



The Power of Accepting Health Challenges with Vigor

Wellness Success Story

Elaine Doherty, who works in Woburn's public school system, is a go getter and accepts every challenge she encounters with vigor and dedication.

Last year, on the day after Christmas, Elaine went to donate blood but was not allowed to as her heart rate at 120 beats per minute was too high. The American Red Cross guidelines for blood donations are pulse rates not greater than 100 and not less than 50.

Fast forward to early this year and Elaine's heart rate was 66, her blood pressure was low, her iron level was up to 15.6 and she was able to donate blood.

How did she do it? Elaine embarked on a journey to lower her heart rate and blood pressure and increase her iron levels. She did this in part by changing her diet including eating more legumes such as beans, lentils, split peas, green peas and peanuts. Elaine also made it a goal to get outside and walk three to four times a week even though it was winter!

Legumes may sound boring, but they are a uniquely rich plant source of protein, are high in dietary fiber, and supply an impressive array of vitamins and minerals, including iron. Like all plants, legumes also provide health-promoting antioxidants and phytochemicals.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend most adults consume one to three cups of legumes per week (depending on calorie requirements), but the actual average intake is less than one cup weekly.

Elaine added more legumes to her diet by participating in a MIIA Well Aware three week self-directed challenge. In addition to benefitting from the nutritional value of legumes, the challenge was also designed to help participants consume more plant foods, choose natural foods over processed foods and increase their dietary fiber.

Try something new

Elaine has participated in many Well Aware programs over the years and approaches all of them with a lot of enthusiasm. She took the “try something new” advice and went kayaking for the first time. Not only was it a good physical workout but also a peaceful experience that reduced her stress level. She went out the very same day and bought a kayak and has been enjoying the waters off Cape Cod for many years.

Another challenge that Elaine undertook helped to push her outside her comfort zone with unexpected results. This challenge is based on the 2004 book, “How Full is Your Bucket?” The author’s concept is we all have imaginary buckets representing a place where our emotional and mental-selves sit. We fill and dip into one’s bucket by our actions and words which are either kind and thoughtful (fill) or mean and careless (dip). When our buckets are full, we feel happy, confident, positive and energized.

One morning when Elaine was in Dunkin Donuts, she noticed a small group of veterans having coffee. She walked over to them to thank them for their service. This is something she said she would never have done until she started thinking about ‘filling her bucket.’ The group had a fun conversation with lots of laughs and the veterans were appreciative of Elaine taking the time to thank them.

Elaine’s determination to embrace a healthy lifestyle and to keep trying new challenges and activities is an inspiration to us all!