

There are no limits to the benefits of becoming healthier

Latasha's Story



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I was overweight growing up. Money was tight in my family, and my parents worked hard to put food on the table. Nothing was ever wasted, so I always ate what was put in front of me. I ate everything.

As I got older, it was one fad diet after the next. My pattern was to lose weight on one diet, only to gain it back and more on the next. I was depressed and down and out all the time. Then one day my therapist recommended working out—a simple suggestion that changed my life.

A dedicated, 5-year employee with Custom Design Benefits, Latasha felt the pull of the tiring cycle of work, home, and taking care of 2 kids. She needed something that would give her a break from the demands of motherhood, change up her routine, and revitalize her spirit. With the help of her therapist, Latasha learned to take time for herself every day.

I started by going to the YMCA. Upon meeting my Zumba instructor, I learned she lost 80 lbs. 5 years ago and has kept the weight off ever since. I was immediately inspired by her energy and weight loss results. The added benefit was that I absolutely loved Zumba. I was hooked.

I learned there is a magic pill after all, and it's found in counting calories and moving. So, that's what I did, and the weight just started coming off. Move more, eat less, and find your balance.

Down 65 lbs., Latasha has a plan that works. She started her journey taking Zumba classes 6 days a week, and is now on a consistent 4-5 day-a-week exercise routine. When not taking Zumba, Latasha tries to walk for an hour every day.

It amazed me to learn that even when I felt too tired to exercise, or simply not in the right frame of mind, every single time I pressed on, it instantly boosted my mood. I never understood how moving so much could give you energy both mentally and physically. Now I know.

Latasha's Tips for Better Health

- 1. 10,000 steps is my daily goal, but I started with 5,000.** Start wherever is right for you and increase your goal incrementally.
- 2. Don't beat yourself up if you fail.** Good health is a marathon, not a sprint. Allow yourself little failures all day long, as long as you pick yourself up and keep going.
- 3. Don't do crazy things.** Celebrate the small victories. I celebrate every pound I take off.
- 4. Remember the benefits of good health and wellbeing are limitless.** I now have more energy, focus better, and am more productive at work (and those are just the tip of the iceberg)!

Walking up the stairs used to make me winded. Now I spend more time outdoors and even ride bikes with my kids. I can give my kids so much more quality time, now that I can get up and move. I never exercised growing up, so I am thrilled to be discovering the benefits of becoming fit as an adult.

Latasha's kids, ages 10 and 7, have noticed Mom is different. They ask why she goes to Zumba every week, and they see her taking better care of herself, feeling more confident, and happier. The end result is her kids want to be more active like their Mom and now go to Tae Kwan Do weekly.

"My daughter watches me, and sees I am not giving up. I don't have to say anything. She sees what I am doing and wants to be fit too."



I use the My Fitness Pal phone app and scan the bar codes of foods I eat. I set a goal of 2 lbs. every week. I replaced soda with water, and I don't eat out. My taste buds have changed. Recently I stopped at a fast food place, but the soda no longer tasted good. I now enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables, but I am a snacker. Sticking to just three meals a day is tough for me, so I cut up green peppers and apples to munch on. I prepare my snacks in advance and plan daily so I can eat all day long. I also boil eggs or have oatmeal for breakfast, and cooking chicken and veggies at home keeps me away from fast food (which is no longer desirable anyway)!

I use my **wellness portal that Custom Design Benefits** has provided for me as part of my wellness plan. I log in my weight and **sync my daily exercise** with my Fitbit to monitor my progress. I also read the monthly **New Paths newsletter** that is on the portal and browse the site for information. There are good articles that make you stop and think about how much sugar is in the foods we eat. I find the tips and recipes very helpful.

I'm lucky that I don't have prediabetes or high cholesterol, but who knows if I continued down the same path and had not taken action what would have happened? I did my screenings at work as well. As a result of becoming healthier, my benefits premium went down. **I thank my employer for offering me the chance to, not only save my health, but also save me money.**

I'm still trying to lose 35 lbs. (my original goal was 100 lbs.) but I'm not committed to any number. I'll try to lose more, but if it doesn't feel good or look right for my body type, I'll just keep focused on toning up instead, staying healthy, and setting the right example for my kids. Plus, my husband already loves the new me, especially now that I have so much more energy.

Others have noticed Latasha's positive changes. Colleagues ask, "What are you doing to lose weight?" Shying away from the attention, but feeling empowered to help others, Latasha has inspired others to join the gym and get moving. Latasha knows that each journey is unique and personal, but a support system makes it easier.

My goal now is to be able to do just one regular pushup. It's not the loftiest of goals for most, but for me it will be one amazing feel-good accomplishment.

- Latasha Gray