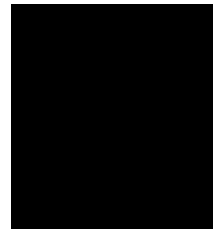


Maria Vargas-Pion – Family History of Heart Disease



Like many women, taking care of her family was the first priority for Maria Vargas-Pion. When her husband refused her world-famous flan, she knew something was wrong.

“This was his favorite dessert that he wanted every single week and all of a sudden he said no. I was shocked!” she remembers.

But it didn't take long for her to figure out why. Months earlier, his father had died from a heart attack. Her husband was devastated and became depressed. Not being able to say goodbye crushed him as did the realization that his father would never know their son who was only two years old at the time.

She tried everything she knew, but her husband kept getting worse. It was then that Maria put the pieces together.

“Part of the problem was his father's eating habits, so my husband and I agreed to make some changes in our diet,” she says.

Within days, they had cut back on sugar and stopped frying food altogether. They cut their oil intake in half and began incorporating more vegetables and salads into their meals. Maria's husband noticed the changes instantly and began substituting his love of flan for his craving for arugula salads. He started taking Pilates and soon, his hopelessness was replaced by healthiness, but it was up to Maria to keep him in check. After a few weeks of healthy eating, her husband was ready to go back to flan and fried foods, but Maria stayed strong.

“I told him that we were going to eat healthy from now on. That this was the way it was going to be,” she affirms.

It was a strong stance for Maria to take, but her husband abided. Not long after, Maria started taking inventory of her own life.

Like many Latina women, Maria put her family first, but in the process, she forgot about herself. She had her own family history of heart disease, too. Her dad's father had suffered a heart attack years earlier. Not only that, her full-time job, school and family kept her so busy, she'd often forget to eat. Her friends even coined her “Superwoman.”

“In the last three years, I've had no time for myself. I don't have the same energy I used to, but I know that if I don't take care of myself, I can't take care of my family,” she asserts.

Today, Maria is finding the balance she so desperately needs. Knowing that stress can contribute to unhealthy lifestyle choices that cause heart disease, she is quick to calm herself and remain positive through self-talk and motivational books.

She's eating healthier, stressing less and even finding time to incorporate exercise into her full schedule, but her role as a supportive wife and mother still takes precedence.

“I Go Red for me, my family and the Latino community.”