

# Samuel Cruz Santiago

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**\$5,000 WINNER**  
**Walmart Supercenter #2346**  
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For a long time, I was in a habit of eating fast food all the time, and it caused me to have a problem with gastritis. On top of that, my wife is a nurse and my son had gone away to study at university in Chicago at Loyola, and we needed help with our finances. A transfer from another store, Damaris Santos, started working at our store, and she told me about the Thrive Challenge. I knew I needed to make a change to save money and change my diet, but at first I said to myself, "I don't know if I'll be able to do this."

## **Four or five of us at our store committed to starting the Thrive Challenge.**

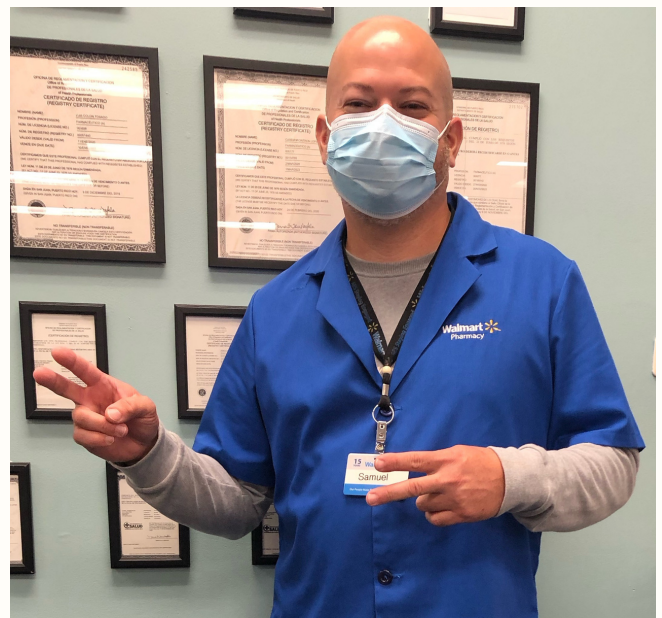
I was nervous, since I started some of my habits when I was 12 years old and I'm now 41. I was thinking, "How am I going to stop doing these things?" But I told myself that I would give it a try. I needed to do it for my health and to help my son. Those are the most important things to me.

## **I started with my finances.**

My son has scholarships at school and he's very smart, but compared to our local university, his school is very expensive. I originally told him to study closer to home in our small town, but he wanted to be at a big university. So I really need to be saving to help with his tuition. I started by moving some of our money into a separate account for savings. And every time I get paid, I add some more money into that account. That helped me get into a mindset of saving. I started saying to myself, "Put some money away, we don't know when we'll need it."

## **Next, I knew I had to take steps to help my gastritis.**

At the time, I was drinking soda every day, and I finally said to myself, "This is the opportunity to put down the soda." It wasn't easy for me, because I had headaches from giving it up at the beginning, and I would even be in a bad mood because I was having withdrawals from it. But Damaris actually really helped encourage me to keep going. She said to me, "You have to stay consistent." And over time, I saw that I was losing weight and my stomach issues were starting to go away. I felt better and it made a difference.



## **My wife and I started making changes to our diets together.**

We've been preparing food together which has brought us even closer. I've stopped eating a lot of bread and I've started eating more fruits, vegetables, grilled chicken, and baked potatoes. I used to eat a huge sandwich for breakfast, and now we have oatmeal. We both feel better, and we've even started exercising together too. I wanted to start working out, and she started joining me. Now she's just as motivated as me in the gym and I even told my son recently, "Manuel, take some time to exercise too," because he spends all his time studying.

## **Preparing our meals at home is helping us save.**

We're not letting anything go to waste. We're putting away money to help with my son's tuition. That's been the change I'm most proud of — helping my son with his studies. He puts a lot of pressure on himself and he is making a great sacrifice by leaving home and studying at Loyola. I want to be able to help him and send him money when he needs it.

## **Today, my gastritis has gone away and I've completely given up soda.**

That was my biggest vice and I never thought I could do that. Now, my wife and I have a morning routine, we drink our water, and I have so much more energy. I'm grateful for colleagues like Damaris who have encouraged me throughout the whole journey. She has kept telling me to remain positive and keep going. I feel so positive and ready for what's next.



THRIVE