



Success Stories

Healthy Living Matters. Prevention Works.

A New Life

VETERAN GEORGE SARKESIAN DISCUSSES HOW BEING SCARED ABOUT HIS HEALTH GOT HIM IN THE MOVE! PROGRAM, AND HELPED HIM END A 30-YEAR WEIGHT STRUGGLE

George started MOVE! because of his diabetes—his A1C was up to 9.7%, when it needed to be at 7% or less. Carrying 236 pounds on a 5'9"-frame and 44-inch waist had sapped his energy and left him feeling 'very fat.' He'd struggled with weight for 3 decades and tried many different weight loss programs—high-protein diets, low-carb diets, high-fruit and vegetable diets, you name it. And for the last 5 years, he'd tried to eat nutritious foods, but his love of potato chips was making it hard. He was still not losing any weight, so he decided to talk to his VA pharmacist.



"Edna Ng-Chen told me that even losing a little weight—like 5-10 pounds—would help improve my diabetes and health. When I said, 'Okay, what can I do?,' she recommended I try MOVE!.

To be honest, I was scared about my future health. So I decided to use that fear as inspiration. I started the MOVE! Program at the Oceanside CBOC of the VA San Diego HCS in October 2015.

I went one day a week for 8 weeks, and it was the best health class of my life. Being an Army man, I was good at following directions. So I decided that the 186 pages of the MOVE! handbook were my marching orders, and I was going to follow them!

Several concepts I learned in the program really helped. Goal setting kept me on the right track. I picked goals that I thought were attainable and realistic—like getting down to 200 pounds and walking over 10,000 steps per day. I tracked my progress with daily morning weigh-ins. The food log was very helpful, too—listing everything I ate really opened my eyes to how easy it was to overeat. MOVE! also gave me the nutrition knowledge to choose the right food at the right portion at the right time.

Now, I eat six times a day, which is the key to never feeling hungry. Portion size is also a big factor in my weight loss. When we do our favorite monthly lobster buffet, for example, I drink a lot of iced tea to start, eat slowly with lots of portion control, and then add a few more steps of exercise later that day.

The MOVE! information on physical activity was also useful. I learned about things like the FITT principles, and how to stay motivated, prevent sore muscles, exercise safely, take your heart rate, and use a pedometer.

Through MOVE!, I met my weight goal—I'm at 195 pounds and have a new goal of 190. I met my exercise goal, too—my daily average is 11,500 steps. I've lost 6 inches from my waist, my clothes fit better, my self-image has improved, and my energy level has increased. I no longer take blood pressure medication or insulin, and my liver function is back to normal.

I still use the MOVE! materials, track my meals in the log, eat nutritious food in the right portions, and drink lots of water. I've maintained a weight loss since starting in the program in October 2015. I plan to increase my energy, strength, and general health at each 5-pound weight-loss increment. Ultimately, I want to get down to 180 pounds.

“ It was the best health class of my life... I picked a goal that I thought was attainable and realistic...I tracked my progress.”

– George Sarkesian

My improvements would not have happened without the support of Carol Walsh and Cindy Gerlan at the VA Oceanside Clinic, as well as the support of my wife and friends. My wife really kept me on track by buying the right foods and helping me eat the right portions. Now, she's also started using the great information from MOVE!.

I'm staying active and having fun. I love to ride my Harley motorcycle, and my Siberian Huskies keep me moving. I do agility training, urban mushing, snow sled dog sprint races, walks, and hikes with them. I also continue to meet my physical activity goal of 10,000 steps or more each day.

I'd tell Veterans to decide if they want to improve their health. Then if they do, they should do the MOVE! Program and enjoy better health. I'd say to them, 'You owe it to yourself, your family, and your friends!'"