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\$5,000 WINNER
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After having knee surgery a few years ago, I gained 100 pounds. I weighed 350 pounds. I'm 35, I had back pain, I was always fatigued and out of breath, and I had a lack of drive. That made me depressed, which led to continued overeating. My partner, Kristi, and I have an eight-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, but I had no energy for them. In March, I downloaded the Thrive app to start a new routine and hold myself accountable.

Meal prepping every weekend helped me to change my diet.

I've shifted to a plant-based approach to eating, incorporating more vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains into my meals. And I avoid excessive caffeine and sugar. I've been discovering new recipes, like chickpea spinach curry. It's simple, flavorful, and packed with nutrients. I serve it with brown rice or quinoa. I've fallen in love with roasted almonds and walnuts for snacks. Instead of potato chips and sweets, I opt for kale chips or carrot sticks with hummus. For a sweet fix, I'll have a little dark chocolate or frozen grapes.

Microsteps are helping me move more.

Whether it's taking a morning stroll, walking during breaks at work, or choosing to walk instead of driving for short distances, these added steps make a difference. My biggest obstacle to exercising before the Challenge was juggling time constraints with a lack of motivation. I overcame this by recruiting a workout buddy, Chris, for accountability. We both make sure we go to the gym and push each other to do our best in workout sessions.

I've returned to lifting weights, which I used to do.

I started with lighter weights and gradually increased how much I lift. This has improved my muscle tone and overall strength. But the crucial lesson from my movement journey has been that it isn't just about traditional exercise. It's about finding joy in all activities, like tending to the chickens, or playing with my daughter.

Improving my sleep quality is another focus.

Stress was affecting my ability to wind down. So I implemented a bedtime routine that included limiting screen time an hour before sleep and reading. I also use a sleep tracker. And before I go to sleep, I write down three things I'm grateful for that day. It's a beautiful way to end the day on a positive note.

My focus is better.

Every day, I integrate various Microsteps into my routine to be more present in my life. Each morning, over a cup of coffee, I jot down my top three tasks for the day in a notebook. This helps me navigate my day with purpose.



Every hour, at work, I have a mindful moment.

I set an alarm to remind me to pause, take a deep breath, and stretch for a minute. It's become my mini-rejuvenation ritual. Also, I've actively been avoiding multitasking. Whether it's working on a presentation or washing the dishes at home, I give my full attention to one task, and I'm not scattered.

I've lost 95 pounds, I'm not in pain, and my doctor is very happy.

I can bend down and tie my shoelaces now. I feel so much better. My A1C is under 5 now and she's cut my blood pressure medicine.

Kristi, who also works at Walmart, is my biggest support.

She loved me before I lost the weight, but now she's so proud of me. And I feel proud of myself. We're bonding, and going on date nights. And we set aside an hour in the afternoon for family time in the yard. We'll play basketball or throw the football with Elizabeth.

One day, when I was playing with my daughter, I realized how far I've come.

It was a sunlit afternoon, I was in the backyard, and Elizabeth was racing towards me. Without a second thought, I began chasing her. A realization hit me. A few months ago, I'd watch my daughter play, feeling a pang of guilt, wishing I could join her without gasping for air. And I thought, "Here I am, running around with my daughter." My lungs felt clear, and my breaths were deep and even. As Elizabeth wrapped her arms around me, I felt an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and gratitude, not only for reclaiming my health, but for the memories I'm now able to create with her.



THRIVE