirt, I'm currently wearing a size 30 waist and medium shirts.

I have more confidence today than ever before.

I used to hate seeing my doctors. The news was rarely good and I would leave feeling depressed. Now, I love seeing their faces light up when they see my latest test results.

My endocrinologist said I'm a rarity in their office and they wish more patients would put in the work to try implementing lifestyle changes.

Previously, I was on the largest and strongest insulin dosages for controlling my blood sugars. Now, I'm almost off of both long-acting and quick-acting insulin. My doctors say that is remarkable.

Yes, I could have just taken weight loss drugs but that would have been a short-term win.

Instead, I've implemented lifestyle changes that I can maintain for the rest of my life. I have such a better understanding of my health as it relates to food and exercise and I have every intention of continuing on this health journey.

*Kevin Dunn is a retired chef from Michigan.*

*All views expressed are the author's own.*

**Do you have a unique experience or personal story to share? Email the My Turn team at [myturn@newsweek.com](mailto:myturn@newsweek.com).**

## READ MORE

- I was a US embassy officer in Syria—that kid still haunts me →
- I quit my \$300,000 banking job 2 months before a six figure bonus →
- I'm a storm-chasing adventure photographer. I live for heart explosions →
- I fought for my non-Jewish peers—their silence now is deafening →
- I can relate to Kate Middleton. I know what she needs →

[Request Reprint & Licensing](#)

[Submit Correction](#)

[View Editorial Guidelines](#)

## About the writer

**Kevin Dunn**

Kevin Dunn is a retired chef from Michigan.