

MY WEIGHT LOSS ADVENTURE

It was about 2 ½ years ago when it all started. It was the week of graduation from residency and my parents had come up to visit. My father in passing mentioned that he would like a physical exam to go to scout camp. I told him that I would do it and I took him to my office.

On his physical I discovered that he had hypertension, at a level that sound medical practice demanded treatment with medication. He of course was looking for another way, and alternative therapy that makes your pressure go down. I talked to him at length about exercise, but it did not have the “ring of truth.” In other words, I was suggesting something to him that I myself was not doing. I also was 66 inches and 224 lbs (BMI of 36).



Before: April 2001

Fast forward 2 months and 9-11-2001 happened. All of us have had to cope and deal with this horrific event, which at the very least produced more stress in our lives.

The day of Thanksgiving, 2001, I got a telephone call from my mother. My grandfather was ill and we had told her that if he died, we would go to the funeral. The call was of course, the bringer of that bad news, so we got tickets and went to Puerto Rico . He was 89 years old and always the healthiest person in the family. After the funeral, I had asked my grandmother what she was going to do with his old medications. She told me that I could have the medicines. As I was going over them I discovered that my

grandfather had Diabetes Type 2. I was surprised, because they had always told me that there was no diabetes in my family. I later learned that he developed it at age 84. At the time I thought 84 would be a nice age to develop diabetes. The fact that he had diabetes really hit me hard; I had just learned that my aunt also had diabetes. She however, was much younger, and I did not want to have diabetes when I got to her age of diagnosis.

Diabetes, Hypertension, stress, a new job....all of it was coming due. 2 more months go by and a friend of ours from church asked me to go to their house to pick up a toddler bed, and an air conditioner. I picked up those things and asked about their exercise bike. They said I could have it if I would use it. I told them that I would use it, but that it may take months. And I took the bike.

In March of 2002, I attended the National Hispanic Health Association meeting in Washington , D.C. I also attended a seminar on Diabetes, and what we could do about it. By this time, I had learned that exercise would help for sugar control, but every time some one would ask me how to do it, I would just say it was a “challenge” and very difficult. I can remember the presenter, but I cannot remember her name. She was however, thin. And then she showed us her pedometer. For me that was a pinnacle moment—thin people have to exercise too!!! I had no idea that they did. I was fascinated by this pedometer, and was inspired by that meeting.

I bought my first pedometer on May 10, 2002 . I had begun to ride the exercise bike, but was having difficulty figuring out how much I was doing. I rode every other day for 5-6 minute and would take my pulse at the end. If it was 19 beats in 6 seconds, then I figured that it was enough. I had learned from an extraordinary medical student about maximum heart rate, and what my maximum would be. 190 beats per minute was very close to my maximum, and I was doing all right. I believed that if I used the bicycle to count my steps in the morning, then I would be able to use the rest of the steps for additional weight loss. The theory was good, but the pedometer did not register my exercise on the bike. Nonetheless, I looked for excuses every single day in order increase my steps. I also began adding minutes to my workout—which was now approaching 15 minutes a day. After the first month I could not believe what was happening to me. I was enjoying the exercise, and I had lost 25 lbs.

I am fortunate that I work with both medical students and other providers in my office. I would ask everyone I came into contact with, including patients and colleagues about how to get the most out of my workouts and what I could do about my eating habits. Another medical student showed me the information that he had obtained from weight watchers and the “points” system. Two other providers in my office had the same information and between all of them I was able to start on a modified weight watchers diet. I say it is modified because of 2 things: I did not have all of the information and I did not figure in my activity when I calculated how many “points” or calories I could eat. The people that I worked with as well as my family were overly supportive. They would notice immediately when I would loose weight, and they would complement me. I would just brush it off with a comments like, “My belt has been stretching because of my huge

belly, so I had to make another hole.” It was not until Judy told me that it was all right to take a complement that I learned to say thank you.

The summer of 2002 proved to be exciting indeed. My family and I had taken up new habits, we have started eating better, and I had lost 67 lbs. While I would frequently weigh myself, I did not have the courage to buy new clothes. So finally, the same colleague that told me to take a complement, said, “Jose, you really need to get some clothes.” I went shopping on the cheap, and I found out that I had lost 9 inches off of my waist. 2 weeks later I went, in August, and I learned that I had taken a full 12 inches off of my waist. It was at that time that I learned that I was done losing. The hardest part was yet to begin.



After: December 18, 2003

When they told me that maintaining weight loss was harder than losing, I thought that they were crazy; unfortunately they are right. It has been difficult, but I have learned something very important. ***It is the habit that counts.*** I have continued to exercise, although my bike is now a thing of the past. It broke twice, but due to the generosity of my patients, they were fixed both times, free of charge. I have gone to manual treadmills (I still own one) and more recently swimming and running outside. I can now run 5 miles in under 40 minutes. When I was in high school, I could not even drive that fast, let alone run. I feel more alive, more energetic, and healthier. My children and my wife also do more exercise and our whole attitude has been that of maintain better health. It is beautiful. I have gained a few lbs, (exactly 6), but I have also begun to lift weights as well. It is a whole different world than the one I lived in during

medical school. I am now proud of the example that I set for my children. Nothing makes me prouder than to see my 2 year old lifting a 1 lb weight at the sports store or running on the treadmill at home. Even though he is chunky now, he will learn good habits from us.