

MARISSA RIVERA

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When Marissa Rivera looks back on the birth of her two children, the contrast is striking. With her first pregnancy, she hoped for a natural delivery but ultimately required a C-section after a long and difficult labor. With her second, she had prepared for another C-section. Instead, she delivered her son naturally and quickly.

The difference, she believes, was movement.

“In my second pregnancy, I was more active than my first,” Rivera said. “So I believe with all the walking, it helped transition the baby to come out naturally.”

Rivera, a human resources specialist at Hidalgo County’s Department of Human Resources, credits a more active lifestyle during her second pregnancy for what she describes as a smoother, less traumatic birth experience.

That shift did not happen by accident. It grew out of years of starts and stops, fears and motivations, and the influence of a workplace culture that encouraged her to take small, consistent steps toward better health.

During her first pregnancy, Rivera was careful — perhaps overly so.

“I was mindful of what I was eating the first time around. But I wasn’t putting in the extra activity of keeping up with exercise,” she explained.

Fear played a role. Like many first-time mothers, she worried that too much physical activity could cause harm.

That caution came with consequences. After more than 24 hours of labor, her daughter never fully



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descended, leading to surgery and a long recovery.

“It’s a whole different kind of recovery rather than when you have it naturally,” she said. “It was very fast. Within an hour, I had my son. Rather than my daughter, it took almost more than 24 hours. I felt the difference.”

By the time of her second pregnancy, Rivera was working for the county’s HR department, where the work culture exposed her to walking breaks, friendly step challenges, and coworkers who encouraged one another to keep going.

“The step challenges and the pins — that’s what was motivating me,” she said. “My team in the division, they also motivated me even when I didn’t want

to walk anymore. They pushed me.”

Those pushes mattered. In her previous job, she said, there had been virtually no wellness support or structured breaks for movement.

“There were no 15-minute breaks, there was no wellness program,” she said. “Other than that, there was no motivation.”

With new support and daily walking, Rivera noticed not only in how she felt but in how her pregnancy progressed.

“It’s very important for you to walk towards the end of your pregnancy. So your labor is smoother,” she said. “And it is smoother.”

“My kids ... are my motivation. I want to be a good role model to them.”

She went into the hospital expecting the possibility of surgery again. Instead, she experienced a rapid natural delivery and avoided another major operation.

“I was so relieved that I didn’t have to go through surgery again!” she expressed.

Rivera’s approach to health is practical rather than extreme. She allows occasional treats but focuses on better daily choices. Her first changes began in the kitchen.

“I’m trying to stay away from processed foods and implementing more protein, more vegetables,” she said.

With two young children, lengthy gym sessions are harder to manage, so she adapts.

“We go to the park, and I take my 15-minute breaks to go for a walk. More home workouts,” she said. “I feel like that’s helped out a lot. I can say, ‘Okay. I did do some type of extra activity, rather than just sitting down all day.’”

Rivera’s motivation runs deeper than weight and appearance. Chronic illness in her family history serves as a powerful reminder of what she hopes to avoid.

“My kids and having a healthy lifestyle matter to me. I want to be a good role model to them,” she said. “Because I come from parents who have diabetes and high blood pressure. I don’t want to go through that. I’ve seen what it does to them.”

Her husband shares that mindset and supports her efforts.

“He was very proud of me that I was able to have our son naturally,” she said. “We want to have a healthier lifestyle for our kids and be leading examples to our children.”

Her influence is already spreading. Rivera’s father, inspired in part by her changes, now walks every morning.

“He makes the time. Rain or shine, he goes,” she said. “So I see that change in him.”

Rivera says her workplace environment made a meaningful difference.

“I thought it was really neat that the county has a Wellness Program like this,” she said. “It actually shows it cares about your well-being, your health, and your mental health as well. And not many employers have this type of opportunity, so it’s always important to take advantage of it.”

Short walk breaks clear her mind and break up long hours at a desk.

“It’s a good distraction from what you’re working on. Clears your mind. It makes you feel better about yourself,” she said. “At least I’ve got 15 minutes out of my day, and I did something productive regarding my health rather than just sitting down at your desk.”

Rivera is careful not to suggest that pregnancy should involve intense workouts. Instead, she advocates mindful, steady activity.

“During your pregnancy journey, of course, be mindful of what you eat. Be careful with your activities, but it’s very important that you do stay active so you don’t have a traumatizing birth at the end,” she said.

Even when energy is low during the last trimester, she urges persistence.

“Those two 15-minute walks out of your day — 30 minutes a day, it’s gonna make a difference. Because I really do believe it made a difference for me,” she said.

Most of all, she encourages women to put themselves and their children first.

“Don’t let fear or don’t let negativity get to you. Do what’s best for you,” she said. “Put yours and your child’s life first, because that’s what matters.”

For Rivera, those daily walks during her pregnancy became more than exercise. They were steps toward confidence, recovery, and a healthier future for her family.

