



Better Than Good

TLC Helps Veteran Michael Sleigher Make Little Changes to Lose a Lot of Weight

For Veteran Michael Sleigher, the journey to better health started with a surprising result from a simple medical test.

“I was helping out at a Veteran outreach clinic at VA Butler Healthcare, doing sign-ups for My Health^eVet,” he explains. “On a whim, I asked a young woman at the clinic to measure my blood sugar. When the test revealed that my A1c level was borderline for diabetes, I was shocked!” At the time, Michael’s weight and BMI were a little higher than he wanted. But he never expected that his health could be in jeopardy.

Something More

That was June 2012, and Michael immediately decided to lose some weight and take charge of his health. “I started getting a little more physical activity on my own, then I joined a fitness class that was led by a chiropractor here at the HCS,” he says. He was able to lose some weight, but soon became frustrated with his inability to keep it off. “My weight went up and down, and I just couldn’t maintain the weight loss over time,” Michael explains. “I knew it was time for something more, but I didn’t really know what that was.”

That “something more” was NCP’s TLC Program. “I introduced Michael to TLC and signed him up in October 2012,” says Karen Dunn, the facility’s Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program Manager and TLC program facilitator. “With TLC patients, it’s all about timing, and Michael was ‘ready’ for the program,” she says. “If we enroll them when they’re ready to make lifestyle changes and ready to talk to a coach, they have a great chance at meeting their health goals.”



Convenience, Encouragement

On the initial TLC call, Michael's health coach Barbara helped him set his sights on better health. "I started TLC weighing 182 pounds, with a BMI of 28.9, and I had an A1c of 6.0 percent. So I set two goals for myself: reaching a weight of 150 pounds dressed *and* getting healthier," he says. "Then we started an ongoing conversation about my goals and how I could reach them."

Michael says that TLC worked for him because of his coach. She called him at home, at his convenience. She made sure his goals were achievable, and continually went over them with him. She provided support, and she cared a lot. "Barbara was my primary coaching contact, although I worked with a few others, too," he explains. "They were all excellent and encouraging. At one point, Barbara helped me get over a mid-program 'plateau' when I just couldn't seem to drop any pounds. And when I gained a little weight over the holidays, she said it was okay. But she reminded me to keep moving forward and stick to my goals."

Motivator

Another important part of Michael's relationship with his coach was accountability, an aspect of successful health behavior change that Karen believes is critical. "Sticking with the program and the health changes is the number one struggle for most patients," she says. "But on every TLC call, the coach is there, reminding the patient to strive and stay on track—not simply telling them what to do. Simply put, TLC patients don't want to let their coaches down." Michael agrees, saying that having to regularly give his coach an update on his progress was an important motivator.



In fact, Michael's progress in weight loss was based on fairly straightforward, simple lifestyle changes. "I didn't really change my diet much, I just controlled my portions better," he says. "Then I maintained the weight loss with physical activity." Michael began TLC unable to do more than 60 minutes of physical activity each week; now, he's up to 225 minutes per week! "Every day, I walk 3 miles in the morning before work, then do a mile at lunch," he says. "Three days a week, I go to a 'kick-butt' cardio class that Karen organized at the HCS with the help of local YMCA instructors." The improvement in Michael's appearance has been obvious to both him and Karen, even if his friends didn't immediately notice the physical change.

Changes

Now, life is "better than good" for Michael, who finished his series of TLC calls in May 2013, but will likely do one more follow-up call with his coach this summer. "I weighed myself the other day and I was down to 142 pounds—that's a 40-pound weight loss!," he reports. "My BMI is down to 23.2, and I've dropped my A1c to 5.2 percent."



It's nice to be able to bend over and tie my shoes without gasping. And my grandson is just amazed that I can do more push-ups than he can!"

But Michael's health improvements are more than just numerical and physical changes. He's also changed the way he thinks about his health, and has a better understanding of things like food preparation, nutrition, and his body's needs. "I now have the knowledge to 'adjust,'" he says. "If I splurge a little, I measure my weight, then modify what I eat. And if I'm feeling a little sluggish, it's usually due to carbohydrates. So I just cut back on certain snacks."

Working On It

Michael recommends TLC to other Veterans by simply telling them to look at him. "I lost 40 pounds simply by calling my coach every week or two, and making little changes in my life and diet," he explains. "It's a great program—it wasn't hard, it was easy. And it can work for anybody!"

Karen likewise describes TLC as "wonderful", noting that the MOVE!® Team is currently offering it as a supplement to help Veterans who are now enrolled in Butler's MOVE!® Weight Management Program. "With small, simple lifestyle changes and the guidance of the health coaches, Veterans can successfully meet a variety of health goals *and* make big, positive differences in their well-being," she explains. "Showing—not telling—is how to help them do it, and this approach is one that the medical community and VA are really embracing now."

For his part, Michael continues to talk up TLC to other Veterans, touting it as a program that can help them really improve their health. "They just need to give a try," he says. "I don't have 'six-pack' abs, but I'm working on it!"

