

## Maria's Wellness Warrior Story: A Complete Lifestyle Change For Better Health



*Warriors Enjoy Cooking and Eating Real Foods*

### **How did I get here and why?**

I blame a phone conversation with my mother in 2010. I was 36 years old then. Mom asked if I was dating anyone, if I had thought of how my life at age 50, 60, 70 was going to be if I stayed single and/or without

kids. I told her I was not willing to sacrifice my quality of life for the sake of companionship—if the right person ‘showed up’, great. Plus, I was prepared to raise a child alone.

The conversation made me dig deeper inside and questioned **how aging could impact my active and independent lifestyle**. I went through family medical history (physiological and physical conditions) and my own health concerns. As a trained finance professional, I often think of the worst case scenario and prepare for it. My thought was let me assume I will stay single, no kids, and be away from my family until I die.

***In that case, what do I need to stay content, active, independent and maintain cognitive and functional health?’ My answer was ‘Health’.***

Achieving and maintaining **optimal health** should give me the ability to continue to do things I love—socialize, play sports, enjoy outdoors, scuba dive, travel, and exercise. I grew up **constipated, bloated, gassy, burping, cold sores, reoccurring external hemorrhoid, and with a serious addiction to sugar**. I used to drink condensed milk out of a can. In addition, I have not been only a work alcoholic with strong work ethic all my life but also sleep deprived. Let me share a little secret with you.

*Work first = constant pressure = unbalanced lifestyle = chronic stress = high blood sugar = high insulin levels = insulin resistance = hormonal imbalances = prediabetic. Eventually, it can lead to diabetes, heart issues, inflammation, and much more!*

Let me tell you, nobody should feel proud for functioning with three to four hours of sleep. I used to be proud of it! My pathetic diet was composed primarily of **deli meats**, poultry, **dairy products**, refined and **simple carbs/sugars** and artificial sugars. It had plenty of grains, whole wheat products, and tropical fruits. Vegetables and healthy fats were nowhere to be found on my plate. I refused to cook and often regarded as a waste of time. In summary, tropical fruits were the only real foods I consumed.

Although I have not been obese or looked overweight, my BMI was of an overweight woman since my mid 20’s when I had my first physical. The test also showed a triglycerides to HDL ratio of 4! For the next 10 years, I joined the **fat free and light/diet products wagon**, no eggs, little red meat and fat. The concept of healthy fats did not exist for me. Surely, I improved my lipid profile but my sugar addiction went to the roof.

In 2011, my HA1C had reached pre-diabetic level and my doctor said nothing. I found that out by evaluating my own lab a few years ago. I guess I was not a diabetic so he could not medicate. Hence, what else he could have done for me, right? I had a few good things going for me though: no sodas since the age of 18, little to moderate alcohol consumption, no drugs/smoking, and was active 3x week (running, racquetball, volleyball, some strength training).

Certainly, in order to achieve optimal health, I needed to fix my own health issues, find out the root cause, and jump onto the disease prevention wagon. In 2011, I started my **quest to understand the meaning of a ‘healthy diet’**. I started to educate myself on various topics of health, but mostly diets and foods, and started to pay attention to how my body reacted to foods.

The moment I learned how carbohydrates, protein, and fats break down, get stored and utilized in the body, their impact on cells, brain, muscles, organs, and energy, I became an avid researcher. The more I dug, the more I wanted to learn. Eventually, the different areas of study including cell and organ function, energy production, exercise, hormones, food nutrients, inflammation, sleep, stress, and internal/external toxins made sense! It became clear to me it **was not about a ‘healthy diet’ but about a ‘healthy lifestyle’**.



*Cooking for nutrients. Time well spent.*

Two diseases that scare me the most are cancer and dementia. Diabetes increases changes of Alzheimer's by two fold and dementia of any kind by 1.75 times. I am thankful and blessed with amazing opportunities since I've moved to the US. It is very sad to see people's lives and memories deteriorate rapidly.

**I am fully committed to do whatever is in my control to prevent these diseases and others.** It is not about managing one or two aspects of lifestyle, but also include nutrition, stress, exercise, sleep, and timing. Yet, we must start from somewhere. Small and educated steps build!

Today, I am happy to share I have never felt healthier in my life. I feel in control and in tune with my body through mindfulness. I've learned what works for me.

*My mission is to educate and empower others to find what is best for them and look and feel priceless.*

My blood sugar is well under control so are my hormones. I am no longer pre-diabetic and I kissed good-bye to my health issues. Needless to say, **whenever I cheat my own protocol, my body responds quickly with a 'no-no'**. I exercise 4-5x a week and have great energy.

Management of my nutrition became central. I cook about 95% of what I eat and truly enjoy the process, but most important, my food tastes amazing. I cut artificial sugars, unhealthy fats, unhealthy iodine, and most preservatives and additives out. I focus on eating nutrient dense, delicious and colorful foods for higher nutrient content. Plus, I eat a lot more than I used to (volume wise).

My plate is 1/3 of **protein** (grass fed meat, pasture raised eggs, organic chicken, and wild caught mild fish), and 2/3 of **carbs** (vegetables and some fruit) and **healthy fats** (coconut, ghee, avocado, grass fed butter, olive oil, nuts). Since 2014, I have been focusing on improving my sleep and it has paid off. Sleep is the hardest part. I also recognize it impacts my stress, digestion, skin quality, hormones, mood swings, energy, cravings, and much more.

*Living a long life is not enough. **Living it with joy, energy, and health** is perhaps the best gift one can be granted with.*

**Are you doing your part?** I invite you to **become a Wellness Warrior.**