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In April last year, my fiancé, Olivia, found out she had stage 3 Hodgkin lymphoma. She had to have chemo and she was exhausted. I'd pick up our three-year-old, Oliver, from daycare, make dinner for him and give him a bath, then make dinner for us. We were eating fast food and frozen food, and I was always tired.

Olivia's doing well now; she's in remission.

But I wasn't taking care of myself. I ate too much sugar. I'd have dessert every single night. I always had a party size sleeve of oreos or a box of cupcakes in the house. I'm only 31 and I had painful stomach issues. And I wasn't sleeping well. I'd play video games until midnight, then I'd be in bed watching YouTube videos.

I learned about the Thrive Challenge from one of my best friends, Justin Duarte.

I started with a list of things I wanted to focus on: like sleeping better, eating better, and spending quality time with my family and friends.

I began cooking simple dishes like shrimp alfredo or creamy mushroom pasta.

We've been diving into lots of veggie options. During COVID, we'd signed up for a food meal-kit delivery service, and we'd kept our favorite recipes, so I've learned how to make lots of great dinners.

As I cook, Oliver is with me in the kitchen and I explain what I'm doing.

I tell him how potatoes have to be cooked in hot water until they are soft. He'll help me add spices and mix ingredients.

I cut out sugary snacks.

I walk by shelves of candy bars at work, so at first it was hard to resist, but I told myself, "We're not buying them." Doing check-ins on the Thrive app helped me stay accountable. Now, instead of soda and candy, I have fruit and water. I really like peaches and plums, and I always keep grapes in the refrigerator. I used to joke that when I finished my first Challenge, I'd reward myself with an entire cake, but after a few weeks, I didn't actually want anything sweet. My stomach feels a lot better, and I have more energy.

My reward after dinner, instead of dessert, is playing with Oliver.

We're out in the backyard building a sandbox. We live close to an airport and Oliver has fascination with planes, so we watch them flying by. We go for family walks around the neighborhood with our dog, Odin. Oliver rides his Radio Flyer tricycle while we're walking.



I'm doing yard work like mowing the lawn in the evenings after work.

That means I have more time to spend with the family on the weekend. My dad was a landscaper, and gardening was instilled in me. I'm finding that planting lilies, reseeding the yard, and listening to the birds is calming and relaxing. It's replaced the time I spent playing video games.

The Meaningful Connections Microstep on the app has made a big difference.

We've been getting together with our family and enjoying each other's company now that Olivia's treatment is over. We had a nice brunch with my brother, Christian, and his partner, Gracie. And we celebrated my friend, Chris's birthday; we all sat down and had burritos.

Olivia and I are communicating.

We talk to each other like a couple, not just two people passing. She tells me how she's feeling. There was a lot of stress because of her cancer. But the doctor did an impeccable job of easing our worries, and now we're less stressed — and much closer.

We have a strict bedtime.

We're in bed by 11 p.m., and off our devices. I'll rub Olivia's back and feet, and give her a little R&R. I'm sleeping eight hours a night instead of five or six hours, and in the morning, I don't just want to roll over and go back to sleep. I go to work ready to start the day instead of ready to end the day.

We're saving money.

It was difficult for a while because Olivia was laid off four months into her treatment. Thankfully we've built up our savings, and she's now working at Walmart in the auto care center. So we have more security.

I proposed, and we're talking about our marriage plans.

My mother and father-in-law have some property and we're planning to have a country-style wedding there. It's going to be wonderful.

