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For a long time I was addicted to opiates. Most of my paycheck went toward paying for pills like Hydrocodone and Vicodin. All I thought about was how I was going to get more pills if I ran out. I was in a dark place in my 20s, and going downhill fast. I finally quit by digging deep down into myself, and with the support of my girlfriend, Ashley, I've been sober now for 11 years. I'm 34, and Ashley and I have a five-year-old-son, J.J. I've been doing well but I wanted more support and to move forward in life. During COVID, I'd been eating junk food — and a lot of cookies-and-cream ice cream. I wasn't exercising and I wasn't active with my son.

I wanted to be the best dad I could be, like my dad, who's always been there for me.

My co-worker, Patty Kennedy, inspired me to start the Thrive Challenge and I was excited to start. I began drinking super-food smoothies and cooking for the family. One of our favorite meals: salmon filets stuffed with spinach and parmesan cheese with a honey glaze. We'll have it with asparagus and brown rice. I've also been eating a lot more fruit like watermelon. J.J. loves everything we're making. We have a big family, and on Sundays, everyone will come over for cookouts. We'll grill chicken and hamburgers and make pasta salad.

I'm working out at the YMCA which helps me start my day off the right way.

I stretch and loosen up. Then I'll do push-ups and now I can do 1,000 in an hour! I work different muscle groups each day like my upper body or legs. I consider my work-outs to be my peaceful time.

My goal is to become a personal trainer.

Working out is what I love to do. I already help people with different workout routines and show them how to do it correctly. I watch inspiring motivational speakers on YouTube, like CT Fletcher, who's also a personal trainer. My other goal: I want to help people who might be going through what I went through and share my story about how I overcame addiction.



Meditation helps me relax.

I sit quietly on the floor and put on soft music or the sounds of ocean waves. I just inhale and exhale and reflect back on where I came from, and how far I've come.

Therapy has helped me with anxiety.

I had a wonderful therapist and didn't hold anything back. I let her know exactly how I felt and what I'd been through. I'd recommend therapy for anyone.

I'm spending more time with my family.

We walk around the park and go to the zoo; J.J. loves the tigers. I take him fishing to the lake in Alcoa Park, and he is always so full of joy. A few weeks ago we all went out on a boat down the Tennessee River for my girlfriend's class reunion. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. I can't ask for a better feeling than being with my family. I live for it — that's what gets me going in the morning.

We went for a much-needed family vacation recently to Panama City Beach in Florida.

We stayed in a condo with my girlfriend's parents and sisters. We had an ocean view and it was a breath of fresh air, getting away from everything. My best memory: being on the beach, all together. We took a selfie of all of us, with everyone laughing, happy to be together. It was J.J.'s very first time at the beach. He was running on the sand and the water would come up and splash us. He said, "I don't want to go home." We're already planning to head back there soon.

I'm doing my best to save money — I put aside 20 dollars from each paycheck.

I'm saving to buy an engagement ring for Ashley, and then I'm planning on proposing! She's been my support system for so long and we're so happy. Not a day goes by that I don't thank God for everything in my life. Life is a blessing.



THRIVE