Healthy of Heart

Evelyn Cunningham swapped pricey blood pressure meds for a few smart lifestyle changes.

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Name Evelyn Anne Cunningham
Age 56
B.P. on medication 140/80
B.P. on holistic remedies 140/80
Methods used Exercise, dietary and lifestyle changes, herbal remedies and stress-management techniques

EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER In 2000, my mother died after a prolonged illness. The next year, my live-in boyfriend, who had also been ill, passed away. I was emotionally whipped, hanging by threads. My employer and I both knew it, so we agreed to part. I purchased COBRA benefits for $400 a month—about 25 percent of my unemployment check—and was only using them to buy blood pressure medications, which would have cost me about $100 per month without insurance.

TAKING CHARGE My blood pressure was high but under control. I knew I could not afford to have uncontrolled hypertension—my family history and lifestyle put me in jeopardy of having a heart attack or stroke. Both my parents had heart attacks. Plus, I didn't exercise regularly or drink enough water. I consumed too much salt and I needed to lose weight. Previously, I had been exposed to some alternative health practices. I knew they take time and attention that medications don't require and I don't always have. Still, I believed they could support me and that I could do better. So I quit paying for COBRA and started tending to my health.

GARLIC AND TEA I diligently avoided any foods that could make my hypertension worse. Instead of taking blood pressure meds, I started mincing one to two cloves of garlic each morning and drinking them in 8 ounces of orange juice. Within hours, I could see the reading on my blood pressure cuff go down. I also drank three or four cups of "stress release" tea daily. This cost about $30 a month.

A NEW WAY OF LIFE I started walking for at least one hour five to seven days a week. I did an aerobics tape for 40 minutes three to four times weekly. I drank more water, meditated for at least 15 minutes and journaled for three pages minimum each day. My friends and family supported me, and I bartered for healthy food, massages and other health-sustaining services. While my new lifestyle wasn't automatic, I worked at it until it became a part of my daily routine. I lost 15 pounds

and my blood pressure held steady at 140/80.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED Unfortunately, when I returned to work, I also returned to some old habits, gained weight and stopped exercising and drinking enough water. I'm back on medication. But change is a process; it's important to be gentle on yourself. The information I've learned I can easily apply again. My body is very responsive when I try to get healthy. When I'm not taking care of myself, it reminds me, "Girl, you can do better than this."

EVELYN'S ADVICE

Be kind to yourself. Just as illness doesn't develop overnight, getting well takes time.

Create a regime and stick to it. Practicing discipline in some areas creates freedom in others.

Surround yourself with people who honor and support your improved lifestyle.

The body is wise. When we allow it time and attention, it reclaims health willingly.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/blood-pressure-holistic-12914-9719