



## My Lifestyle Change

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This newsletter contains inspirational stories about how everyday women overcame health challenges!

Get inspired!

Get Healthy!

Start Today!

I was an overweight child who grew into an overweight adult. For most of my life, I felt unable to control the weight gain on my 5ft 4in frame. I was 52 years old when I gained control, and I have no intentions of letting go the reins.

In February 2007, I weighed 218 pounds. One month later, in March 2007 I weighed 207 pounds. I did not diet or exercise or consciously try to lose the weight. I believed in my heart God was giving me a great gift and that I must use that gift wisely. Without realizing it, I had embarked on a personal lifestyle change in my mind and body.

I became employed by the WIC and Nutrition Office in Ft Walton Beach Florida in September 2006. I worked in this office for a couple of months before I fully understood that this was a Nutrition Office, and the information offered was sound, practical, proven advice for adults as well as children. The more I lis-

tened, read and understood, the more I became aware that I was capable of losing and controlling the weight in my own body.

Only weeks after beginning my journey toward good health, I went through a very serious personal crisis that threatened to overshadow the strides I had just begun to make in my life. I had just lost ten pounds and no one knew I was trying to lose weight. I could have given up my gains, took the familiar road, and ate my way through my crisis or I could try to become a healthier person inside and out to make more positive choices in my life. I made the decision that I would not be miserable in my misery, and to become a healthier, better person to myself, my family and others.

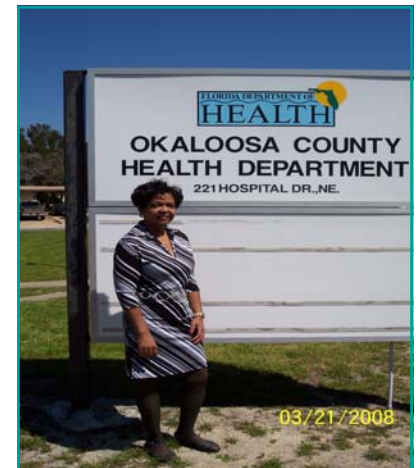
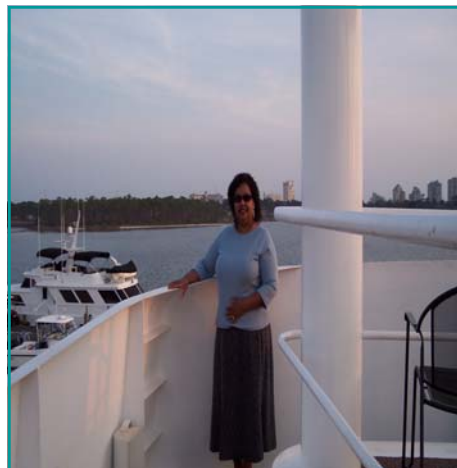
I had already figured out that whatever foods I needed to lose weight, would be the same foods that I would eat for the rest of my life. I could not understand the concept of

“weight loss foods” and “maintenance foods.” The WIC Program taught me that good nutrition embraces foods in its simplest forms, without added sauces, salts or fats to subtract from its nutritional value to the body.

I could eat beans, greens, lettuce, tomatoes, corn, carrots, bread, lean meats, just about anything I would normally buy, as long as it was cooked without taking away its nutritional need to the body and consumed in healthy portions.

Coupled with regular exercise, my body began to go through a surprising and delightful metamorphosis.

It is March 2008, I now weigh 144 pounds, and I have gone from a size 18/20 to a size 8. I am still excited about losing weight, exercising and making healthy choices. I believe that faithfully I will maintain this lifestyle change for a very long time and I feel great!



