

# Marco Javier

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

Marco Javier, 30, has always been physically active. He played basketball in middle school, then picked up tennis in high school, and had participated in martial art classes since he was in fifth grade. However, he says his fitness journey didn't start until his senior year of high school.

Standing at 5 feet, 7 inches tall, Javier says he weighed less than 115 pounds. He became determined to focus on his strength and build muscle. As a young high school student, he expressed that he was impatient and frustrated when he first started off.

"One of the barriers that I faced was the gym environment," he explained. "Being a senior in high school weighing 115 pounds and seeing guys who are bigger and taller, more experienced. It kind of felt intimidating."

Within time, Javier overcame that feeling of intimidation and learned that it was expected because he was new. As he got older and closer to his goal, he gained confidence and broke that barrier.

He had a lot of support along the way. Javier made friends at gyms he attended. They became mentors for him along his journey.

"They would see me struggle," Javier said. "And instead of judging me or making fun of me, they taught me how to do it. Just from there, that motivated me to help out others."

He mentioned during his freshman year of college, he paid it forward and helped his best friend. His friend ended up losing 80 pounds and has since kept it off.

Javier's motivation hasn't been isolated to just the gym environment with his buddies.



### **Marco Javier - Public Health Preparedness & Response, Health Department**

Javier's parents had always had their own hobbies. His dad enjoys fishing and his mother likes to garden, but both, who are currently in their late 60s, noted Javier's passion for fitness.

"They're finding ways and time to [take part] in physical activities," said Javier. "My dad is walking two miles every other day. My mom is using a stationary bike."

Javier mentioned some members of his family and other loved ones have dealt with depression and anxiety in the past. When it comes to his mental health, he says it's been an important aspect in his life.

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*“This all starts with finding your goal, setting your goal, and just achieving it and having a good support system.”*

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“For myself, I’ve been through mental breakdowns. So I’ve used fitness as a way to cope with everything. Whenever I’m stressed out, I spend like an hour at the gym. Working out. Releasing all my frustration,” he explained. “It gives me a peace of mind, even if I’m just taking a walk around the park with my dogs. It actually releases the endorphins I need to be happy.”

He believes mental health and fitness correlate with each other and can benefit anyone.

Along Javier’s path to gaining strength, he met a young woman at a gym, who would later become his wife.

“Actually, our first date was going to the gym at five in the morning,” Javier gushed. “That’s where we first met and from there we just started working out together.”

His soon-to-be wife introduced Javier to CrossFit. When they moved from Brownsville to McAllen, he was offered to teach a CrossFit class. He accepted the job, but he says he didn’t do that for too long. At the time, he described it would exhaust him teaching a 5 a.m. class, then going to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., then focusing on school assignments after work. Instead, Javier says he invested to put together his own home gym. He bought the equipment and set it all up in his garage.

Javier started working with Hidalgo County at the beginning of this year, January 2022. He’s a public health planner for the Public Health Preparedness and Response Division at the Health Department. When the occasional birthday cake comes around at the office, he admits he takes advantage of the sweet treats.

“I always tell my coworkers the reason why I work out is that I can eat whatever I want,” he laughed. “I do have a really big sweet tooth, so I try my very best to limit my sugar intake. Whenever I have that craving, sometimes I’ll bring a protein shake. Or I’ll just have black coffee to suppress my hunger and cravings for sweets.”

He added that another reason he watches his sugar intake is that he was diagnosed with gout. To prevent flare-ups he doesn’t eat too much red meat or processed sugars.

“I eat basically just fish and chicken from Monday to Friday. Saturday, I’ll have a burger that I grilled myself,” Javier explained. “I learned my gout does not flare up as long as I eat less than 6 ounces of red meat. So, to me, that will be my cheat meal, but I’ll use that to make into a lettuce wrap burger or a turkey burger.”

He expressed he has figured out ways to balance his favorite foods, even when he travels.

Javier first heard about the Employee Wellness Program through emails. He participated in the virtual portion of the Wellness Fair that was held in May.

“It was so much fun!” he gushed. “It was so awesome to see everything [the wellness program] had and how much technology has advanced when it comes to [a virtual event].”

He says he and a couple of his coworkers wanted to go to the in-person portion to do one of the physical challenges, but due to their workload were not able to.

“To have it virtually allowed us to all connect to each other. It was amazing,” he said.

According to a couple of his colleagues, Javier always invites them to work out with him, offering words of encouragement, and giving them advice. They will have friendly competitions with each other.

“I’m a very competitive person,” Javier said. “We all have Apple watches, so we try to compete with each other.”

They will tally their steps or calories burned within a day’s time or at the end of the week. Javier encourages his colleagues to walk around the office when they need to chat about something rather than just sitting at their desks.

When it comes to others asking Javier for his fitness or supplement advice, he says he’s completely honest.

“I don’t want them to spend so much, so I tell them to get just the basic needs,” he said. “I tell them if they ever want to work out with me, they’re always welcome to work out at my house. Several of my coworkers have been to my house. They’ve trained with me. Some right now are going by at five in the morning, because I was able to motivate them to live a better life.”

Javier’s general advice to anyone wanting to start their own health journey is to not feel intimidated. He described there is no doubt a new gym goer will see others who are far into their own journey or are in their own cliques. He says it is going to be hard the first time around for some and finding a great support system is beneficial in one’s journey.

He shared something he once told a coworker and best friend, who suffers from anxiety when it comes to public spaces.

“You’re there to work out. You’re there for yourself. You’re there to better yourself just to live a healthier lifestyle,” he stated. “This all starts with finding your goal, setting your goal, and just achieving it and having a good support system.”

