It's important to listen to your body

By Lourdes Carini

Earlier this year, my entire world turned upside down. I've always been healthy and full of energy. To stay that way, I did the things you know you should do as a woman. I performed monthly breast self-exams like clockwork. I scheduled my annual pap smear and breast exam to coincide with Mother's Day — a time of year I chose to commemorate my commitment to my children to live a healthy life.

Last year, I started experiencing abdominal pain. It was the kind you initially brush off as insignificant — just a twinge, that's all, nothing to see here. I was a tad bloated, but I shrugged it off as indigestion. And I was tired, but I'd been burning the candle at both ends with some form of gynecologic cancer (which includes cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal and vulvar cancers) each year. More than 30,000 women will die of one of these cancers each year. And because these cancers are frequently detected late (in stages 3 or 4), they are often deadly.

This has been a difficult journey, to be sure. But it's important to listen to your body, and more importantly, you must communicate what's wrong, but I never imagined...