

# Berta Lopez

## *Hidalgo County Wellness Program Champion of the Month*

Berta Lopez does not let her age or physical abilities hinder her dedication and discipline to improving her health.

Lopez was diagnosed with diabetes 10 years ago, has a heart issue and developed arthritis in her right knee. These issues appear as just minor setbacks for Lopez.

At the age of 60, Lopez is always on her feet. She explained she does not like to be sitting for too long. She goes on walks everyday and will not consume anything past 6 p.m. other than water. She even holds a part-time job on the weekends to stay busy.

Lopez's colleagues say she looks great for her age. So when people find out she has diabetes, they're surprised. At the time of her diagnosis, she asked what some might ask themselves when given the results that they have the disease – "Me?!"

"It's a shock. Because you think – no. How could I be a diabetic being I was always so active, always taking care of myself? Anybody can get diabetes." Lopez said.

Lopez was a migrant worker when she was young. Her father farmed cucumbers up north and she would help harvest the produce. As a teen, she was in volleyball and track, and anything else her parents would allow her to participate in. Now she is doing her best to stick around for as long as possible to see her grandchildren grow.

"I don't want them to think their grandma died young. I consider myself young," she gushed.

Lopez does admit her eating habits were not the best before her diagnosis. If she felt hungry late in the evening, she would eat cereal or eat a tortilla and tell herself, "Tomorrow I'll walk it off."



### **Berta Lopez** **Assistant Court Coordinator, JP 1-2**

"No. It's gonna catch up to you sooner or later," said Lopez. "So now I try after six – nothing. Water. You're hungry? Get water with lemon."

After work she goes on walks, but doesn't push herself too hard because of her bad knee. Then on the weekends, she has a part-time job at the outlets in Mercedes.

"[Coworkers at the outlets] say, 'How can you work seven days [a week]?' " Lopez explained. "To me, being home on a Saturday, all I want to do is just sit down, watch movies and eat. No. Because I can't."

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*“Look at my age. Try to [tell yourself], ‘You know, I want to do something to better myself.’”*

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At the county office, she is a respected and long-standing employee. Her colleagues seek her advice and ask how she keeps her energy levels up. She forewarns them that it's hard to live with diabetes and advises them to keep moving, even when your body is aching after a long day at work.

“I cannot sit down,” she boasted. “I’ve always been like that. I’m not going to sit around and wait for somebody else to do it for me.”

For 13 years, Lopez has served as an assistant court coordinator at the Justice of the Peace Precinct 1, Place 2 office for Judge Jesus Morales. She discovered the Hidalgo County Employee Wellness Program around the time it was established three years ago. She admits she was a bit hesitant to look into what the program offered, but took a chance when she first attended a presentation at the Precinct 1 office.

Lopez says she watches the webinars hosted by Deer Oak Employees Assistance Program Services when she can. She mentioned there was one during the pandemic she still remembers. It covered depression, stress, and how to deal with the current events at the time. She has also looked into the H-E-B Nutrition Services.

“I went to the [H-E-B] there in Weslaco. Sometimes there’s a [dietitian] there telling you to eat this or this is a good portion for that. So I do follow that. And I do go online to look for foods for diabetics.”

In addition to the services at H-E-B, she joined a coaching group. She explained that they are told to journal what they are eating throughout the day. She measures her food and writes down the amount of calories of her meals.

Lopez revealed that her daughter also has diabetes. Her daughter is a counselor for children who are immigrants and knows she sits most of the day at work. Lopez says she’s always reminding her to make rules for herself when it comes to food and exercise.

Some of the information from the Deer Oaks EAP webinars makes its way to Lopez’s daughter. Lopez shares what she learns, especially the webinars that cover stress or anxiety.

Lopez appreciates that the county developed the Wellness Program for its employees. Her hope for the program is that others take advantage of what it offers.

“I think a lot of people are intimidated and say to themselves, ‘I’m a little bit overweight. What are they going to say about me?’ But if you don’t take advantage, you’re never going to know,” she said. “Look at my age. Try to [tell yourself], ‘You know, I want to do something to better myself.’”