

Linda Ekperi

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I'm a single mom and I've been divorced for eight years. My marriage was troubled and I've raised my daughter, Lisa, on my own without any support. I was always working, taking Lisa to school or to the babysitter and I didn't have time for myself. My family's in Nigeria — I lost my mom and dad but I have seven siblings — and I miss them. Because I was so busy, I'd get pizza or hamburgers for dinner on the way home from work. I gained a lot of weight and felt really depressed. None of my pants fit and I decided I wasn't going to keep buying a bigger size — I needed to make some changes.

I cut out fast food and started cooking after work.

Lisa's 15 now and it's easier to make the time. We cook together which is fun. We bake chicken instead of frying it and add our own special seasoning: garlic, chili sauce, and nutmeg. We also eat fish, broccoli, and salad, and lots of fresh fruit like strawberries, oranges, and grapes. I drink water instead of soda. I work in the deli, but I don't buy fried chicken anymore!

After work I go to the gym for two hours.

Sometimes Lisa comes with me. To be honest, it's amazing because I've never, ever exercised before in my life. I get on the treadmill and the bike and I lift weights too. I've lost 30 pounds and feel so much better. I can actually bend my knees and kneel down now which I could never do before because everything hurt.

My co-workers are noticing how I've changed.

My coach said to me, "Linda, keep doing whatever you are doing!" And I'm encouraging them to start the Thrive Challenge because it's changing my life. I tell everyone, "You just have to make up your mind and get started."

I love my job and I'm going to college so I can get promoted.

I'm studying business management. I want to become a coach, then a store manager, and go on from there. That's my goal and I'm excited about my career.



I'm sleeping better because I'm not on social media all evening.

I used to be chatting online and looking to see what my friends were posting for hours and then I couldn't get to sleep. Now I read the Bible and feel much more calm. I pray for good health and a good life. And I ask God to send me a good husband! I would love to meet someone who's kind, a Christian like me, and who accepts me as I am. I also say positive things to myself like: "Linda you're doing a great job." I tell myself that I'm living a good life and I'm going to make it.

My daughter is a great support. She says: "Mommy you look good."

We go to church on Sunday and spend time together talking, sharing about our problems and listening to each other. Then I go to the park with my friends to relax and talk and laugh.

I'm saving money because we're not eating out anymore.

I've been putting away \$500 a month for Lisa's college fund. She's a straight A student and does a lot of charity work with our church, like feeding the homeless. She told me I'm "the best role model ever."

I've saved enough money to buy a ticket to Nigeria to see my family.

I'm going this summer and I'm excited. I haven't seen them for four years and I'll be there for a month. I've bought a fancy new pink dress, a royal blue gown, and new jeans for the trip. I feel more confident and more beautiful at 47 than I've ever felt in my life. I know there's no going back.



THRIVE