## *Heart Healthy Lunch and Learn*

The Lafayette County Health Department partnered with University of Florida, Lafayette County Extension Office, Suwannee AHEC and The Mayo Women's Club for their second Lunch and Learn Program. The Heart Health Program was developed to inform citizens of the community the basic information needed for keeping their heart healthy. Information such as signs and symptoms of a heart attack, maintaining good blood pressure and proper cholesterol levels, the importance of physical activity, maintaining a proper nutritional diet and medications were the main focus of the presentation. All participants received goody bags with heart health information in the bags and each participant received a Healthy Heart Cookbook.

Here's how we got started. The Healthy Communities Coordinator approached the Senior leaders of the local Women's Club earlier in the year to see if the Women's Club would be interested in assisting with a Launch of the "Healthy Lunch and Learn Pro-

grams" in our community. The local Women's Clubs have been impacting and enriching the lives of women and their communities as far back as the late 1800's so who better to help bring awareness to Women in the Community was my thought. Fortunately for our community, the senior leaders were thrilled about the idea and were very interested in participating in our "Launch". The Women's Club leaders set the wheels into motion. They planned a dinner meeting to educate their members and close friends about the Heart Healthy Program. This was ideal since February is the national month to recognize Women's Heart Health Month. Members of the club challenged each other to make a concerted effort to learn simple lifestyle changes to help themselves and others in the community for living a healthy life. They began their challenge by helping to assist with the Healthy Heart Lunch and Learn Community Program.

The Mayo Women's Club donated and prepared all the food for the Lunch and Learn Presentation. The recipes used for the luncheon were recipes from the

Healthy Heart Cookbook which were donated by the Lafayette County Health Department. By preparing recipes from the cookbook participants had the opportunity to see and taste low-fat meals, which were heart healthy and easy to prepare. All of the foods were served in portion controlled containers so participants can see what an appropriate serving size really looks like.

The luncheon was very successful and ended with many participants receiving potted herbs as door prizes. Also available were booklets donated by the UF Lafayette Extension office on how to season with herbs, which in many cases can reduce salt intake for a healthier diet. This was a special treat for many participants. An information table was available after the presentation for participants to pick up extra material on Heart Health and Gardening with Herbs.

The whole Healthy Heart Lunch brought together over 80 citizens both women and men from around the community together through community clubs and community partners. Together women can make a difference.

## *My Stroke Did Not Stop Me!*

I suffered a stroke at 18 months and I have a paralysis of my left side not allowing me full use of my arm and leg. I adapted regular activities to fit my disability. I got certified in 2006 as a dance instructor of Zumba and started teaching, I was worried that the students would focus on my disability and not on the class, but to my surprise it was not an issue for them. I would let the class know that I did not have full use of my left arm. My overall mobility has improved.

I went to a local high school and demonstrated Zumba.

There were a couple of disabled students there and by them seeing me do Zumba, they tried it. They came to me after and thanked me for giving them the courage to try. In one of my classes, I have a woman who suffered a stroke and wanted to take Zumba, but was afraid that she could not do it because of her paralysis. She now comes regularly and is progressing very well.

Zumba has given me an opportunity to show people can see regardless of age, gender or disability that you can accomplish whatever you put your mind to.



Lois Leading a Zumba class at Northeast High School in St. Petersburg

**Lois Huyghue**  
**Human Services Counselor III**  
**Pinellas County Health Department**

## Winning at Weight Loss!

Rhonda O'Brien, ARNP, is the **Employee Wellness** nurse at the Pinellas County Health Department. (PinCHD) She took this job on with great enthusiasm two years ago and has not stopped since. Prior to Rhonda, the PinCHD had never had a position such as this one before and we were not quite sure where to go with it, but Rhonda went right to work researching the best practices across the nation and has since involved our staff in numerous healthy initiatives, from **Ride Your Bike to Work** to **Lunchtime Yoga** to giving Flu Shots herself at the countywide Director's Staff meeting! Rhonda is one of the most positive, upbeat people you could ever meet. She is a constant force behind all the healthy things we do and is a great cheerleader for all. She co-ran a **Real Solutions** weight class at lunchtime where the average weight loss was eight pounds per employee. She authored an employee wellness policy that, among other things, changed the vending machines in all of our health department centers to offer only healthy items approved by our nutritionist. She also researched and found a vendor willing to only stock healthy items! Her

work with this was instrumental in other organizations in our county beginning to show interest in workplace wellness changes. She assisted in running focus groups with employees to find out what they wanted and needed to make healthier changes in their work life. Rhonda O'Brien is an inspiration to all of us for her tireless efforts to improve the health of our employees!



