



Gail Mates – Family History of Heart Disease

Gail Mates has a strong family tradition: heart disease. She has spent most of her life watching it strike her family members. Both grandfathers died of heart attacks, her father suffered from several, even her mother had an enlarged heart and hypertension that makes her susceptible. When Gail's father had a stroke, she witnessed firsthand the depression and fear that he felt.

"It was heart wrenching to watch," Gail remembers.

In her own life, Gail's health issues were mounting. High cholesterol, high triglycerides, pre-diabetes, sleep apnea, esophagus surgery and a metabolic syndrome were just a few of the hurdles she faced.

"I was digging my grave with a knife and fork," she laments.

Gail knew her life was going downhill, but caretaking was something she did for others, not herself. It wasn't until her daughter pled with her to make a change that she finally listened.

"Even though I had a cardiothoracic surgeon tell me I was at risk, it didn't hit me. Then my daughter told me through tears that I was killing myself and that she wanted me to be here for her children," Gail says.

Gail started looking at her life. "I was drinking soda and eating cookies and potato chips for breakfast. I literally was responsible for raising the stock prices of sugar."

Diet was the first area Gail tackled. She began eating 'live' foods, shopping on the outside of the grocery store instead of the inner aisles of canned and boxed food. Exercise came slower to Gail, but it was the exact pace she wanted to set because she knew doing too much, too soon would backfire. Gail channeled her enthusiasm into a local church's Lose to Live healthy lifestyle class. As her progress increased, so did her motivation to help others. She even started mentoring other women.

Almost 30 pounds lighter, Gail is changing her heart every step and beat of the way. She's practically off her sleep apnea machine, she's training for a 5K, her triglycerides have been cut in half—and it just keeps getting better.

Today, Gail never makes excuses.

"If it's snowing outside and I can't get to the gym, I just walk around my living room and bedroom," she proudly states.

"If you can make it easy, you can find a way."

While nothing is stopping Gail, one thing keeps her going: the smile on her daughter's face.

"I believe in myself, but I Go Red for my father and the other people who have died of heart disease in my family. I want to live. I'm up for this fight."