

# SONIA MIRELES

## CLERK II PRECINCT 1

**T**here was a point when Sonia Mireles stopped caring. Not completely. Not in some dramatic, overnight way. It happened more quietly than that.

She noticed herself gaining weight. Her energy was slipping. The outdoor activities she enjoyed became harder. Things she once did without much thought began requiring more effort. And as her body changed, so did the way she thought about herself.

“My self-esteem was low because I saw a change,” Mireles said. “I was gaining weight, and my body was slowing down.”

Then came the disappointment.

“I was disappointed in myself, and it was just all negative,” she said. “I started not caring about myself.”

That admission is an important part of Mireles’ story because wellness journeys are often told backward. We see the results first: the weight lost, the healthier meals, the exercise routine.

What gets lost is everything that happened before. The frustration. The comfort of old habits. The difficulty of convincing yourself that changing is worth the effort when you already feel discouraged.

For Mireles, an employee in the call center clerk at Precinct 1, getting healthier meant confronting all those things. And it began with deciding to try.

Mireles has worked for Hidalgo County for 15 years. Growing up, exercise was never formally built into her life. There were no organized fitness routines or



## *“My energy is back.”*

regular trips to the gym. Physical activity was practical. Without transportation, she walked to and from school, but otherwise life largely revolved around school and work.

Years later, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted routines in a different way. With so much closed and normal life interrupted, Mireles said she lost interest in taking care of her health. Eventually, she began experiencing health problems. Her doctor told her she needed to make changes. Mireles knew it too.

Her body was giving her reminders in ways that were becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

Mireles loves gardening, yard work, and being outside. She also enjoys outdoor

activities with her grandchildren. But she began noticing she could no longer keep up with them the way she wanted to.

“That was a warning for myself,” she said.

Her opportunity to change came last November when she received an email about the Wellness Program’s Maintain, Don’t Gain Challenge. She signed up for the challenge, her first, and began working on herself.

Around the same time, Precinct 1 was expanding the wellness resources available to employees as it prepared for the upcoming Wellness and Community Center. Its wellness coordinator, David Alonzo, helped Mireles develop a plan she could follow. But the plan did not begin with an intimidating workout. It started during a 15-minute break.

***“It was more like a wake-up call, because I knew that my health was not at its best, where it needed to be.”***

Mireles and her coworkers went outside and walked in the early spring. They began doing simple exercises in the break areas with equipment provided to employees.

“That’s how it all started,” she said.

There is something instructive about the simplicity of that beginning. While most imagine change as requiring a complete reinvention of our lives, whether it’s a new diet, joining a gym, or a strict exercise routine.

Mireles started where she was, with the time and resources available to her. Then came the

harder part: sticking with it.

Changing her eating habits was particularly difficult. Mireles had spent years becoming comfortable with a certain lifestyle, and a new routine required something less exciting than motivation but far more dependable: discipline.

“At first, yes, it was hard because I was so used to already being in a lifestyle that I was comfortable [with], especially in the eating,” she said.

She began paying closer attention to what she ate and worked on building balanced meals around foods such as protein, vegetables, fruits, and grains. The changes followed her home.

Her son works in the oil fields and stays with Mireles when he returns home. These days, he may open the refrigerator and discover something different than what he remembers.

“Come on, Mom, not even one Coke?” Mireles recalled him asking.

She laughs about it, but it illustrates one of the realities of trying to change: The rest of the world does not reorganize itself around your goals. Family still wants its favorite food. Coworkers still bring treats to the office. Celebrations still happen.

Sometimes Mireles gets off track. If she has had a good week, she may accept a treat at work. She has learned the goal is not perfection. It is returning to the routine. At home, she stands firm.

“This is where I’m at,” she tells her son. “This is what’s helped me. And this is what we have here at home.”

Nearly a year into her journey, Mireles has lost 25 pounds. But when she talks about what has changed, the weight is only part of the story. Her energy is back.

She can work in her yard again. She can garden. She can spend time outdoors with her grandchildren. She also feels more focused at work.

“The energy is back,” Mireles said. “My energy is back.”

The mental shift may be even more significant. The woman who once described herself as disappointed and no longer caring about herself now talks about staying active, watching what she eats, and continuing to work toward her goals.

She has also learned that maintaining that mindset sometimes requires reminders.

Mireles watches wellness webinars offered by the Wellness Program and has attended presentations held at Precinct 1. She especially values hearing other employees’ stories.

“It’s always good to listen to somebody else’s testimony because you learn from that person as well,” she said.

Those reminders matter because progress does not make someone immune to setbacks. Habits loosen. Routines get interrupted. Motivation fades. Sometimes hearing the message again is enough to recognize you’re starting to get off track.

Mireles credits Precinct 1 Commissioner David Fuentes with making wellness resources available to employees as the precinct prepares to open its Wellness and Community Center. Having those resources nearby will help turn intention into action.

“I have it here. It’s here. I can take advantage of it,” she recalled thinking. “I’m going to go ahead and work with it.”

But resources can only create an opportunity. Eventually, the person has to decide what to do with it.

Mireles understands that because she remembers being on the other side of that decision. She remembers the low self-esteem and disappointment. She remembers losing energy and realizing she could no longer do some of the things she enjoyed as easily as before.

That is why her advice to someone struggling with their own wellness journey is plain and simple.

“Listen to your body,” Mireles said.

When something begins to feel different, and your health seems to be moving in the wrong

direction, she believes it is worth taking seriously. And if resources are available, use them. Then take the first step.

“It’s always hard to take that first step,” she said. “But once you take that step, you know it’s the first step to success.”

Mireles’ story does not end with 25 pounds lost because she does not talk about her journey as something she has finished. She is still working at it.

There will still be difficult days, disrupted routines, and moments when discipline feels inconvenient. The difference is that she now knows what it feels like to come back — to the walk, the healthier meal, the routine, the garden, and the grandchildren she wants the energy to keep up with.

A year ago, Mireles was trying to figure out how to begin. Now, she is simply sticking with it.

