

HEALTH & WELLNESS

BENEFITS WELLNESS WORKLIFE
www.gvsu.edu/healthwellness



Success Story: Patricia Stephenson

"I went from 'I know everything and I don't need help' to 'I don't know everything and I do need help.'"

Health coaching is not everyone's first thought when it comes to improving their health, and that certainly was the case for Patricia Stephenson, an affiliate professor in the Statistics Department, who thought she didn't need any guidance.

Patricia had been active and athletic for most of her life, but suffered a "series of unfortunate events" beginning with a car accident, then an Achilles tendon injury, "aging lady issues," and subsequent surgeries. This caused her to gain weight, and her physical problems led her to become mentally discouraged, which prevented her from doing the things she had always done.

She first went through denial because "we humans don't think we need help." But eventually, Patricia says, "It felt like I was spinning out of control and I didn't know how to get back." She decided to participate in the [Healthy Choices Wellness Program](#), and her Know Your Numbers results suggested that she receive three months of health coaching.

"I confess the motivation for this was the financial incentive. Then I met Amy. In those three short months I got hooked because I saw small changes happening." Patricia credits Amy, her health coach, for getting her through life's struggles and stresses, big and small. "She held me accountable, but was encouraging and focused on the successes. I thought health coaching was only about diet and exercise, but I have slowly learned that it is far more than that. Health is a holistic endeavor, encompassing all aspects of life."

However, these changes didn't happen in one conversation. "[It's] a continuous dialogue. [Health coaches] need to get to know the specifics of a person's life in order to make customized suggestions that lead to improvements." And for Patricia, that was peace.

Something as seemingly simple as making lunch had become a stressor, so figuring out how to restructure her day to eliminate further stress allowed more peaceful living. “In my case, getting back in control and reducing the stress and discouragement that had invaded my life required purposeful planning. Amy could see the small places where I could easily incorporate a little change here, a little mindfulness there, in ways that were easy and stress-reducing.”

“It’s quite a gift to have someone available that gives you that personal attention for your unique life.”

In addition to health coaching, Patricia has also participated in [group exercise](#). “I just want to try various classes and see what’s for me and what isn’t.” This is something she suggests to everyone: find what works for you. Even if she can’t make it to a class, incorporating movement into her daily life has become a habit. Patricia laughs and says she and her daughters will pick up dumbbells and do curls while watching Netflix “because Amy says so!”

Realizing just how strong the connection is between every facet of life has made all the difference. “There is a significant tie to things like your mental well-being, eating habits, physical exercise, the stressors in your life, relationships, spirituality, etc. I had a sense of that, but I didn’t know that things were influencing each other nearly as much as they did. Any change, good or bad, can seep into the other areas of my life.” Patricia urges everyone that feels stuck in any way to “tap into this resource and the coaches will help you to appreciate the ripple effect of positive change into your life.”

Visit the Health and Wellness [Health Coaching webpage](#) for more information, or email healthandwellness@gvsu.edu.

Register for the Healthy Choices Wellness Program [here](#).

How to Give your Best Self

Elisa Salazar, LMSW, GVSU Work Life Consultant

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

–Maya Angelou

How do I give my best self when I am stressed out?

How do I not let my situation interfere with my attitude?

How do I ensure I live out my values to those around me?

Be mindful.

Giving a best self is a truly mindful act. A mindfulness practice that can help with this is to conduct a “check-in” with yourself. How am I feeling in the moment (physically and emotionally)? Listen to yourself and be aware. When you have difficult emotions such as anger, sadness, or hurt, be mindful about those feelings. Allow yourself time to sit with those emotions. There is often a misconception that ignoring feelings will make them go away, however, the more we ignore emotions, the more persistent they are and will creep up in unexpected ways. You will find yourself snapping at someone undeserving or panicking with no trigger. When you allow even 15 minutes to experience your emotions, they are being heard and addressed and will not come out suddenly. Approaching, rather than avoiding, all emotions is how to get through difficult emotions. Ride the emotions like a wave. Let them come and go without judging them as good or bad. Over time, the waves will settle and you will experience peace.

Practice loving kindness.

Think of a person you love and hold that loving feeling. Imagine carrying out that loving energy to everyone. Imagine yourself holding that loving kindness towards yourself. Affirm yourself and be kind to yourself. Think of a situation that upset you, then take that loving kindness and hold it there. It is empowering to know that we control ourselves and emotions not anyone else.

Live with integrity.

Let your values be self-evident through your behaviors, actions, and energy. Don Miguel Ruiz, in his book *Four Agreements*, identified “Be impeccable with your words” as a key way to ensure that you are being your best self. Speak with intention and see your words as having power to build up or strike down. Your body is a vessel, through which all of your feelings and thoughts are expressed as actions. At the end of the day that expression is our legacy in this life.

Show gratitude and give everyone your very best.

If you need resources or support with your work and/or life please contact Elisa Salazar for a confidential meeting at salazael@gvsu.edu.

The How and What of Mindfulness

In this engaging workshop, you will learn how and what you need to do to be mindful in everything . These techniques will be helpful for anxiety and also to increase overall enjoyment of life experiences. There will be an educational piece as well as opportunities to practice and discuss how the skills are relevant to your personal and professional roles.

Presented by Elisa Salazar, LMSW, GVSU Work Life Consultant.

Event will be held in CHS 233.

Register online www.gvsu.edu/sprout

Persistently Sad or Anxious?

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. If you need assistance through any professional or personal issues, don't hesitate to contact [Encompass](#), GVSU's Employee Assistance Program.

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