

# Healthy of Heart

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

August 29, 2007 As told to Hilary Beard

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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>