

Permanent Change:

VETERANS LARRY AND TAMMY TUNISON DISCUSS HOW MOVE![®] IS HELPING THEM STAY ON THE PATH TO RECOVERY

“We are both Veterans—a Vietnam-era Marine and former Air Force servicewoman—who are coping with co-morbid mental health disorders. When we started on medications to help manage our mental health issues, we experienced side effects that included weight gain and lethargy. We decided that we had to get healthier and lose weight.



At the time, MOVE![®] had not started at our outpatient facility here in Ohio, but our VA health care team used the MOVE![®] program concepts with us. We sat down with our team, assessed our current lifestyle, set goals for the lifestyle we wanted, and wrote down the steps we would take to get there. Then we followed every instruction we received from our providers.

We’ve made a lot of lifestyle changes and every change has been permanent—we didn’t simply go on a ‘diet.’ Instead of eating the traditional three meals, we now eat five times a day to keep our blood sugar balanced and our hunger at bay. All the foods we eat are nutritious and serve a purpose for our bodies. We avoid food advertisements and never go to fast food restaurants. We also control our portions and eat slowly. We eat similar foods every day—it keeps us on track, takes the hassle out of preparing meals, and makes things simple. It might sound boring, but it works for us because being healthy is most important to us.

Breakfast is our highest-calorie meal, but the calories are ‘good’ ones that we typically burn off before mid-morning. We eat healthy cereal with berries, nuts, and half a banana. We use 2 percent milk and sweeten with brown (unrefined) sugar.

Mid-morning snacks and afternoon meals are fruit, real fruit bars, or 100-calorie snack-packs. We try to make foods fit into our calorie limits, so portioning them to 250 calories

keeps us within our calorie goals. Throughout a typical day, we drink about six bottles of water—staying hydrated is critical to weight loss and health, and also helps us feel full.



We are busy, so we make our evening meals simple. Frozen meals keep our portions in check and we aren't tempted by leftovers. There are a variety of delicious frozen food options, and we have less to clean up after a meal. We reward ourselves with a low-calorie snack only if we have had enough activity to offset the calories.

We are still faced with triggers, but being healthier gives us a better chance of overcoming triggers and getting better. We realized early on that when one of us gained weight, the other did too. So we've set up a support system and we work hard to keep each other motivated.

We've gotten into such good shape that we were able to compete in regional and national roller skating competitions! We also play tennis in a competitive local league. Tammy now takes diverse classes at the local vocational school, and I take classes at the local college—I'm relearning how to dive and do strength training. And one of the most satisfying things for us was graduating from VA Peer Counselor training, because now we have the ability to help other Veterans!

We still cope with our mental health issues each day. But thanks to the VA, we are in recovery and better managing our weight. As we've become healthier, we've been able to eliminate some of our medications and lower the doses of others. We are very grateful to the VA for helping us change our lives for the better and maintain our quality of life.”