

Elaine's Health Story

Carrie asked me to write my health success story. Mine isn't impressive, but I don't think it has to be. I got healthier by degrees, and the improvements in my well-being were not all immediately apparent. But looking back, I'm glad I'm a lot further down the road of health than I was.

I have always been a thin person. There can be a misconception that being thin means you are healthy. I was not. From childhood, I was never good at sports and therefore did not participate in any of them (except for a lapse of my sanity when I was a high school basketball team player, and a laughable one, at that). It wasn't until I started my chiropractic education, that I took stock of my health. It was easy at the time to weight train, join aerobic classes, and be mindful of my diet because I was immersed in an environment where my colleagues and I were all focused on health 24/7, in our studies, as well as our free time. I loved it.

But with marriage and the subsequent arrival of children, my fitness regimen came to a grinding halt. As time went on, the demands on me and my time increased, and my health deteriorated. I caught ever cold and flu that came around, and was notoriously sick during the holidays. I ate chocolate and ice cream in copious amounts, especially in the evening after the kids had gone to bed. And because I was thin, I had little incentive to reign in my eating habits.

I did try to exercise between the births of my children. But it was always short-lived...and frustrating. Time was always an issue and it was really hard to ride an elliptical with kids grabbing at my ankles, calling, "Mommy! Mommy!" I would also quit working out when the morning sickness from the next pregnancy would set in. The more babies I had, the worse the morning sickness became. With my 9th child, I lost a tremendous amount of weight, and suffered my first bout of post-partum depression. During my 10th pregnancy, I ate way too much ice cream, as it was the only thing I could stomach, and had a frightening, difficult birth of a 10+lb baby, who wasn't breathing upon delivery. Emergency measures were taken and she was revived, but that was a turning point for me.

As the quote goes, "Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change." I watched what I ate more closely and limited the late night snacking. By the grace of God, my pregnancy, labour, and delivery were immensely better the next time around, in spite of my fears. Five months later, I attended fitness classes sporadically, bringing an older daughter along to watch the baby. I remember the day, when one of my fitness buddies asked me if I was coming the next week for workout. I answered, "I'm all in!" and I was. I exercised throughout my 12th pregnancy, up to 2 days before the birth and resumed 2 weeks later. I have consistently exercised now, around 6 hours a week for nearly three years, and have no desire to lose what I have gained.

What keeps me going is the encouragement of my workout buddies and the benefits I enjoy. My fitness friends made me a workout schedule when I went to Victoria for 2 weeks so I wouldn't 'fall off the wagon.' Also, knowing people are expecting me to show up for classes prevents me from skipping out. My chicken legs have more shape now, which is a nice side effect as well, but my main motivation is not to look better in a swimsuit. What I love most about being more fit is what I am now able to DO.

I am much stronger than I used to be. I'm amazed how much that helps me in daily living. Lifting and hauling my baby around is so much easier. I have more stamina to carry out my responsibilities. I can ski with my husband, Kurt, and almost keep up. On a trip to Victoria, Kurt encouraged me to hike up the mountain with the older kids while he offered to mind the little ones. That had never happened before, and more telling, I probably wouldn't have wanted to do it before! Last year, our whole family hiked up Mt. Baldy together and I had to piggyback my toddler some of the way, which would have been an impossible feat for me a couple years ago.

I have not been sick since I regained my health. I no longer have a raging head cold at Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. When the flu hit my house this year, I was the only one out of 13 people who did not get sick. It's not that I don't ever go on a downturn, but my body now responds quickly and keeps illness at bay. I am expecting my 13th child, and I have not felt this good since my first pregnancy.

The ability to practice a healthy lifestyle and share it with my husband and children are worth the sacrifice of time and effort to be healthy. My older daughters have joined me for fitness classes at different times, and my little ones like to practice their push-ups and planks at home on their mats. I can join Kurt on his outdoor excursions, which has always been important to him, and can now be mutually enjoyable.

Accommodating fitness into my schedule is still a juggling act, and sometimes a downright pain, but how much time would I lose and how much effort would I exert, struggling with ill health and fatigue, if I didn't take the time? Being more intentional about my well-being has taught me that:

I want to thank God for all he has given me and I want to enjoy it to the fullest.

If it's important, I'll find a way; if it's not, I'll make an excuse. (Ryan Blair)

Even good change is accompanied by struggle and difficulty.

I don't have to be an athlete to be physically fit.

Exercising with others, is not only more fun, but being accountable to them keeps me going.

Having a fitness plan on a schedule away from my house was essential to my commitment.

The time I take away from my family for my health is actually an investment in them as well.

I am so thankful to be healthier and stronger, and with God's grace and the support of my family and friends, I plan to remain active in my life and in the life of my family for the years to come.

