Lifestyle Medicine: ‘Saved My Life’

Susan Stortzum is a mother of two who lives in Silver Creek, Nebraska. She’s a registered nurse, working at Occupational Health Services in Columbus. Today, she’s the happiest she has ever been, but that wasn’t always the case.

In 2015, Stortzum’s 17-year-old daughter, Cady, was bitten by a tick and contracted tularemia.

Tularemia, also known as rabbit fever, can be life-threatening. For Cady, it resulted in swollen lymph nodes, extreme fatigue and chronic pain.

“She was in and out of the hospital,” Stortzum said. “During that time, I was so focused on taking care of her, I feel like I let myself go.”

Before her daughter got sick, Stortzum said she was generally a healthy person – never weighing more than 120 pounds. After several emotional and stressful months, she stepped on the scale and found out that she had gained more than 50 pounds.

“I got on the scale and I just shrieked. I hadn’t seen my weight for a couple of years. I couldn’t believe that I reached 175,” she said.

Her health concerns didn’t stop there. Shortly after, Stortzum had a health screening. Her tests revealed that she was not only pre-diabetic, but also had high cholesterol and triglycerides, and high blood pressure.

“I just wanted to leave work that day and go home to cry,” she said.

MAKING CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

That was the turning point for Stortzum. She enrolled in the Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP) and started practicing Lifestyle Medicine.

“CHIP is a 12-week program that goes over a lot of lifestyle changes and modifications,” said Dr. Luke Lemke, a family practice physician at Columbus Medical Center. “It focuses on six main areas: nutrition, exercise, tobacco use, stress, sleep and love.”

CHIP has been proven to help patients lower their blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar as well as lose excess weight.

“We are trying to empower people to take their own health back and make health a priority,” Lemke said.

Stortzum followed the program very strictly. After just six weeks, she lost weight and her labs changed dramatically.

“My labs looked like they were from a totally different person. I actually wanted them to test me again because I didn’t think they were my results,” she said.

Aside from physical changes, the program also helped Stortzum in ways she did not expect.

With help from CHIP, she also learned to manage stress through yoga and meditation, and focused on getting adequate hours of sleep.

“I am a better mom. I’m a better worker and a better friend. I feel like I’m a better person because of this,” she said. “CHIP saved my life.”

The Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP) is a 12-week program that focuses on nutrition, exercise, tobacco use, stress, sleep and love.