

# Marcella Castillo

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

Marcella Castillo has gone through a healing process – both physically and mentally. She was about to turn 50 years old when she made a decision that she believes saved her life.

On New Year's Eve 2019, Castillo underwent gastric sleeve surgery. She says she entered 2020 with a new sense of determination in her mind.

“I remember I told the nurse, ‘I’m going to become a new person.’ And she said, ‘Yes! That’s what you need to become,’” she recalled. “I trained myself. I drink my vitamins, my protein shakes. I still taste foods, but not the same. In small portions.”

Castillo explained that in her experience with gastric sleeve surgery, a portion of her stomach was removed. She is now only able to eat very little but says she will still have a taste of most foods. Since her surgery, Castillo has lost nearly 90 pounds and has kept it off for nearly three years.

“I’m at 158 [pounds]. I used to be at 245,” she said. She mentioned that others who have had the same surgery can easily fall back into their old eating habits and gain their weight back. The surgery does not guarantee weight loss for good. Castillo thinks of the surgery as a tool.



**Marcella Castillo - Deputy District Clerk I, District Clerks Office**

“In my mind, I told myself I didn’t go through all this to expand my stomach again,” she exclaimed. “To be honest, I don’t miss all the eating or drinking. Even then, I would only drink just to socialize.”

Prior to the procedure, Castillo says she was initially informed she developed a fatty liver in her late 30s and her doctor told her she was at high risk of developing diabetes.

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Aside from a regular diet and exercise she had tried alternative methods to lose weight such as taking diet pills. She says they would work, but as fast as they helped, she would gain back the weight.

The main motivation for taking control of her weight was that her mother struggled with diabetes, high blood pressure, and developed liver cancer. Her mother passed away in 2018 at the age of 71.

“It all runs in my mom’s family,” she explained. “I wanted to change those patterns and also for my daughter.”

Her mother was diagnosed with liver cancer in 2016. Castillo says the two years leading up to her mother’s death were very stressful as she would make trips back and forth to San Antonio for treatment. Her mother had gone through the process to receive a liver transplant but became ineligible because she turned 70. The age limit to receive a liver transplant is 69 and under.

“My weight was going up and down like a roller coaster,” said Castillo. “I was grieving my mom. It caused a lot of my depression.” She added that the weight gain also caused sleep apnea.

Castillo is a Deputy District Clerk at the District Clerk Office. She first heard about the Hidalgo County Employee Wellness Program through emails and learned about the fitness classes at the Precinct 2 Indoor Sports Complex in Pharr. Before the pandemic, she would go after work frequently.

When the pandemic lockdowns were issued, which was also during her recovery from surgery, Castillo stayed active by going on walks or tuning into the sports complex’s live Zoom sessions. During that time, she found a silver lining to focus more on her recovery and took advantage of working on a routine and prepping meals.

Castillo says she also utilizes the information she gets from the Deer Oaks EAP Services webinars, provided by the Wellness Program. She finds the webinars very helpful, especially the ones that cover stress management and mental health. In addition to the webinars, Castillo likes when the Wellness Program stops by her office to give a Health Talk presentation.

“Last time they took a counselor. That was great!” Castillo recalls a past Health Talk. “One of the best things they’ve brought to us.”





Castillo says when her colleagues ask about her experiences, she is more than happy to share how the surgery has improved her life, “I recommend it. I just tell them to make sure to follow everything the doctor says. Don’t go back to your old habits. That’s the number one thing.”

She likes to help people and is willing to provide what she can to others. Castillo says she believes many people don’t know how to get help when it comes to their mental health.

“In my department, there are about 70 or 80 of us, right? A lot of us might be going through a mental illness, so those seminars can hopefully help them reach out to get help,” she said. “The county offers a lot of help.”

When it comes to her own mental health, compared to a few years ago, Castillo says it has significantly improved.



“Life brings us ups and downs. And in those downs, we just have to pick ourselves up. And if you don’t get help, don’t go get some therapy – you can stay stuck in that hole,” she said. “I’m also a religious person, so I also believe God can help us.”

Castillo encourages others to “break the patterns” many people live under.

“Sometimes it can be genetics. Lifestyle. Stress from work. We just need to break all those patterns and get help,” said Castillo. “There’s the [free fitness classes], there’s therapy, our insurance can cover some surgeries, and there are also dietitians. The county offers a lot. We just got to take advantage and use them. Start breaking those patterns. We got to become a new person and don’t give up.”

Castillo added those who want to start a new wellness journey need to do it for themselves, if not, do it for their loved ones.

