

New Habits, New Life:

VETERAN ERIC OLLENBORGER DISCUSSES HOW MOVE![®] HELPED HIM CONQUER A ‘HUGE CHALLENGE’

“I’m 48 years old now and have been struggling with weight issues since I was in my twenties, about the time when I was a U.S. Navy corpsman. I tried numerous things over the years to lose weight—starvation diets, pills, the ‘cabbage soup diet’, meal replacement shakes—all with little to no success. I lost weight while on the Atkins diet and a juicing diet, only to have it return over time.

About 15 months ago, I lost my oldest brother to congestive heart failure. He was only 50 years old, had a similar lifestyle, and was obese like me. About a year ago, my primary care physician, Dr. Aday, ran some tests on me. My bad cholesterol was too high, my good cholesterol too low, and my blood pressure was also way up. So I started medications for these problems.

Dr. Aday also suggested I start the MOVE![®] Program. I tried it because I don’t like being on medication, and also needed to learn how to deal with my obesity in a healthier way. He explained that the program has a high success rate because it teaches people how to control weight through lifestyle changes, not crash dieting. MOVE![®] seemed to be very well known among the staff at the Boston VA Healthcare System, so I felt good about being part of it.

I started MOVE![®] in January of 2013 and participated for 9 months. The program not only taught me what and how much to eat, but also about exercise and the lifestyle changes needed for success. Being in a group setting, I saw how others coped with daily difficulties and dealt with things such as plateaus, stress, nighttime snacking, depression, and weight-related health issues.



For me, the most helpful thing about MOVE!® was having the support from the staff and other participants. Losing weight was a huge challenge, but having some friendly competition—seeing who lost the most weight or walked the most steps—was a big motivator for me. The group setting was great and the various health care and nutrition staff answered all my questions.

The people who helped most were VA and MOVE!® staff such as Trish MacDonald, Sandi Maher, Amy Pechukas, and my fellow MOVE!® participants. In the past 9 months, I've bonded with everyone in the program and continue to communicate with them. I've made some new, exciting friends who have the same health goals as I do.

I learned so much from MOVE!®—I feel like I can finally live a healthy and productive life. My life is very different today than it was before. Prior to MOVE!®, I did little to no exercise; now, I exercise twice daily for several hours. Through MOVE!®, I've become very familiar with nutritional value of most foods and drinks. Before, I ate fast and processed foods; now, I plan my meals and choose primarily high-nutrition, low-calorie foods. I also eat lean, white meat daily—almost no red meat now. I drink mostly water, and rarely the soda, coffee, fruit juices, sweetened drinks, and beer I preferred before. And my lifestyle is always in check with proper nutrition and exercise—it's become an important part of my life!



Overall, I'm very happy—I feel great and have more energy than ever! I don't take or need any medications. For the first time in years, I'm able to keep up with people in their twenties. I spend time with friends who are healthy like me, and for fun, do things in the great outdoors. This past summer, I hiked mountains in New Hampshire and Vermont with people half my age, and it made me feel so good.

My weight battle continues, but for the first time in my life, I have the knowledge and motivation to succeed. I have no doubt that I will not only reach my overall goal, but also maintain it for the rest of my life.

My advice to other Veterans is to take advantage of this a free service provided through your local VAMC. Doing MOVE!® will provide great benefits. It'll teach you how to eat right, exercise, and create new habits for a new lifestyle. You'll feel better about yourself, have more energy, possibly take less or no medications, and ultimately, live a longer, healthier life. I would highly recommend starting this program—I mean, what do you have to lose besides 50 pounds or more?"