

DIET TRICKS THAT DELIVER

No matter what plan you're following, certain weight-loss strategies are guaranteed to bring success. Try integrating these four into your life today

Don't Be Your Own Worst Enemy

Hide tempting snacks—if they're out of sight, it'll be a lot easier to keep them out of mind. One study from Cornell University showed that women who were offered chocolates from a clear bowl ate 71 percent more than those served from a dish that concealed the candy. The best way to go: Don't keep bad-for-you foods in the house at all (if you don't buy it, you can't eat it).

Stay Strong

If the scale goes a couple of pounds in the wrong direction, there are ways to get back on track. One trick that works: Write down not only what you eat, but what triggers your appetite. For example, you might find that you do well all day but mess up with midnight snacking. Or that 3 P.M. in the office might be your lethal hour. Once you know your weakest times, you can defend yourself with safer snacks.

Get Moving

You can shed pounds with just 30 minutes of exercise a day (and yes, speed walking counts, even if it's just up and down the hallway).

Eat Slower

Anything that lengthens your meal is good for weight loss, because your brain needs 20 minutes to get the signal that your body is full. The simplest way to avoid rushing: Choose time-consuming foods. Dishes that are hot, for example, take longer to eat. And work hard for your snacks—freeze a piece of dark chocolate and see how long it takes to nibble your way through.

—Alison Stuart



“I’m Half My Size!”

These seven women shed a total of 1,062 pounds (some of their stories will make you cry). Here, they share the diet strategies that really worked
By Jessica Baumgardner

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MELANIE DUNEA

“I LOST 133 LBS.!”

Kim Hicks | 37

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 265

CURRENT WEIGHT 132

TIME IT TOOK 4 YEARS

MY STORY I've always been heavy, but the pounds really piled on during my four pregnancies. After my second child was born, I started exercising. The problem was that I didn't know how to push myself, so I never saw real results. I tried a few diets, but could never stick to them.

WORST MOMENT In front of my middle school class in Tucson, AZ, I tripped and hit the ground but quickly pulled myself up. One of the students said, “Man, I didn't know fat people could move so fast.” I was shocked by his rudeness, but mostly, I was humiliated.

TURNING POINT When I visited the doctor four years ago, I got bad news: I was borderline diabetic. My mom has diabetes, so I was alarmed—I know how hard it is for her. For the first time in my life, I decided to make changes.

HOW I LOST IT I was addicted to sugar, so I had to wean myself off the stuff. First, I switched to diet soda and other foods with artificial sweeteners, so I could cut my calorie intake. Now I only eat natural sugars, like those found in honey or fruit. Later, while coaching the girls' soccer team after school, I discovered running. The team was whining about doing laps, so I said, “If you run four laps, I'll run one.” They took me up on it. My first attempt was torture, but I was running four laps by the end of the season (with the encouragement of my 25 “cheerleaders”!). Now I log about 50 miles a week.

FAVORITE TRICKS I've always eaten a lot, and that hasn't changed—but now I wolf down only healthy foods, like steamed veggies. To boost my metabolism, I also started lifting weights.

BIGGEST PAYOFF Being strong enough to run four marathons!



Kim: “I was so ashamed of my body, I didn't want to be around anyone”

“I LOST 100 LBS.!”

Susan Haugland | 45

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 244
CURRENT WEIGHT 144
TIME IT TOOK 1 YEAR

MY STORY For me, weight was always a struggle—at 16, I was already 180 pounds. I used to think nothing of eating a batch of brownies in a day. One fall, I was obsessed with pumpkin bars, so I baked pan after pan—I told myself they were for my kids, but I ate most of them.

WORST MOMENT I'm a music teacher and every year, I used to take a youth orchestra to an amusement park. One time, I stood in line for two and a half hours for a ride. But when I sat down, the seat harness wouldn't latch—I was too big. In front of all the students and their parents, I was told I wouldn't be allowed on the ride.

TURNING POINT I got so heavy that I developed plantar fasciitis, which is a painful inflammation on the bottom of your foot. I knew that if my house ever caught fire, I'd die because I wouldn't be able to move fast enough. *I have to do something about this*, I thought. I was seriously looking into gastric bypass surgery when I saw an advertisement for NutriSystem, and signed up.

HOW I LOST IT NutriSystem delivered a month's worth of prepackaged, preportioned meals to my house, and I added my own fresh fruits, vegetables, and dairy. You can be on the diet without buying the meals, but with four kids and a job, the convenience was a big plus. I also ordered a rowing machine, so I could exercise without standing on my feet. As I lost weight, my plantar fasciitis eased up. I started walking...and now I'm running.

FAVORITE TRICKS I'm with Oprah—no eating after 7 P.M. I also steer clear of TV; for me, it leads to grazing. Instead, I keep busy—doing chores, writing in my journal, or running. And I log on to NutriSystem's message board daily. When I don't want to exercise, I always think about having to face my online pals the next day.

