



Jennifer Engel – Heart Health Activist

Jennifer Engel made the choice to save her heart, mind and body before it was too late.

Jennifer grew up in a heart-conscious family. Her mother was a cardiac rehabilitation nurse and everyone always tried to eat healthy. It wasn't until her 20s and 30s that her health began declining. Her struggle with her weight caused tremendous feelings of inadequacy to the point that it absorbed her identity. Jennifer continually compared herself to others and often felt hopeless and depressed.

"I turned to smoking, drinking, eating and shopping to cope. I really let other people's criticisms get to me," she tells.

At only 34 years old, Jennifer worried she wouldn't make it to 54. The perfectionist and people-pleaser in her was accustomed to a high-stress world. Making time for herself was last on her list.

"The lowest points in my self esteem were the highest points in my weight," she says.

But it was a former host family in Australia who made Jennifer stop to take inventory of her life. Though 18 years had passed, the bond between Jennifer and the host mother remained strong. She saw the sadness in Jennifer's face.

"She told me 'You're better than this. What are you doing?' She just tore it down and told it like it was. I needed that," Jennifer remembers.

From that point on, Jennifer made the choice to take charge of her health. She changed her career, left unhealthy relationships, devoted herself to morning meditation, and began volunteering with a local women's health initiative. Self-care became non-negotiable. She chose to let nothing get in the way of her mental and physical wellbeing.

Today, her outlook is completely different. She's healthy inside and out. She's gone from having a cooler of sodas in her car to not drinking any. She doesn't look at the number on the scale or her dress size, though both have dropped dramatically. Instead, she focuses on how she feels and how her choices can continue to support her healthy desires.

Every morning, Jennifer begins the day with a self-affirming meditation. She works hard not to fall into the "poor me" mode that once consumed her, and she continues to do things she never thought possible.

Being a source of inspiration to other women is what keeps Jennifer going. That, and the memory of the self she left behind.

"I Go Red for myself. I'm taking control of my time and my life now."