## When You Hear Someone Screaming...

Have you ever heard someone screaming and not wanted to help them? Well, I was over 100 pounds over weight and was screaming for help! In July, 2006 I remember looking at pictures of me and thinking "Oh my goodness, am I really that big?"

I have lost **67 pounds** since I actually started listening to what I was hearing people tell me. It feels great, not only because of what I have lost, but because of the influence I'm having on countless people around me. I have become a real friend by showing people that I can feel good and they can too, just by "being fit." The best way to say "I love you" is to show it by the way you live daily.

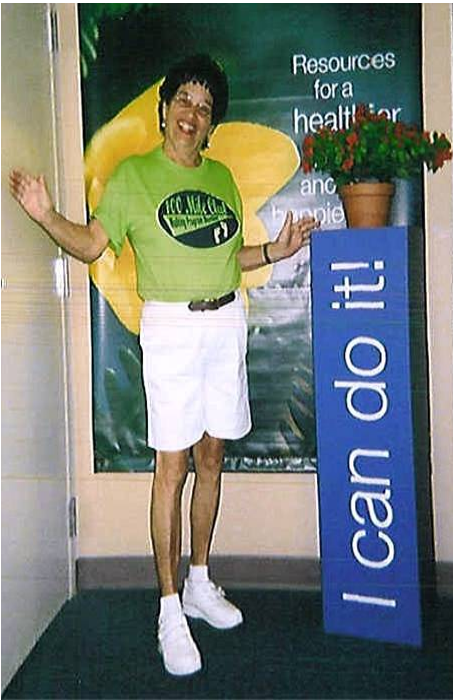
You can't help someone until they are ready to work at losing weight. The Health Department can't force someone to lose weight until they are ready. I learned that moving is as important as what you eat is. My attitude about life has changed! I love to walk, to mess around with the "exercise ball" ride a bike, rollerblade, swim, anything as long as I move.

When you hear someone screaming, reach out and help them.

### Lorna Mears

Former Pinellas County Health Department Employee

## 100 Mile Club Winner!



**Jean Moro, a proud 100 miler!**

The Pinellas County Health Department's **100 Mile Club** program was thrilled to get this letter from one of the residents of Pinellas who walked 100 miles in county parks. We have a program in conjunction with the Pinellas County park system that encourages residents and visitors to walk. Brochures are available in the parks and a tracking log is attached. Once the person walks 100 miles, they can send in their log and receive a free bright green T-Shirt that says 100 Mile Club. Below is the letter from walker Jean Moro.

10 months of diet and exercise, I have lost 28 pounds and 15 1/2 inches! The best part is that I no longer need to take any medication. Diet and exercise! It can be done—walk, walk, walk! I am also a bridge tender for the past 81 1/2 years in Pinellas County—mostly on John's Pass and Welch Causeway and enjoying it more than ever with increased energy level. Thanks for promoting the 100 mile Club----IT DOES WORK!

**Jean Moro**

Thank you so much for the 100 Mile Club T-shirt. I will wear it proudly as it represents an accomplishment to me that I never thought possible. I am a 73 year young diabetic who has lost 1/3 of my right foot to the disease. In

## *I Went From Doctor to Patient...*

Back in 1994, as a successful physician in my country, Argentina, I had generally been in good health. That year I went for an annual exam and within a few hours, my life drastically changed. I learned that I had an acoustic neurinoma tumor. In a split second I went from being a doctor to becoming a patient. The good news was that it was benign, but it required surgery. Without surgery, this tumor could touch my cerebellum and eventually I would not be able to walk. At the time there was only one surgeon who could do this kind of surgery. The cost was \$25,000. I knew that I had many reasons to live, primarily, my two children who needed me to take care of them and who were my whole life.

