

Israel Perez

Hidalgo County Wellness Program Champion of the Month

“

“It’s not easy. You need to find motivation. Talk to somebody who has gone through it. Get some pointers or get a buddy system,” he suggested. “I’m glad to help anybody who needs it. I’m just a phone call away or email. It usually gets hard for people. It takes baby steps. That’s how we all have to start. Then from there, start working your way up.”

Interested in being the next Wellness Champion?



SCAN ME

Scan the QR Code to complete the online application



Israel Perez, Supervisor, Precinct 4 Sanitation & Parks

The first step towards any change in life is the hardest. You will struggle. You may fall. However, that resistance that held you back has already been broken. It will take baby steps.

Israel Perez is a supervisor at Hidalgo County Precinct 4 in both the sanitation and parks departments. He says he struggled a bit the first couple of years into his new lifestyle but discussed he has a great support system to help him improve not only his physical health but also his mental health.

The thought to change his lifestyle first entered Perez’s mind when he attended a biometric screening event that the Hidalgo County Wellness Program hosted. He says his results were worrisome, learning he had nearly reached obesity levels. That sparked the thought of his wife and daughters.

“My family is everything,” Perez said. “They are my main concern.”

He immediately started doing some research to be healthier. He spoke to his wife, discussing their diets. They both knew their family needed to eat more healthy.

This was just before COVID-19 hit the Rio Grande Valley. According to Perez, the pandemic, in a way, helped his diet, because all their favorite restaurants and fast food joints were closed for a while.

Perez says before he adjusted to a healthier lifestyle, he had weighed nearly 300 pounds. He believes it might have been due to his workload, causing some stress from time to time.

“I think it was just anxiety. I was just depressed eating,” he said. “I have two departments that I run, so I’m all over the place with them. Sometimes it gets overwhelming because there’s so much that is happening.”



“My family is everything,” Perez said. “They are my main concern.”

A way he found to destress was in exercising. He had decided to join a gym and has gone daily after work and then incorporated biking at the beginning of 2021. He says he has not yet stopped with the routine.

Once Perez started seeing results, a drop in pant sizes, he said it just motivated him and his wife more, as well as his daughters. He says he was not as hungry as much and drank plenty of water every day. Along with shedding the pounds, he mentioned working out helped his mental health.

“It will help you out a lot,” said Perez. He discussed a past moment with his children. It had made him feel that if he stayed on the same unhealthy path it may keep him from playing with them or may, later on, discourage them from participating in activities.

“I would see my kids out there, I would think, ‘Ok, if I’m not out there with them, what are they going to think?’ or ‘How are they going to react?’” he explained. “Maybe they will be like, ‘You know what, Dad can’t do this.’ So then, I don’t want them to feel depressed or just feel left out, or just say, ‘You know what? I’m not going to do this, because I’m seeing the way my Dad is.’”

It may not have been his initial goal, but his mental health ended up at the forefront of his mind along with his family’s. Perez spoke about one of his sisters who suffered from depression.

“I showed her some of the [webinar] recordings about stress,” he said. “We talk almost every single day about it. About her problems. My problems. She’s slowly recovering.”

He and his sister have since developed a support system with one another. Perez added finding support is essential to your health journey.

Perez is also a Wellness Ambassador for the county. He tries to offer the same support to those working in his departments by checking up on them, especially if he notices a change in their behavior.

As a way to help colleagues, he will sometimes suggest to them the Deer Oaks EAP webinars.

“The webinars are a very good tool,” he says. “It will teach you about what the effects are with stress or whatever issues somebody has. You hear it. There are other people who have lived through it. Gone through it. And that will make you reflect on it and say ‘OK, this is what I need to change.’ I try to instill that into my family and work. All-round it’s helped me out.”

He added he has watched most of the webinars promoted by the Wellness Program. If he missed out on one covering a topic he’s interested in, he will watch a recording.

Perez says he will usually meet up with colleagues for bike rides and is always inviting others to join him at the 2nd Street trail in McAllen.

At the age of 42, he has dropped down his weight to 220 pounds and believes he has improved his overall wellbeing but knows he still needs to work at it. He understands it may be more difficult for some than others to cut out delicious, but unhealthy, foods and take the first step to enhance their health.

“It’s not easy. You need to find motivation. Talk to somebody who has gone through it. Get some pointers or get a buddy system,” he suggested. “I’m glad to help anybody who needs it. I’m just a phone call away or email. It usually gets hard for people. It takes baby steps. That’s how we all have to start. Then from there, start working your way up.”

