



## Holistic Approach to Health Provides Many Benefits

Cheryl Gallagher, a special education teacher with the Nashoba Regional School District, began a fitness and healthy living journey several years ago that has led her to not only better health but opened the door to new activities and experiences.

Recently Cheryl reached out to the MIIA Wellness team to share an update on her progress.

*For years I have been emailing my completed activities and I figured I should share some progress to show that the wellness programs are super beneficial. In ten years, I have lost 50 pounds and no longer take any prescriptions! Thank you for your ongoing support! I feel my healthiest self at 47.*

### Hike More, Worry Less

Cheryl has participated in many of MIIA's Well Aware programs and particularly enjoys the monthly challenges, which provide the opportunity to connect with colleagues, engage in healthy competition and measure her success. She has benefited from participating in a wide variety of onsite workshops, online programs, and self-directed activities. Practices she has integrated into her daily lifestyle include yoga, strength training, stress relief exercises, and mindfulness methods.

Many milestones have been achieved over the years. Cheryl has transitioned from a size 22 to a 12, reduced her arthritis symptoms and lowered her blood pressure. Today she experiences less pain, sleeps better, has more energy and is mentally less stressed. And one of the best outcomes is that she no longer takes any prescription drugs, including blood pressure and heartburn medications. Her doctor says her health is the best it has been in 20 years. And her two sons say Mom looks good!

Adopting a healthier lifestyle is not just about numbers on a scale, eating different foods and exercising more. Cheryl has embraced a holistic approach to become healthier and that includes strategies such as increasing gratitude and mindfulness, volunteering, painting and taking digital detox breaks. She found that removing her digital watch, which made it hard for her to disconnect at times, has allowed her to focus better and 'be in the moment.'

After learning about trekking poles during an on-site MIIA program; Cheryl started using them as they can help to reduce wear on the knees, strengthen your upper body and burn more calories. The poles became quite helpful as she started walking more and then hiking on local trails. She is now passionate about hiking and often goes out with a colleague who has encouraged Cheryl to hike longer distances and in all seasons. This has led her to set more challenging fitness goals.

Using *MyFitnessPal* helps to keep track of food Cheryl is eating and her fitness activities. She also encourages friends and colleagues in her groups with high fives and likes. Studies have shown that the more consistently you track your food intake, the more likely you are to lose weight.

Cheryl has also been able to share some of the stress reduction and mindfulness practices with her students as some of them can experience anxiety about taking tests, deciding what to do after they graduate from high school or coping with other important events.

Finally, Cheryl encourages others to experiment, whether by trying a new activity or teaming up with a colleague to accomplish a goal.

Find out what works best for you so you can plan your journey to a healthier you.