

# Monica Gonzalez

*Hidalgo County Wellness Program Champion of the Month*

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*“It’s just the small changes you have to take. You’ll slowly get there. You might not be there now, but you will one day if you just make the small changes.”*

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## **Monica Gonzalez - Precinct 4**

When COVID-19 first impacted our community, Monica Gonzalez found herself not knowing what to do just like everyone else. She detailed that those first few weeks of COVID-19 spreading through our community impacted her wellness journey.

Gonzalez made life decisions and set goals while being at home. She also expressed her gratitude for getting more involved in her church and how the pandemic led to her improved sense of life, mentally and spiritually.

“Before that, I had gotten to a point where I was very happy,” she explained. “My strength and conditioning was a lot better than what it is now.”

Gonzalez did not allow the unsettling situation surrounding the virus to impact her happiness. She channeled her energy into something positive and made the decision to enroll in the last few courses needed to obtain her bachelor’s degree. She had put school on the back burner for a while but now had the opportunity to complete them. She graduated in August 2021.

Although Gonzalez reached the milestone, she mentioned the long hours of work for her job and working on school assignments drained her. By the end of those busy days, it was easier for her to just pick up fast food on the way home.

***"Tiny lifestyle changes can easily turn into a big change later on. Just don't get discouraged."***



"I noticed I was gaining [the weight] back little by little. Then I got to a point where I was like –" she gasped. "Then the holidays came, and of course, that is the hardest time to start anything."

After graduation, Gonzalez knew she had to get back to the healthy habits she had developed prior to the pandemic. She along with her friend and coworker, Edna Caballero, both set a goal for the year 2022.

"I really loved how I felt two years ago," she stated. "I just said, I'm going to push myself to do at least one 5K every single month for my new year resolution."

Six months into the year, Gonzalez has completed at least one 5K event each month and already has the next few picked out for the near future. She has also stuck to a routine with meal preps and exercising, although she admits she is not as restricted as she was a few years ago.

"I was very strict. I had no cheat meals. No nothing. Now, I understand you can't really do that," she said. "It's just the small changes you have to take. You'll slowly get there. You might not be there now, but you will one day if you just make the small changes."

Gonzalez detailed how her effort in improving her health impacted her spiritually.

"I did get more involved in my church. Now, I'm one of the leaders at my church. Which I'm really grateful for that and I think the pandemic had a lot to do with that. You know, you had to be at home and had time to find yourself," she explained. "As to before, it was such a fast-paced life and it slowed things down."





Gonzalez has been able to find support at both home and work. She mentioned her daughter has expressed she's proud of her effort and determination. Gonzalez says her parents are living their retired life but her mother has made an effort to exercise with her.

"The other day I did take her with me to the Edinburg park. We had just started walking around the lake there. As we were going up she asks, 'How many miles have we done already?' I look at her and look at my watch and it said we had just done .39 miles. I said, 'Mom! We're not even at half a mile!' she said, 'Whaaat?!'" Gonzalez laughed. "I was glad she went and glad she got out there."

She added her mother says she wants to join Gonzalez on more walks. Gonzalez hopes she can influence her mother to be more active.

At the Precinct 4 office, Gonzalez and Caballero, who also happens to be the April 2022 Wellness Champion, both made the same new year resolution and have supported each other throughout their efforts. The duo has been able to get their colleagues up from their desks and out to take walks during their breaks.

"At first it was just me and her," she said. "We would tell everybody, 'Hey, we're going on our break!' We'd be able to fit in a mile in those 15 minutes."

The staff's interest in participating in walks outside their building and 5Ks outside of work led a small group to speak to Precinct 4 Commissioner Ellie Torres to create a 5K event of their own. "She gave us the green light!" Gonzalez exclaimed.

She explained that the run was not a 5K, but a 4K for Precinct 4. Gonzalez detailed that since the event was in the month of June, which is Men's Health Awareness Month, the event put a spotlight on the topic.

"We invited a lot of the men. The whole constable's office went and ran it in full uniform," she described "Commissioner really loved it and she actually wants us to do another one."

When it comes to snacks at work, Gonzalez says it's tough. Especially when it's someone's birthday.

"We have birthdays galore," she gushed. "Just today, someone took cake and offered me some. I said no. You just have to find your willpower to say no or to limit it and say, 'Okay, I don't want the big piece.' Slice it very tiny just to try it. Again, it's just baby steps."

Gonzalez emphasized setting small realistic goals for those who want to make a change in their well-being.

"A bunch of really small goals will eventually get to a big goal. I think a lot of people just go off the bat and say, 'I want to lose 25 pounds this month.' Then they work out all week then they check the scale and see they only lost three pounds. Sometimes that discourages them. But if you think about it, three pounds this week, three pounds next week, three pounds the next week. And if you continue going, eventually you will reach your 25-pound goal. Maybe not necessarily when you wanted it, but I really do think baby steps have a lot to do with it. Tiny lifestyle changes can easily turn into a big change later on. Just don't get discouraged."

With a little patience, goals – no matter how big or small – can be reached if people have the willpower to do so. Even though she strayed off the track and got back on the high horse less than a year ago, Gonzalez has persevered with a positive attitude and determination to improve her health and well-being, all while influencing people around her at home and in the workplace.

