

From marshmallow to motivator

Cathy King's story starts five years ago when, at 65 years of age, she was handed a Green Prescription by her doctor.

You would never know it looking at her now, but a short while ago Cathy, the Green Prescription hostess at Te Matariki Clendon Community Centre, was overweight, unhealthy and suffering from asthma, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

Today Cathy is a whopping 50 kilograms lighter, has a normal blood pressure, well-managed diabetes and no asthma. So how did this everyday grandmother once called a "marshmallow" by her grandson make such an impressive physical transformation? She joined her local Green Prescription group...and stuck with it.

"It's a wonderful programme that offers so much help and support" says Cathy. And she should know. Not only has she benefited from the support offered to her, she's now also reaching out and helping others in the same position she was once in.

As a Green Prescription hostess, Cathy is responsible for inducting new participants onto the programme and making sure everyone is well informed about the activities available to them.

She gets a thrill out of seeing people get healthier and happier. She recalls participants she's seen struggling to walk from their car into the centre at first and then, after a period on the programme, are able to walk freely with their quality of life drastically improved.

Cathy says one of the best things about the programme is the variety of entry-level exercise on offer. She lists off gentle aerobics, gym workouts, walking group, aqua aerobics and aqua jogging as possibilities, along with various educational seminars.

"I love going to the gym at the Manurewa Aquatic Centre. I remember the first time I was told that going to a gym was one of the options and just cringing. I never thought I would enjoy doing that. But you get to chat to people, you laugh together and you look forward to going back" says Cathy.

With attendance costing just a couple of dollars per class Cathy says it's money well spent. "That money would be saved on sugary treats alone!" she jokes.

Cathy says changing her eating habits wasn't too hard but she still gets cravings occasionally. "The difference is that it's not part of daily life now. I used to have dessert and sugary treats every night, now if I have dessert it would be fruit with yoghurt. And if I feel like a burger, I make a homemade version with lots of leafy greens."

But it's not just her eating habits and weight that have changed, Cathy says she now enjoys a whole new lifestyle.

"I enjoy keeping fit now. I used to sit around a lot. I would sit and watch TV or read or knit. I still enjoy those things but now I can do so much more. I get out in the garden and walk with my husband. One day I took off running and my grandchildren looked at me like "what's nana doing!""

With all of her "fat clothes" given away, Cathy is committed to making her transformation permanent. "I don't see any reason why I wouldn't keep this up. I feel great. It has given me a new lease on life really" she says.

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Green Prescription (GRx) is a health professional's written advice to a patient to be physically active as part of their health management. The initiative is administered by the Ministry of Health, and is provided locally in Mangere, Manurewa, Otara and Papatoetoe thanks to a partnership between Manukau Leisure and Sport Auckland.