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I have a painful medical condition called lipedema, which means I have an abnormal buildup of fat in my legs. I've had it since my teens. I'm 37 now, and it's affected my confidence because it made me uncomfortable about my appearance, and it made me feel sad. I'd never wear shorts or skinny jeans. I've always wanted to be normal, with normal looking legs.

I wasn't eating well.

I'd have fast food, candy and cake. I was really depressed and I weighed more than I've ever weighed in my life. And because I felt so bad, I wasn't doing regular exercise.

My co-worker, Candie Holland, said, "You should definitely take the Thrive Challenge."

She explained how it would help me with everything, so I got started. The first thing I did was to go for a walk to the park during my lunch break. It was a beautiful, sunny day and it felt so good just moving my legs.

I walk every day now.

I feel happy looking at the squirrels and breathing in the fresh air. I love having quiet time on my own; it gives me a sense of peace.

When I wake up, I stretch for a few minutes.

I'll put on music by my favorite artist, The Weeknd. When I listen to the song "Starboy" in the morning, it gives me energy and I feel like I can take on the day.

My husband, Mortel, is supporting me.

We're food prepping together. Mortel also works for Walmart and we both take our lunch to work. I used to eat rice with every meal, but I've switched to a low carb diet with lots of veggies. We'll make chicken breast stuffed with blue cheese and spinach. I'm from Louisiana and my favorite Southern recipe is smothered okra cooked in tomato sauce with turkey sausage and shrimp. My grandmother used to make it and it's delicious. I'm also eating smaller portions. I've lost 40 pounds and I feel great.

Mortel and I are spending more time together.

We just moved to Arkansas and we're exploring the area. We went to the local farmers market and bought sweet potatoes and pickled okra. We'll look at shops and go to different restaurants. And we watch a lot of basketball because we're both big fans.

My favorite Thrive Microstep is connecting in a meaningful way.

I started talking to Stacey, a co-worker who sits behind me. I'll smile and open up a conversation and say, "Good morning, how are you?" The other day she didn't feel good and she said, "You know Jarryn, just seeing your smile makes my day better."



I'm feeling good about my body.

I'm treating myself to pedicures. I had my toes painted teal green, and I bought cute white sandals. I wore a blue and white striped skirt into work that was above my ankles. I was worried people would stare, but as the day wore on, I was standing tall. I was proud of myself for wearing the skirt and taking that small step. It gave me a big boost. Next month I'm going to a gala and I bought a black dress with sequins to wear that fits perfectly.

People who know me know I love to read.

Last year I read 167 books. Getting lost in a book is a form of meditation for me, so I'm including it in my Thrive Challenge because it's a healthy habit. Reading in bed helps me to relax, sleep better, and recharge. Right now, I'm reading *Sweet, Soft, Plenty Rhythm*, a wonderful novel by Laura Warrell about a jazz player.

Reading expands my knowledge.

I learn about different customs in places I've never been, like India. I'm always reading something new, so I love to give book recommendations and write reviews.

I believe in the power of prayer.

I grew up going to church and I carry that spirituality with me. It supports me in staying positive and reminds me that I can get through everything.

I'm slowly rebuilding my confidence.

Thrive has given me a new outlook on life — and it's making me a happier person. I know I'll always have my leg condition, but I'm feeling more comfortable in my own skin. Mortel and I are planning a trip to Jamaica to see his family, and I feel so much better about myself, I might even wear a bathing suit!



THRIVE