

Michael Nims

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\$5,000 WINNER

Walmart Customer

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Before the pandemic, my life felt pretty mundane. I was going to work, hitting the gym, spending time with family — I wasn't necessarily unmotivated, but I definitely wasn't goal-oriented. Instead of maintaining my habits, I wanted to start improving them.

I heard about the Challenge from my mother, Florice, who was an Essence Challenge Winner.

She's great at engaging people — she started inviting others on her daily walks and before long, 30 people were walking with her! I saw my mom doing the Challenge, making Better Choices, and I realized I'm half her age, I need to get after it, too! The first step I took was planning everything out. I knew I'd need to be disciplined to meet my goals, so I started planning my meals, packing my gym bag at night, making my workout playlist ahead of time. I stepped into the gym on February 1 and haven't looked back.

I'm working out Monday through Friday and using Saturdays for active recovery.

I like doing cardio and toning my physique. I've lost 13 pounds so far. Working out has been the easiest part for me — eating healthy is harder. But I've realized I don't want to work out and then eat junk food. I was in the army for six years, and I remember a drill sergeant telling me that the body is a machine — you have to put the right fuel in it if you want it to perform at its best. So, that's what I'm doing.

I've eliminated sugar, bread, rice, and potatoes from my diet.

I'm only drinking water with slices of lemon, lime, and ginger. I've found that jackfruit is the ultimate meat substitute, so I've been using that instead of chicken or beef to make healthier tacos. I've stopped eating fast food; it was hard for me to cut out french fries in particular.



I gradually cut back on store-bought fries, then I started making homemade fries in the air fryer. Now, I've stopped eating them completely and it feels great not being dependent on starches.

Changing my diet is helping me sleep better.

I'm getting two or three more hours of sleep each night and waking up feeling energized. I've found if I deviate from cleaner eating, my body pays the price. The sluggish feeling after eating fried food is no longer worth it to me. What is worth it are the results. I've tried crash diets before, but the progress doesn't last and you're eventually overcome with cravings. This is different — this is lasting change.

My family and friends are in on the Challenge.

We have a family group chat where we share our progress. Our relationships are closer because the Challenge is something that connects us. Our conversations at family dinner have transitioned from day-to-day things to: What can we do better? What meals work for you? What workouts do you plan to do? We all want to be around longer for each other and lead more fulfilling lives. This inner circle keeps me motivated and nourishes me to keep pushing forward.

