

One woman's journey toward health

Moving Grays Harbor
By Maryann Welch

I have always found personal accounts of weight loss, fitness feats and dramatic health improvement to be fascinating. It never ceases to amaze me that there are so many catalysts that spark the initiation of change and in most all cases the tools for a healthier life (education) are well ingrained. Today I am going to share with you one such personal account. I hope that you find it as inspiring as I do.

Erin Schreiber, a former co-worker and a very skilled and valued Health Educator at the Public Health and Social Services Department, has always been a picture of strength and self-confidence; however, like all of us, there was one area of her life that she had struggled to control. Erin shares that over the years she has tried and been successful at many different “diets” or “eating programs”, reached her goal weight and felt great only to gradually let some unhealthy foods and attention to portion size lapse. Along with these lapses came the weight gain. By all accounts, an unhealthy cycle.

Erin, however, is unique. She graduated with a degree in Exercise Science and Health and Wellness Promotions. She quickly discovered a love for fitness after taking a health class in college and she has previously taught fitness classes, been a personal trainer, and worked in Cardiac Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy. She had all the tools to know about diet and exercise and how to affect body weight. But, as we all know, life sometimes gets in the way of good intentions.

Erin discloses that in January of 2007 she was at her highest weight ever (including when she was nine months pregnant) and “I was not happy, I was struggling with self-confidence and was just not myself. This really affected my relationships with people close to me as I was grumpy and frustrated because I couldn't find the motivation to change.” Her motivation finally presented itself in May. Her brother-in-law got engaged and the wedding was scheduled for July. Erin dreaded being in those family photos and shares “it is hard to smile in pictures when you are unhappy and uncomfortable with the way you look and feel”. I should point out that Erin also stresses that her fitness aspirations are not rooted in the American cultural values of what the “ideal” (skin and bones with augmented features) female body should look like. She believes that everyone has their own ideal weight and fitness level that makes them feel healthy, strong and confident.

To attain her fitness goals, Erin started following the *South Beach Diet* plan, focusing her meals on healthy protein like cottage cheese, yogurt and nuts as well as adding lots of vegetables, fruits and small amounts of high fiber cereal and bread. She also found a workout partner and together they are helping each other stay motivated – motivated enough to attend the YMCA spinning class every Saturday morning! Erin has always enjoyed exercise and loves the intensity of spinning – even though her friend's husband occasionally jokes that they have joined a “cult”. She is also practicing Yoga twice a week and tells me that she incorporates some kind of physical activity into every day.

Another key to her success is that her husband is also a bit of a fitness nut. Together they have made exercise and healthy eating part of their family values and priorities and are proud to know that they are setting a great

example and a healthy foundation for their 4 year-old daughter.

In a recent visit with my former co-workers I noticed that Erin is continuing to lose weight and looks really great. She reveals that she has lost about 40 pounds since May (a very healthy rate) and she has a goal of losing 10-15 more pounds.

I asked Erin to share a few comments to help inspire others and here is a recap of what she said: “in my work as a Health Educator, I give people all of the information and resources they need to be able to prevent diseases, stay safe and healthy and achieve their life goals. Even with all the information that is out there it still all comes down to our own personal choice to choose change. That was a lesson that I had to accept. Just having all the information was not going to stop my weight from going up...I had to make that choice. You have to choose health because you want to and believe me, when you do, your life will be so much more rewarding.”

Congratulations, Erin on your wellness journey and thank you for sharing your story with us. To all my readers out there, I wish you success in discovering your wellness trigger.

Maryann Welch is the recently retired director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.