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In 2018, I went for a routine eye exam and was told I had brain cancer. I remember being in complete shock. I was only 26 at the time. I got a second opinion and it was confirmed that I had hydrocephalus, where your eye pressure is enhanced, causing fluid in the brain to cause headaches. The MRI showed a tumor in my brain the size of a kiwi, and I needed radiation treatment to remove it and prevent it from growing back. I had a team of doctors that worked with me during that time, and thankfully I was able to get through it and say I was in remission. But when it was time to introduce myself back into the world, it wasn't as easy as I'd thought.

All of a sudden, I was busy all the time and I didn't have a lot of time for myself.

I work in public health and I also teach step aerobics classes after work. I've always loved dance and physical fitness, so I found it fulfilling to be a fitness instructor after work and even teach youth dance classes through parks and recreation. I had to take a break from it when I was sick, but once I got better, I was right back into my schedule of working a full day and then teaching fitness afterwards. When I did have any free time, I was on social media. I would check my phone first thing in the morning, and then be in nonstop meetings all day. I knew I needed to slow down.

After cancer, I wanted to put myself back out there full-force, but something wasn't working.

I don't think I realized that going from cancer into a pandemic would take a toll on me, and I really needed to find some balance. My aunt, Alantha Gatson, told me about the Thrive Challenge and showed me all of the Microsteps on the Thrive app. I noticed the one about making an effort not to look at your phone first thing in the morning, and that one really hit home for me. I decided I'd start there.



I started doing 30 seconds of mindful breathing in the morning instead of checking social media.

It was difficult at first, but once I got used to it, I started doing gratitude journaling too, and pretty soon I was taking time for myself in the morning instead of comparing myself to everyone I saw online. That really changed things for me. I even started taking little stretch breaks during the day instead of always checking my phone. It helped me refocus. I have an Instagram account for my fitness classes, so I still had to post announcements and class times, but I started scheduling posts in advance instead, so I didn't have to constantly be on my phone. I was learning different ways to work around it.

My mom is a cancer survivor as well, and she's one of my biggest supporters.

She is actually a two-time survivor and she's been in remission since 2005. She suffers from other injuries like arthritis, and those challenges sometimes hinder her from working out, but she's been doing my classes and supporting me, and we're spending time together.

Today, I am working on giving myself grace.

I feel like I've been making up for lost time and I'm embarking on a "new me" with a new body, and I'm trying to stay on track and become the best version of myself. With that said, I can be a big critic of myself, and I'm reminding myself that there will be times where things won't go as planned, and I'm giving myself time to feel my feelings, write it out, and let it go. I try to stay disciplined, but if I skip a Microstep one day, I have to remind myself that it's all part of my growth, and that we're all adjusting and doing what we can. I am still on my post-cancer journey and I am grateful that I've been able to create space for myself to get back into things on my own time.



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