

# Melinda Sotuyo

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

Life can abruptly throw us unexpected challenges at times. These challenges can spark a motivation to better ourselves and those around us. Melinda Sotuyo shares her wellness journey and the events that have had a large impact on her.

Melinda Sotuyo's father passed away in 2010 of a massive heart attack. She says it was a health-centered wake-up call.

"[It] helped me make the decision about how to eat and what to eat, and work out," she said.

She explained that the doctor who treated her father said there wasn't anything they could do for him. A factor was that heart disease and heart attacks ran in the family. Sotuyo mentioned that the doctor advised her and her family to get a checkup with a cardiologist.

"There are eight of us in my family. Eight siblings and my mom," she said. "A lot of my siblings didn't [get a checkup]. They just felt, 'No, I'm doing good. I don't have to.' But I did and after that I just try to eat right."

At the time of her father's death, she was in her mid-40s and admits she had always struggled with her weight and to eat healthy. Just like many others who are raised in the Rio Grande Valley, Sotuyo says she grew up being fed frijoles and tortillas and all the tasty Tex-Mex dishes native to the area.

"It's hard, but it's gotta get done somehow," said Sotuyo. She credits her 34-year-old son in



### **Melinda Sotuyo Cashier at District Clerk Office**

helping her with her diet. Although he lives in Austin, he orders her vitamins and other healthy drinks and always travels down to check up on her. Now more than ever.

"Recently I lost my husband. Nine months ago," Sotuyo stated. "He died of liver disease."

Sotuyo says she had a lot of support from her family throughout her husband's illness. Her husband's cousin stayed with them to help

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*“Life. Life motivates me. Life is too short.”*

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around the house and her son was able to take time off work to stay for three months.

Her husband was placed in hospice care when doctors told her they did all they could do. He died about a week later. Her faith helped her through the loss and she still counts her blessings.

“God was with us. And my family – I gotta give them credit,” she said.

Sotuyo found comfort knowing her husband is no longer suffering. Her husband’s illness was another motivation to keep up with her doctor visits and to continue her healthy habits.

Her son helps her choose the foods she should stay away from or eat more of. Sotuyo has cut back on products with high amounts of sugar and salt.

“I feel more energized. I don’t feel tired,” she said. “Now that I’m by myself I thought it was going to be hard for me to adjust.”

She set a routine for herself. She goes to workout at the Precinct 2 Indoor Sports Complex after work everyday, goes home, cooks a meal, and enjoys her shows until her watch tells her to stand up and move.

Sotuyo started going to the sports complex when she first heard about the Hidalgo County Employee Wellness Program about three years ago. She had started going to the early morning classes, but switched over to the classes after work.

“I lost about 20 pounds with just those classes,” Sotuyo said. “It’s free! What else do you want? I was paying for a gym and I never went. I paid for a whole year! [The fitness classes] motivate me to go. It’s free and they do a lot of nice workouts for us.”

She enjoys going to the Precinct 2 Indoor Sports Complex because the trainers do not make them do exercises that they cannot or don’t feel comfortable doing.

“One of the girls has vertigo. She just started going. They gave her different workouts so she doesn’t have to be moving too much because of her imbalance. That’s awesome that they go above and beyond for us,” she said.

One of Sotuyo’s sisters is a former bodybuilder. When she first started working out, her sister gave her a full list of foods and recommended a meal plan for portions of chicken, rice, and sweet potato five times a day to help her “shred”.

“And I did do it! I would eat five times a day. Just portions,” Sotuyo exclaimed. “It worked for me.”

Years later, Sotuyo started paying it forward by helping another sister. Her sister sees the food Sotuyo posts on social media and asks her if she could make the meals for her. Sotuyo says she’s going to start preparing overnight oats for her sister soon.

Sotuyo has worked at the District Clerk Office for 18 years. There, she says she’s grateful her supervisor is very supportive when it comes to employees taking breaks.

“She lets us go on walks during our breaks,” she said. “I like that about her. She motivates the office.”

Sotuyo takes full advantage of the presentations provided by the Employee Wellness Program. She watches the webinars from Deer Oaks EAP Services and will share what she learned with other colleagues.

She has also attended the bimonthly Lunch and Learn Cooking Class with a registered dietitian from H-E-B Nutrition Services when it was held at the office. The one Sotuyo attended was over healthier alternative side dishes for barbecues and the dietitian stirred up a sparkling blackberry punch with a rosemary garnish for everyone.

The resources provided by Hidalgo County to its employees has helped Sotuyo stay on the path to improve her health. Her advice to other county employees is simple.

“The first step is starting. That’s it,” said Sotuyo. “You’ll be alright. You just gotta get there.”

After losing the lives of two loved ones, Sotuyo has stayed positive by putting trust in her faith. Her colleagues see how she’s persevered and has become an inspiration to those around her.

When finally asked what her motivation is, she took a short moment to reply, “Life. Life motivates me. Life is too short.”

