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EATING
STRATEGIES TO STOP

CELEBRITY CHEF

STEVE
MARTORANO

HOW LISTENING TO HIS
HEART SAVED HIS LIFE



A GOOD LISTENER

By Michelle F. Solomon

LOCAL RESTAURATEUR STEVE MARTORANO KNOWS HOW TO LISTEN TO HIS BODY. TWO YEARS AGO, THIS ABILITY HELPED SAVE HIS LIFE.

It's Friday night at Café Martorano, and as always, it's packed. Despite this, the overall vibe is kind of laid-back—that is, until owner Steve Martorano arrives. Suddenly, the energy level hits the red as Steve starts whizzing around, greeting his customers and creating the restaurant's signature club-style vibe as he deejays from a small space next to the open kitchen. The only pauses to the nonstop party happen when Steve flicks on a scene from a favorite movie, usually a gangster movie, on the restaurant's many TV monitors. The crowd doesn't mind the abrupt break—in fact, most of them seem to know the scenes and enjoy them. Once the scene is over, Steve cranks up the music and the party continues.

The well-muscled 235-pound South Philly native looks like the tatted picture of health, and his lifestyle suggests that he should be. When not running two Café Martoranos, the original at Oakland Park Boulevard and A1A and another at

the Rio Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Steve is working just as hard in the gym. "I go to the gym six to seven days a week," says Steve. "Guess how much I bench pressed today?" the 52-year-old asks, knowing full well that he's going to tell you before you can even utter a word. "Four hundred and five pounds." He doesn't say it in a bragging tone—it's more like a dry report, much in the same way he can rattle off his most recent cholesterol reading. Steve brings the same sharp focus to his health that he does to his burgeoning food empire. Good for him that he does—that strong health consciousness may be what saved his life two years ago.

AT THE TIME, STEVE WAS IN LAS VEGAS, overseeing the launch of his restaurant and keeping up with his daily gym routine as always. However, after years of pumping iron, Steve was thinking of working some cardio into his workouts. So he started getting up early in the morning to walk from the Rio Resort, where his restaurant was, to the Mandalay Bay casino. "It was about a four-mile walk and it felt really good. The second time I did it I pushed a little bit more. I wanted to walk a little further," he says. The second day, as he began to walk back he felt a burn "over the center of my chest, and to the right," he recalls. The "burn" lasted about 30 seconds. The next day he went for his walk again. "I was feeling great, but, again on the way back, I felt this burning." He called his doctor, Sheldon T. Warman, M.D. "Steve told me that after he'd walk a few miles, he'd get what he thought was acid indigestion. I told him to tell me more about it, when was it occurring and we went through details. Listening to him describe the pain, I started to think this could be coming from his heart and not his stomach," says Dr. Warman. The physician advised Steve to get back to Fort Lauderdale as soon as possible, but that he wasn't in any immediate danger. However, taking no chances, "I took the red eye," says Steve.

He went to The Heart Center of Excellence at Broward Health Broward General Medical Center to get a stress test the next morning. However, as Michael Chizner, M.D., the Center's chief medical director, spoke to Steve and examined him, he noticed some red flags. First, there was Steve's family history: his father Jimmy died of a heart attack at 54 and his aunt Phyllis also died of heart disease in her 50s. Then there was the burning pain Steve experienced while walking. "This development was new for him.

He had never experienced a pain like that. I told him that it was safer with this new onset of symptoms to find out what his coronary looked like," recalls Dr. Chizner.

So Dr. Chizner performed an angiogram, which is a test to see if a patient has blocked arteries or veins. A doctor will inject a dye-like liquid into a blood vessel with a thin tube called a catheter. The liquid makes the blood flowing into the vessels visible on X-rays. What the test revealed was alarming: Steve had a 90 percent blockage in one of the main arteries going to his heart, a condition known as a "widowmaker" because it can cause a major—and often fatal—heart attack.

THE NEXT STEP WAS CORONARY ARTERY BYPASS SURGERY. "We open up the chest, take an arteries from behind the breastbone and a piece of vein out of the leg and we use that to bypass a part of the coronary artery," explains Dr. Kenneth Herskowitz, medical director of Cardiothoracic Surgery at The Heart Center of Excellence. The blood vessels end up grafted above and below the blocked area, creating the bypass, essentially a new route for blood to flow that skirts around the blocked arteries. Dr. Herskowitz performed Steve's surgery and in doing so discovered that Steve had even more blockages in all three of his major coronary arteries. "Patients that are his age and in good physical shape more often have this condition because of their family history," says Dr. Herskowitz.

The surgery went well, and after it, Steve tried to get back to working out as soon as he could. "It probably took me about a month to feel good, but after 10



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Dr. Michael Chizner



Dr. Kenneth Herskowitz

days I would sit in my backyard pool and I would lift some small weights, two pounds, five pounds," he recalls. "The doctors told me they never saw anyone go back to the gym so quickly."

TWO YEARS LATER, THINGS ARE BETTER THAN EVER FOR STEVE.

He's back in the gym, lifting lots more than just 2 to 5 pounds, and is also working in cardio every day for 25 minutes. The Vegas outpost of Café Martorano is up and running, with large posters plastered all over town that promote the restaurant. He's also finishing a book that's tentatively titled *Yo Cuz*, an autobiography with recipes that's due out in January 2010. "It's about family and recipes, but it's not a cookbook," he points out. TV could also be on the horizon for Steve—he's expecting to get another shot on the Food Network. (The heart bypass operation forced him to miss a crucial meeting with Food Network reps.) He also reveals that there may be interest by Hollywood to make his life story into a movie. And closer to home in Hollywood, Florida, he's ready to clinch a deal with the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino to open a Café Martorano in their food and entertainment complex.

Yet if Steve had ignored the burning in his chest back in 2007, none of these impressive developments would have been possible—and he knows it. "I credit all three of those doctors with saving my life," he says, referring to Drs. Warman, Chizner and Herskowitz. That said, Steve deserves some credit too—he acted immediately once he sensed something was wrong. And according to Dr. Warman, there's a key lesson to be learned from the way Steve reacted. "If you have heart disease in your family history, that's even more of a reason to be proactive, and should you develop symptoms, heed the warning. Listen to your body like Steve did," he advises.

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