

Rhonda Collins

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Over the years, my life has often been stressful. I was a single mom raising my twin sons, Dustin and Brandon. I had to do two or three jobs at times to get by. I'd work at Walmart and then wait tables at different restaurants. Now, I'm 54 with grandchildren. Each of my sons has a daughter. I love my family, but I was always tired and had no energy to do the activities we used to enjoy, like going to museums, camping and hiking. My weight's gone up and down and a few months ago I was the heaviest I've ever been. What made everything worse, I've had long COVID and was too exhausted to exercise. I had chronic fatigue, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes. I was actually thinking to myself: "Why go on?" I heard about the Thrive Challenge and thought, "You know what? I'm going to try it." I want to see my grandkids growing up and graduate from college.

I start each morning by drinking water and I cut out chocolate milk and sweet tea.

I've been adding fruits and vegetables to my diet. I'll cook chicken with peppers and onions and have it with a whole wheat tortilla or rice.

I'm stretching and doing gentle walking.

I'm also getting outside with my dogs, which gives me energy and is helping my mood. I have a four-year-old boxer, Savannah, and an energetic boxer puppy, Waylon. I'm constantly having to get up and do things for him. I call my dogs my fur babies — they keep me going. Now I'm moving more, I've started to feel better and I've lost 11 pounds. I feel like I've got a chance at living again.

I'm enjoying being out in the garden, pruning and caring for my plants.

I've got a lilac bush, coral roses, a cherry blossom tree, and a lovely big yellow forsythia bush. I can mow the lawn again myself — it feels freeing to do normal things without relying on my sons to help me. For a long time I could hardly leave the house and now I've been sitting out on the deck. Being in the sunshine and knowing I'm getting enough vitamin D helps me relax.



When I take my pills I say positive affirmations to myself like: "You can do it."

And when I clean my teeth I look in the mirror and say: "I love you Rhonda." It's hard but I'm trying to do it every day to remind myself I'm worth it.

I'm spending more time with my family.

I've been going out for dinner a couple times with my mother, which is nice because she hasn't been getting out in the pandemic. And I go to my sons' house. They're both divorced and live together with their daughters; Hailey, who's 13, and three-year-old Kennedy. We play in the backyard. The kids play chase and I'm the safe base! I'm not running yet, but I'm moving. We took the little one to the circus which she loved. I like making memories and I hope they'll remember these good times too.

For my birthday in July, I've rented a cabin by White River.

It's a couple of hours from where we live and the whole family will be there together. My hope is that I can actually kayak and hike with everyone. I'm feeling fulfilled and pretty much at peace, with hope for the future.

Getting around at work is easier because I'm breathing freely.

I used to use a shopping cart to get around the store. I'd have to stop for rests and would sometimes have panic attacks. Now, my legs aren't swollen. I can get from point A to point B which feels freeing. I've also been smiling more at work. The other day I said "Hello" to one of the overnight guys and he said, "You're happy, what has changed?" I told him, "I don't know; I guess I'm actually living."

