

“I Accomplished Something”: USING MOVE![®], ROBERT HENDERSON MAKES THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DIET AND HEALTH

Vietnam Veteran Robert Henderson was a “success story” well before he came to the Jesse Brown VAMC (Chicago, IL) to start the MOVE![®] Program. “Before I started at the medical center, I was in bad shape—I was tired all the time, could barely walk, and had a lot of chest pain,” he says. Robert was also taking a slew of medications for high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, and heart problems. So when his doctors said that he *had* to lose some of his 277 pounds, he met with a dietitian and started to change how he ate.

One important mistake

Robert had some initial success. “I used to have three big meals each day—I’d eat fried chicken, bacon, cakes, and cookies, and drink six sodas a day,” he explains. “So I just started eating smaller portions of these foods and I was able to lose 27 pounds.” But Robert soon realized that he was making a key mistake: he was focusing on weight, not health. “Because I was losing weight, I thought I could still eat the same stuff,” he says, “but it became very difficult to keep that weight off.” Robert started taking an arthritis medication that made him even hungrier, and he was about to give up. But a talk with his daughter inspired him to keep fighting and join MOVE![®].

“The best part...was seeing that other people had just as much difficulty with weight...we’re all fighting together to take it off!”

Fighting it, together

In March 2009, he started attending MOVE![®] classes and it was an eye-opener. “I saw how many people were struggling just like I was,” Robert says. “The best part of the program was seeing that other people had just as much difficulty with weight. I felt like we were all fighting together to take it off, and that really motivated me.”

Camaraderie and support were key to his success, as was the intensive education he got through MOVE!®. He learned what and how to eat, and how to prepare each meal. Robert learned to keep a food log and “wrote everything down...then, if you slip up, you know *where* you slipped up.” As he started to drink more water and eat smaller, more frequent meals throughout the day, he lost even more weight.

Making the connection

“Before I started MOVE!®, I didn’t make the connection between eating and health,” Robert reports. Now, he has an appreciation for the nutritional *and* caloric value of food. Compared to his old diet, his current one is a stark contrast: four small meals daily that include foods like vegetables, fruits, and baked chicken. And only one can of diet soda, for dessert.

“I feel good now. I feel like I accomplished something.”

Exercising more has also helped him succeed in losing weight. “Before, I was lucky if I could walk to the other side of the medical center,” he says. “Now, I have slowly built up my fitness level— I do three laps of the entire second floor, three times a week!”

Doing it for the kids

Several years of hard work in MOVE!® has paid off for Robert. He currently weighs 199 pounds, has lost over 50 pounds, and has trimmed his waist by 10 inches. No longer taking heart medicine, Robert’s also reduced his other medications by half because his overall health has significantly improved.

“I feel good now,” he says, “and I feel like I accomplished something.” If you ask Robert what keeps him motivated to keep off the weight, he’ll tell you it’s one thing: his grandchildren. “I used to just want to just sit around and watch TV. Now I want to go outside with the kids and walk around the block. That’s what really keeps me going.”

