

Maria Howell

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\$5,000 WINNER

Supercenter #5823

Dallas, TX

I used to find it hard to balance my job with taking care of my family and myself. I'd grab snacks like a hot dog, or a cookie and Coke. I was always tired and stressed. For dinner, I'd pick up fried chicken or order pizza, something easy, so I could come home and throw myself on the couch. I'm 43 and my husband, James, and I have a 15-year-old son, Andrew, and a 21-year-old daughter, Isabel, and I felt like I was failing as a mother. We have family members who struggle with obesity and diabetes and I wanted to be a good role model. I thought: "If I can change the way I eat and live, they might too."

Keisha, my co-worker, inspired me to start the Thrive Challenge.

She was a winner and I respect Keisha. She's like me: energetic, always laughing, and doing her best. She said, "Do it." I said, "Keisha, I'm going to!"

I started by cutting out cookies and sweets.

Instead I'll have water or tea and fruit. I love blackberries and blueberries. At work, a group of us on the Thrive Challenge support each other and swap recipes. Clare, another winner, brought her chicken salad in to share in the break room. At home, I'll bake chicken marinated in lime juice, and we're eating more salad. My daughter helps with the cooking. I'm from Mexico and we love enchiladas and burritos. But now we're using small corn tortillas instead of big flour tortillas.

As a family, we're exercising together outside, jumping rope and lifting small weights.

Or we'll go swimming. It's great because we're connecting and the kids have a good, active environment and spend less time gaming and watching T.V.



For "me time," I relax in the backyard and go into my own world for a while.

I breathe deeply, listening to the birds and looking at the flowers. I also enjoy gardening and have a lot of red roses. Flowers are so beautiful and life should be beautiful too.

I'm tracking my spending and we're saving over \$500 a month by not eating out.

My goal is to pay off the mortgage on our house. James and I are teaching our kids about finance — how it's important to limit your spending and put money away in a savings account that you do not touch.

My house is like a care home for seniors!

I take care of my mother, my mother-in-law, my uncle, and his wife, who live with us and all have medical problems. I take them to the doctor and cook for them. I do it because it's good for my soul — and now I have the energy for my family as well as my job.

I feel like a new person.

I've learned how to take time for myself and inspire my family. I have purpose in my life. I'm ready for whatever comes my way and I'm happy to be alive.



THRIVE