

A Lifestyle, Not A Fad:

VETERAN WILLIAM GUANCI TAKES BABY STEPS TOWARD BETTER HEALTH WITH MOVE![®]

As a child, Veteran William Guanci's self-consciousness about his body held him back from getting involved in sports and caused bouts of isolation and depression. "I've been overweight all of my life," he says. "I grew up in an Italian-American family and used food for comfort. Unfortunately, I never learned as a child to be self-disciplined with food." As an adult, he realized that his loving family was enabling him to continue to feed his emotions with food.

"When I was 22, I joined the Army weighing 200 pounds," William explains. "At my discharge, I was down to 144 pounds. But over the next 5 years, my weight went up and fluctuated between 170 and 180 pounds." Following his service in Vietnam, he began to struggle with alcohol and drug addiction, as well as obsessive-compulsive behaviors. To deal with these issues, William began again to overeat and his food addiction resurfaced.



Recovery

Over the successive years, William was fortunate to enter into successful recovery for his alcohol and drug addiction. But his food addiction continued. By July 2009, he was over 256 pounds and had suffered three heart attacks and three strokes! Taking 29 pills a day to deal with his ailments, he knew it was time for a change.

In July 2011, he completed the MOVE!²³ questionnaire. But it was a year before he decided to pursue the program further. During that time, William recognized that he'd conquered alcohol, drugs, and smoking—which left him with only one problem: food. In July 2012, William joined the MOVE![®] Program at the VA Boston HCS and has been attending group classes ever since. Now on his third time through the program, he says that he "learns something new in every class."

Exceptional Support

William believes that much of his success is due to exceptional support from his MOVE!® group leaders. “Dietitian Trish MacDonald, social worker Sandi Maher, and nurse Amy Pechukas make the classes enjoyable, motivational, and informative,” he says. “They have taught me so many invaluable lessons.” William has learned, for example, how to read food labels, eat a variety of foods, avoid mindless eating, and not use food as a reward. He’s also learned to recognize triggers that cause him to turn to food and choose a better alternative when that happens—like walking or reading.

William has also found that his fellow MOVE!® Veterans are great support. “As with other support groups I’ve done, the MOVE!® Group has helped me to do what I couldn’t do alone,” he says. “The group’s provided me with encouragement and feedback. If my weight’s gone up one week, then they help me identify changes I can make.”

Taking Responsibility

The lifestyle and diet changes that William has made have all been gradual. As an example, he explains how he improved his coffee habit. “I used to have at least six iced coffees a day, with cream and sugar. So my first change was to replace the cream with milk,” he recounts. “Then I slowly made the switch to black coffee with artificial sweetener. Now I’m down to only one or two coffees per day!”

William’s also become much more aware of his food choices, as well as his portion sizes. He doesn’t avoid the comfort foods that he loves—American chop suey, for example—but he now measures out what he can eat and supplements each meal with salad or vegetables. “I don’t let my overeating define me,” he says, “Instead, I take responsibility for my actions and choices.”

Before each meal, he has one or two cups of water, and he’s stopped drinking soda and limited bread. For breakfast, he’ll have steel-cut oats with blueberries or fruit and yogurt, and for lunch he will have a sandwich with lots of vegetables. Dinner can be challenging for him because he cooks dinner for other family members who don’t eat like he does. So he has to make modifications, such as replacing carbohydrates with vegetables or measuring out portions. “When eating out, I look for the ‘less than 500-calorie’ meals, which many restaurants now have and which make eating out easier,” he explains. “I have a “MORE” personality—if one cookie is good, then the entire bag is better—so I consciously limit the tempting snack foods I have in the house.”

Baby Steps

As he has with food, William has seen the value of taking baby steps in increasing his exercise, which proved to be easier to accomplish and sustain. When he first started

exercising, for example, he would get cramps in his legs. But he has learned that if he takes a break, he can later continue his exercise.

William is active every day, and incorporates exercise and movement into his daily routine. “I stretch and ride my stationary bike for 40 minutes each day,” he says. “And when I’m out shopping, I walk up and down every aisle regardless of whether I need something there or not.” William uses other simple tricks, like moving the phone and TV remote away from him, to force himself to move around more.

Not a Fad or Miracle Fix

Today, William weighs 200 pounds, and has dropped 10 inches from his waist size. “I no longer need a cane for walking or cortisone shots for back pain,” he explains, “and I’m down to taking only 8 pills a day now!” William views the changes he’s made through MOVE!® as an ongoing shift in his lifestyle, “not a temporary diet or exercise fad.”

William wants other Veterans to know that MOVE!® works, but that it’s not a “miracle fix.” “The changes begin with your individual choices and commitment. When it comes to getting healthy, you must do it for yourself,” he notes. “You must play the hand you are dealt in life, in whatever way that works for you. Now, I look at each day as if it is a gift that must be taken care of.”