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WOMEN RUNNERS THE MAJORITY AT ING MIAMI MARATHON®

Burger King, McDonald's or Taco Bell.

That used to be a daily decision for Orlando resident Ana Caminas.

Not anymore.

The 56-year-old mother of three has transformed herself from a self-described "couch potato" into a mean, lean marathon running machine.

At 5-foot-4 1/2 and 139 pounds, she's dropped 15 pounds in the last two years. And she's running her first full marathon January 31, 2010 at the ING Miami Marathon and Half-Marathon®, part of a growing contingent of female runners that has helped spike entries 20 percent to 18,000 with more women runners registered than men.

"Heck, no, people looking at me won't think 'runner,'" Caminas says. "I run, but I don't glide along like an antelope like other runners do."

Caminas is embarking on her first 26.2-mile journey in part because of retirement, a doctor, and the support of her family and trainer. It was the doctor that gave her the news two years ago that her cholesterol level was through the roof at 270.

"My doctor said I'm giving you a prescription, that I'll have to take pills the rest of my life," Caminas said, "I said 'Isn't there another way?' The doctor said 'Ana, the only other way takes a lot because you'll have to change your eating habits, exercise.' I said 'Fine, give me three months.' I started running and the cholesterol did go down. She said 'Keep it up and we'll keep you off the pills.'"

The prescription was never filled.

Caminas' cholesterol now hovers around 200. Her HDL has gone up 20 points to 69, and her cholesterol/HDL ratio has shot down from 5.0 to 3.2.

That didn't happen overnight, of course.

"The first time I went running I was out of breath in 30 seconds," Caminas said. "It was amazing. By 30 seconds I was literally hyperventilating. I couldn't get enough breath in me and stopped. I kept walking, but it took me five minutes (to get my breath back). My heart was still pounding. I was like 'My gosh am I out of breath.'"

To fully run her first mile took months.

"I purchased a book and it said run a half minute, recover, run a half minute, recover, then the next week do this, do that," Caminas said. "So over a period of time I went up to a two or three minute run with a two or three minute recovery - walk, run, walk, run. That's how I did it."

She worked her way up to doing a full marathon by running three half marathons.

"My first half marathon I was doing a five minute run, one minute walk," Caminas said. And she was injured with three miles remaining after taking a break to adjust her socks on a park bench. After she got up and began running again she had to dart to evade a biker and felt something in her leg pull. She finished the race walking in pain.

"I stretched something in the groin," Caminas said. "It was horrible. It was excruciating. But after I got to the finish line it was this feeling of euphoria - I actually did this!"

Caminas credits triathlon training at the local YMCA with helping build her endurance and keep her motivated.

"I do it for the cross-training part of it," Caminas said. "At my age I was only doing pretty much running, and I said my knees will go out pretty quickly. So I figured I could do some biking and I could do some swimming. Pretty soon I got better at all three, and I plan to do a Half Ironman also."

Caminas trains each day at the YMCA from 5-7 a.m. She is part of a group that works out with USAT Florida regional chair and USAT triathlon coach Hector Torres.

"With Ana, whatever she set her mind to do she's the type of person that does it," Torres said. "So I knew regardless that if she fell, she'd get up. So when she started it was, 'Okay, she just needs a little more polishing to do what she needs to do.' Every goal she sets she accomplishes.

"I'm very proud of her. I've seen people at all different levels, and she shows that you just need structure and desire. Whatever you believe you will achieve you can do, she's shown that. You just need someone to believe in you and guide you through it."

Training was the farthest thing from Caminas' mind during a 35-year career as a controller in various industries. She retired a year-and-a-half ago, around the time she began training. And last year was the first time in the previous 15 that she didn't set a New Year's resolution of losing weight - her resolution the last two years was simply to be healthy and think healthy.

"Back when I was working I'd go to a McDonald's or Burger King for lunch, grab something quick," Caminas said. "Those value menus were really great, great on-the-run stuff. Activity interfered with everything I had to do at work, was just something that wasn't part of my life. "

Caminas' eating habits have done a 180.

"Today I eat more selectively," she said. "I'm conscious of which foods are higher in the bad fats. I eat a lot more fish, particularly salmon. I eat nuts instead of chips, take a garlic pill, apples - anything that is on the good list. It's 'Let me eat this instead of this.'" Running doesn't come naturally for Caminas - she never played sports growing up and describes herself as "a band geek."

"I played clarinet, and now I play flute and sax," she says.

She's quick to say she enjoys playing music more than running. In fact, she doesn't find much to love about simply putting one foot in front of the other.

"I don't enjoy the running, but I do enjoy saying I have a goal and saying I'm going to go after that goal no matter what," Caminas said. "I don't use headphones because I think that's dangerous. What I do is I'll look at a dog walker coming toward me, will look at the dog. I'll look at the birds, listen to them. On cold days I can smell the fireplaces as I'm going by, will look to see who has the fireplaces. Things like that I'll do to pass the time, finding distractions."

To get where she is now, Caminas had to give up fast food, soft drinks and leisured mornings with her husband Manny and their four parrots.

But sometimes old habits die hard.

"This one day I had a craving for Taco Bell," Caminas said. "I couldn't remember the last time I'd gone there or to a McDonald's or Burger King. We ate there and it was 'ahhh,' but it wasn't anything I want to go back for."

Her goal now isn't securing a quarter pounder or wolfing down a beefy 5-layer burrito. It's getting a five-hour finish.

"I'd like to finish in five hours, but I think realistically I'll be very happy if can make it in 5:30," Caminas said. "My last half marathon was 2:30, so realistically I'll be very happy with a 5:30 and ecstatic with five hours."

"I really just want to do it to say I did it, and there's nothing to stop me. This is the only marathon I plan on doing - I want to show I can make it through the five hours. You're the only person that's stopping you. That's the feeling this marathon is giving me - I'm the only person that's going to stop me from achieving what I want to do."

About US Road Sports

US Road Sports & Entertainment Group, LP is a Dallas-based company dedicated to the production of world-class endurance events. The mission of US Road Sports is to offer an unparalleled participant sports experience that showcases host communities and endures as a deeply valued local asset through events that are a part of the city's culture, identity and brand. For each participant, US Road Sports strives to offer events that allow participants of all skill levels the opportunity to improve their physical and mental health and accomplish life-altering goals while having fun. US Road Sports provides sponsors and municipalities highly effective exposure to help maximize their presence and message in the community.

