

Lorraine's Story



James Cenedella, a much-loved father and grandfather, was hard on his heart.

"My father was stubborn," said Lorraine, a 33-year-old wife and mother of two. "For 60 years, he ate poorly and was inactive. He had high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes. But he never exercised or changed his diet."

The day he had a toe amputated due to complications from diabetes, Lorraine vowed to get healthier. She was about 15 pounds overweight and had exercised from time to time, but not consistently. But the next day, she ran 10 miles. "I know that you only get one heart and one chance."

Lorraine's father had more health problems. "After his toe was amputated, it was his foot. Then his other foot. Then it was both of his legs." Lorraine's dad was sick for 12 years. He died of heart failure in 2005.

"Watching my father go through that changed my family's life," Lorraine said. "Nothing is more important to me than my health." Her dad's tragedy not only inspired Lorraine to get healthy and active. It prompted her to encourage her friends and family to do the same.

"Everyone in my little world is doing what they can to prolong their lives, including exercising and eating right. I'll say, 'it's Saturday afternoon, what do you want to do? Let's go for a hike. Let's go for a run. Let's meet in the park and do something active.' I've encouraged several people to get in shape, and some have gone on to run marathons."

As a wife and mother of two young children, James and Ella, Lorraine said it can be hard to find time to do things for herself. But she knows it's important to stay healthy for her family.

"When my father got sick, I decided to take the time because it will eventually help me take care of my children and my children's children. So every day I try to exercise and take that time to make healthy food or walk the extra block to pick up the healthy meal. I want to let them know, 'you can achieve anything but you're not invincible.' I'm bringing my son, who's only 2, to gym class and trying to get him to eat many fruits and vegetables – and love them."

Her advice? "Don't wait another day. You don't have to decide to run 10 miles tomorrow, but start small and try to be as active as possible. Little changes make a big difference. There are so many things you can't control, but this is something you *can* control."

Spreading the word matters too: "If you can make a difference in your own life, you make a difference in the lives of others." Through the American Heart Association's Go Red For Women movement, "I'm honored to be able to tell my story and hopefully influence somebody to take control of their heart," Lorraine said. "Go to the doctor; get your blood pressure and cholesterol in check."

Lorraine said there's nothing more empowering than getting healthy – even if it seems intimidating at first. "A lot of times you don't realize how bad you feel until you get healthy. Your body's your temple. If you can live your life in the best physical shape possible and also eat healthy, it's not only great for your heart health, but just your daily life."

It might not be easy at first, as Lorraine knows firsthand. But she had her father's advice to motivate her: He had long taught his children that they could do anything.

"In the beginning it can be daunting to think, 'Wow, exercise 30 minutes a day? I don't even get five minutes for myself.' But you realize that it not only gives you more energy but a whole new outlook on life."

Lorraine - New York, NY
Age: 33
Age at time of father's event: 30

