New Beginnings

Carol Friedgood always dreamed of retiring to the desert. She came to the Palm Springs area regularly for weekends and vacations when she was living and working in Los Angeles as an executive secretary and legal secretary in the entertainment industry, first at the studios, and then for a private law firm specializing in entertainment.

Carol retired to Palm Desert eleven years ago."I moved here the first chance I got! I just love it here," says Carol."The colors, the mountains, the sunsets, there isn't anything about the desert that I don't love.And, I have wonderful friends in the area."

Carol's routine changed when she retired. She was very busy and active when she was working, but her pace changed in the desert. She spent more time socializing with friends, which meant more time eating and drinking, and less time spent on activities that would burn off the extra calories.

"When I was working, I did not worry too much about my weight. If I needed to lose a few extra pounds every now and then, it was something I could live with," Carol recalls."It never became a problem. But that changed when I retired."

Carol found that her weight began to steadily creep up, and before she knew it, she had gained nearly seventy pounds.When she came to the desert, she began seeing Eisenhower Cardiologist Philip Shaver,MD for a slight heart murmur. Dr. Shaver says he warned Carol at almost every visit about the risks her extra weight was putting on her health, particularly as a woman over 60 with a family history of diabetes. But Carol says she shrugged off his warnings despite her family history. "Dr. Shaver told me I was very close to the number that takes you from pre-diabetes to diabetes, and that I really needed to get the weight off, but I just wasn't ready to hear it," she explains.

The American Diabetes Association® reports that before people develop type 2 diabetes, they almost always have "pre-diabetes" — blood glucose levels that are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. Recent research has shown that some long-term damage to the body, especially the heart and circulatory system,may already be occurring during pre-diabetes.

"I see Carol every four months, and each time she would come in, we saw her numbers creeping up — her blood pressure, her cholesterol, her glucose levels were all getting too high," shares Dr. Shaver. According to Dr. Shaver,men and women who are overweight when they reach middle age, and who do not exercise regularly, increase their risk not just for diabetes, but also for hypertension, high cholesterol, coronary heart disease, stroke, certain types of cancer, gallbladder disease, and fatty liver disease.

In addition to seeing Dr. Shaver, Carol also saw Eisenhower Endocrinologist Elke Jost-Vu,MD. Soon, however, her doctors gave her the news she was hoping to avoid…she had diabetes."When I heard those words," Carol says,"I finally realized I needed to do something." Dr. Shaver and Dr. Jost-Vu recommended that Carol attend classes at Eisenhower's Diabetes Program to learn more about her disease and how to manage it."My physicians agreed that we would first try treating my diabetes with diet and exercise, rather than medication," says Carol."I took eight hours of classes at Eisenhower, which really increased my resolve to do something drastic about my weight." "Thanks to her weight loss, and her careful management of her diet, Carol has dramatically reduced her risk for cardiovascular disease and other serious health conditions. This is a case where losing really is winning."
—Eisenhower Cardiologist Philip Shaver,MD

Carol says simply that the classes scared her into action."I was not interested in losing my eyesight, or a foot, or one of my limbs, so I told myself that I really needed to take this seriously." Carol immediately adjusted her diet based on a plan provided by Eisenhower. She eats three balanced meals a day, with small portions of the right food groups."I weigh and measure everything now," says Carol."The only things I can eat as much as I want of are green vegetables."Within a year, Carol had lost 70 pounds.

"You listened to me,"Dr. Shaver grinned."This is a stunning change!" That was two years ago, and she has not gained it back.

"Carol still requires medications for hypertension and high cholesterol, but both are now much easier to manage because of the lifestyle changes she has made," shares Dr. Shaver. "Her glucose is normal, and we are reducing her blood pressure and cholesterol medications. I think we are on our way to getting Carol off the medications all together. Thanks to her weight loss, and her careful management of her diet, Carol has dramatically reduced her risk for cardiovascular disease and other serious health conditions. This is a case where losing really is winning." Carol is enjoying her new lease on life, spending time with her friends and her dogs. She has had whippets — racing dogs similar to greyhounds — since 1974."I love their sleek look and their beautiful expressive eyes," says Carol."They are really sweet loving dogs."

Carol has also discovered a Web site that fascinates her, and has made her a part of an online community. "David Hancock is a wildlife expert in Vancouver.He has a site called hancockwildlife.org that has a mini-cam focused on a bald eagle's nest on Vancouver Island," says Carol."You can watch live streaming video every day of what is happening at that nest."

"It's the most interesting thing I've ever seen," Carol explains."You can watch the eggs hatch, watch the babies be cared for by their parents for 13 weeks, and then for two to three weeks, you can watch them learn to fly. There really is a lot of drama, and it's fascinating to see these new lives beginning."

"The site is a forum, and is set up for discussion, and research, and fun," smiles Carol."You get to know everybody, and you find yourself sitting in front of the computer waiting for something to happen…and it always does. Just the other day, I watched a raven steal an egg right out of the nest. Unfortunately, we lost a baby."

When asked if it was hard to lose the weight and keep it off for two years, Carol reflects on her new beginning."It's hard because you cannot eat like you did, but it's easy when your life is at stake," shares Carol."That comes first and foremost.How do I save myself?"

For more information about diabetes, contact Eisenhower's Diabetes information line at 760-773-1403.

Healthy Living is a publication of Eisenhower Medical Center · © Copyright 2013 All Rights Reserved · www.emc.org