

Michael Ball

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I was always helping other people, but I neglected myself. I'm 46, and my wife, Leighanne, and I have two daughters and four grandkids. They came first because I care so much about them. I was eating my feelings. I'd eat anything — hamburgers, pizza, cake, and ice cream. I have type 2 diabetes and I was in a lot of pain. I decided I had to do something different when I stepped on the scale and weighed 349 pounds. I wanted to be a good role model at work, and a beacon of light for my family.

Our senior manager, Beth Wiseman, encouraged me to start the Thrive Challenge.

First, I decided to set up a daily routine and stick to it using Thrive Microsteps. Drinking that first glass of water in the morning gets me off to a good start. I walk a mile at lunch time and build in good choices throughout the day.

For breakfast, I'll have a protein shake.

For lunch, I'll have chicken with tomatoes, cucumber, and pickles. And for dinner we might have a burger without a bun — but I'll have just one. I used to have two burgers and a hot dog! We're eating veggies like zucchini and squash. And I'm having smaller portions. It was a struggle at first because growing up we were poor and you had to finish what was on your plate. But now I've got used to eating less.

My taste buds are evolving.

I'm finding great recipes using cottage cheese, like queso and puddings. My favorite tip: I'll grab a spoonful of peanut butter if I'm craving something sweet. It's so good and fills me up. I've lost 27 pounds so far and I have more energy.

I've started to do short runs, which I love.

And Leighanne and I go for bike rides with our grandkids. My four-year-old grandson, Tatum, told me I'm his best friend, which is awesome! We took the whole family to Great Wolf Lodge, Water Park. We went tubing, we played in the wave pool, and went down the water slide.

Leighanne and I used to get stressed about money, but now we talk about our finances.

We go through our bills and set spending limits. We have 40 dollars each for personal expenses, like going out for lunch. Most of the time we don't spend it all. And we're saving at least \$500 a month.



We're really connecting instead of going through the motions.

Leighanne recently lost her brother and she talks about how she's been struggling. I really listen to her. I'm also open and honest about my own feelings. I always thought I had to be the rock, but now I'm able to open up and we're addressing problems together. We've been together for 18 years and things are really good again.

We're enjoying activities together like thrifting.

And we're more affectionate. Leighanne will grab my hand when we're out together. On a whim, I wrote a note to her saying, "I still love you just as much today as when we first met." And I surprised her with her favorite Oscar de la Renta perfume.

Thrive is helping me to stay calm.

I've learned techniques like box breathing where you slowly breathe in, hold your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale. If I feel I'm getting upset, I spend a minute or two just breathing. I find I relax and I can have a difficult conversation without getting angry.

Maybe it sounds corny, but I love helping people out.

We were at Goodwill the other day and a lady was paying for something and she was six dollars short. She was so embarrassed, so I just gave her the six dollars. She was ecstatic and I felt really good that I could help.

I have much less pain in my feet and my knees, and I feel great.

My intention is to get off all my medications. I want to be there for my friends and family. Honestly, my big goal is to get really healthy so that I can continue to be active with my grandkids and see them grow up. I don't want to sit on the sidelines.



THRIVE