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At the start of this year I was going through a difficult time. I'd lost my mother-in-law and I'd been really sick with COVID-19. I wasn't eating well — I'd have fast food for lunch and my husband, Kenneth, and I would eat out a lot for dinner, often fried chicken. I weighed 328 pounds and felt terrible. What changed everything was that I was diagnosed with a severe back condition, spinal stenosis, which was extremely painful. But my doctor told me surgery wasn't an option because I was obese. In the past, diets hadn't worked, and I began the Thrive Challenge after reading inspiring stories on the Thrive App, because I wanted a whole new lifestyle.

I changed my eating habits, cutting down my food portions, and using smaller plates. I'm cooking delicious meals like sauteed chicken with onions, peppers, mushrooms, and cauliflower rice. For dessert, we eat a lot of fruit — watermelon's my favorite. I love bagels and make my own low-fat version with flour, plain yogurt, and seasoning. It's fun sharing them with friends. My husband's very supportive; he grills chicken and corn on the cob on the weekend. What I find really helpful on the Thrive app are the reminders to stop eating at a certain time in the evening.

My sugar cravings have stopped. At a graduation party I went to recently, I said "no" to cake, which felt like a big achievement — I was always the one who wanted the biggest slice with the most icing. A big milestone for me was that I went to a concert and I could actually sit in the seat comfortably. I've gone down three sizes, and I like being in photographs now. I've lost 62 pounds this year and I'm headed in the right direction.



I've been gardening, and I call my backyard my happy place.

I love to relax, watching the birds, sitting on my swing with my two dogs, my wind chimes, and my sunflowers — I'm a big sunflower person. With my back problems it's still hard for me to exercise, but a physical therapist recommended "walking" in the water. My friend has a pool in her backyard so I go over there and do laps, which feels so refreshing.

I have a brighter attitude at work. I'm an optician, and it's great when my patients come in for glasses and notice how I've changed. The feedback is so encouraging. I'm not a "Debbie Downer" anymore — I'm happier and friendlier. On Facebook I'm always posting uplifting messages, and I'll text my friends saying: "Good morning, how are you?"

If you feel better about yourself, it shines through and you inspire people. My two grown children are proud of me and I feel great. I don't need surgery right now because my back is much less painful. My goal is to go on a vacation to Jamaica. I'd like to be on a pretty beach in a swimsuit, looking for seashells and watching the dolphins.

