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I was not living my life fully until a few months ago. I'd wake up feeling terrible; I'd go to work, come home and just sit and watch T.V. I stopped visiting my family or going anywhere. I was overweight and I didn't like how I felt. I had a bad self-image. I'm 29, I live with my girlfriend Samantha, and between us we have four kids — all boys. The youngest, Gunner, is two months old. Anytime I would go out and do something as simple as yard work or kicking a ball, I'd get exhausted. I felt I was wasting my life away

I wanted to be that dad who was fun and give our boys the childhood that I had.

As a kid, I was outside all the time and I played football, but our boys were just watching T.V. or playing games on their tablets. I felt guilty because when Mason, who's eight, would say, "Will you come out and play?" My answer would always be, "Maybe later." But we'd never end up doing it. We'd eat at different times of the day. There was a lot of snacking and drinking sugary drinks so the kids weren't hungry for dinner. We had a cabinet that was always full of candy and we'd order pizza or have microwaved Hot Pockets.

I needed to do something different and started the Thrive Challenge.

I began with easy Microsteps. I'd pause before grabbing unhealthy food from the cabinet. Then we emptied the cabinet completely and stopped buying sugary treats. For snacks, we give the kids fruit and string cheese which they really like. And now they're actually hungry at dinner time.

I'm a master at making French toast for breakfast and the kids love it.

And we always have low sugar or sugar-free cereal like Cheerios. I do most of the cooking. My absolute favorite meal is grilled steak with steamed broccoli. And I just made cumin-crust chicken with cauliflower, which was great. I feel much better and I've lost 38 pounds.

There are no electronics at the dinner table.

I used to be the biggest culprit. But now we talk as a family and it's completely different — we've built a routine.



I can honestly say I've learned a lot about what the kids do at school and daycare. I learned that four-year-olds have crushes! Jaxon told us that he had a girlfriend, but she doesn't like him anymore. So he has a new one!

We go for family walks to the creek near our house.

There's a pool or puddle of water there and the older kids skip rocks and sit in the water looking for crayfish. We also started a garden. We have sunflowers and we're growing peppers, tomatoes, and watermelon. We planted broccoli seeds in cups — the kids each had a cup, then we planted them — and we're so excited because we're starting to see plants coming out of the ground. It's easy to go to the store and buy a pepper. It's not so easy to grow a pepper, pick it and clean it. The kids are excited about eating veggies because they've grown them. And we're saving money.

Samantha and I are doing more activities together.

She bought a book called The Adventure Challenge with fun dates to try. This one is super fun: You make a homemade pie together. One of you mixes the ingredients while blindfolded and the other person gives instructions by leading with their hands. We made an amazing banana cream pie. Some dates involve the children. We all went to the drive-in movie theater to see **Top Gun: Maverick. It was absolutely amazing.**

We're spending time with my parents on their deer farm.

I'd stopped visiting them because I wasn't happy. Now we're there a lot and the kids love it, whether it's chasing the turkeys around, being chased by the chickens, or riding the tractors. The other day I was there with our family friend, Bob, who's my role model — I call him my second dad. I'd just finished splitting wood and he said, "It is good to have you back." I'm very thankful for getting my life back and finding happiness again. Now, the sky's the limit.



THRIVE