Good news came when friends connected me with the surgeon, Dr. Jorge Salvat. He offered to do the surgery for free if I was not able to raise the money. It took me one month to get the money and prepare my family for that moment.

My surgeon was a rugbier and he liked to coach and I became one the most important members of his team. We agreed we would work together in the operating room and in exactly one month after surgery I was working again, ready and determined to fight for my recuperation. Dr. Salvat is not only a great surgeon and a great coach, but also a great human being. He made me promise to start taking care of my body. That sounded very strange to

me as I had always worked with other people's health; not my own. I looked for a form of physical activity I would like and finally only because I had promised him, I chose belly dancing. At the time, I thought I would eventually find the perfect excuse to quit this activity.

However, life touched me deeply and I had many feelings to explore. Dr. Salvat knew that. I learned that from the beginning of time the feminine body has been a symbol of the miracle of creating life. Belly dance is in itself the creation of life or can be materialized through a new project or in helping other people to connect with themselves. I have experienced incredible moments of happiness performing or when together with other women who enjoyed this form of dance. Any woman can learn no matter their age, shape or body type. It gives confidence, the opportunity to socialize with other women and expression of self. It also can help one remain flexible in facing many circumstances in life. This valuable circumstance in my life gave me the ability of seeing how important I was for my family, my community, how many friends I had, plus the great opportunity to unite science with art and add this to my life. It also gave me the opportunity to encourage many women to explore themselves and to experience the happiness that is being a woman.

---**Graciela Tanner, Clearwater Health Center**



*I looked for a form of physical activity I would like and finally only because I had promised him, I chose belly dancing.*

## Florida Department of Health, Women's Health

Florida Department of Health  
4052 Bald Cypress Way  
Bin A-25  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1746

Phone: 850-245-4444 ext 2305

Fax: 850-245-4124

E-mail: [Corine\\_Mealing@doh.state.fl.us](mailto:Corine_Mealing@doh.state.fl.us)

*In 2004, legislation creating section 381.04015, Florida Statutes, was passed, creating an Officer of Women's Health Strategy within the Department of Health for the purpose of improving the overall health status of women in Florida through research, awareness, and education. This statute recognizes the unique needs of women and encourages public policies to address the distinct characteristics of women's health issues.*

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We are on the web!

<http://www.doh.state.fl.us/womenshealth/>

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Tamara Y. Demko, JD	Assistant Deputy Secretary Officer of Women's Health Strategy
Corine Mealing, MPH, M.Ed	Women's Health Coordinator
Thometta Cozart, MS	Public Relations Manager
Tamara McElroy	Webmaster
Megan Casey	Women's Health Data Specialist

### A LIFETIME OF GOOD HEALTH

## *We are all ears!*



Please continue to send us stories of everyday women overcoming great obstacles to live a lifetime of good health! Stories can be about challenges relating to physical, emotional, and mental health. We know that Florida women suffer from a multitude of health conditions, especially heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Your stories are not only empowering, but inspiring to other women who may be facing similar hardships. We know that women are built strong, however, we also know that there are times that we need the support and strength

from others. We will continue producing this publication for as long as we continue to receive inspirational stories. Please share this publication with other women in your life. Stories can come from any Florida women and identifying information does not have to be included.

In addition, agencies can also include stories about what they are doing to promote a lifetime of good health among employees.

We truly appreciate all the women who are featured in this publication. We thank you for your courage, your honesty,

and your willingness to share your story with others. We wish you much strength and courage as you continue on your journey of living a lifetime of good health.

**Be inspired!**

**Get healthy!**

**Start today!**