BEST DIET SNACK First, dice up a small apple. Add half a teaspoon cinnamon and two teaspoons Splenda. Microwave for two minutes. Sprinkle two tablespoons low-fat granola on top. Calories: only about 130.

BIGGEST PAYOFF I've gotten so in shape that I now run 15 miles a week around my Lake Bluff, IL, neighborhood.

“I steer clear of the TV—it leads to grazing”



Susan: “Just walking to the end of my driveway used to be so tough”

Hair by Algene for Sally Harlor. Makeup by Sue Pike for Sally Harlor. Styling by Kathy Imray. Previous spread, on her: green linen blouse, Liz Claiborne; inset: courtesy of Susan Haugland.

“I LOST 133 LBS.!”

Maria Pappas | 37

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 268
CURRENT WEIGHT 135
TIME IT TOOK 4 YEARS

MY STORY It all started when I lost my first child. He was born with fluid in his lungs, and I only had him for one day. That began eight months of depression; I hardly uttered a word to anyone and spent a lot of time eating.

Then I got pregnant again, piled on more pounds, and gave birth to a baby girl, Olivia, who's now 8.

Even though I was thrilled to finally be a mother, I kept on bulking up. My husband brought tons of junk food into the house, so that's pretty much all I ate.

WORST MOMENT I had always wanted to try horseback riding, so one day I went to a stable. But as I was about to get into the saddle, a staffer came running over and said that I couldn't ride. He explained that I would be a liability because I weighed too much. I was so hurt, I cried for the rest of the day.

TURNING POINT After I'd gotten into an argument with my husband, I went out with some pals in Philadelphia, where I live. I was confiding to a friend, who told me that I deserved much better treatment and that I was beautiful. I said, “Are you kidding? I'm 260 pounds!” He replied, “It doesn't matter; you have a great heart, you're a great mother, and you're a fighter.” I felt so encouraged that the very next day I started exercising.

HOW I LOST IT Someone told me that jumping rope burns more calories than jogging, so I tried it. In the beginning, I could only do 10 skips. Now I'm up to around 2,500 jumps a day, which takes less than an hour. (The best part is that I can do it indoors when the weather's bad.) I also cut out junk food and started eating fruits, veggies, meat, and whole grains. Breakfast is my biggest meal—a couple of times a week, I'll even eat a steak. (It gives me energy all day.) I was slimming down, but things with my husband kept getting harder; we divorced about a year later. Even so, I stuck to my healthy-eating plan.

FAVORITE TRICKS Moderation is my best weapon. When I'm out at restaurants, I don't order a heaping bowl of pasta, and I don't stuff myself with bread (even if it's whole wheat). Exercise is crucial, so you have to find stuff you actually enjoy doing (the more fun it is, the more often you'll do it). Personally, I love to turn on disco music and dance around the room.

BIGGEST PAYOFF Knowing that I'm setting a good example for my daughter.



Maria: “From this to the cover of *Good Housekeeping*—I can't believe it!”

Inset: courtesy of Maria Pappas

“I LOST 199 LBS.!”

Alicia Forde | 26

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 351
CURRENT WEIGHT 152
TIME IT TOOK 17 MONTHS

MY STORY When I was a teenager, my family moved from Boston to Houston (where I still live). That was a big change and, missing home, I turned to junk food for comfort. In college, I put on even more pounds: I would buy chicken wings and soda and have a little date with food. I wanted to be thin, but I couldn't figure out how to lose the weight. I'd try to eat healthy foods like salad, but then I'd pour on bacon, cheese, and tons of dressing. I went on diet pills, but they made me feel wired, so I stopped. I even asked my mom to buy me a treadmill. She did—but within a few weeks, I'd turned it into the world's most expensive clothes hanger.

WORST MOMENT The day I stopped being able to weigh myself at home—the numbers on my scale didn't go high enough.

TURNING POINT A couple of years ago, my closest friend from high school (who also had a strong emotional relationship with food) called me out of the blue. She told me that she'd been very successful with the Weigh Down Workshop, a Christian weight-loss program, and invited me to an upcoming class. Her timing was perfect—I had grown so large that I never left the house, and I was beginning to turn into a hermit. I weighed 351 pounds at that point. If she could get thinner on this program, I thought, maybe it can help me too.

HOW I LOST IT Within two weeks, I had dropped 17 pounds. Weigh Down helped me realize that most of the times I put food in my mouth, I wasn't even hungry. I just had a serious habit of overindulging. Now I let my body's growls and grumbles tell me when I need food. And I eat slowly, so I don't end up belly-busting full. I also got active. I used to always take the elevator and park my car near entrances because even a little exercise was exhausting; now climbing stairs and walking aren't a problem.

FAVORITE TRICKS When I sit down to a meal, I eat my favorite things first—for me, saving the best for last just makes me crave more. I also avoid snacking because I have trouble stopping once I get started.

BIGGEST PAYOFF I look and feel great—and at the Weigh Down Workshop, I've also had the chance to discover my spirituality.



Alicia: “Before, I used almost all my spending money on food”



MaryKay: “I basically replaced every meal with fast food”



“I LOST 150 LBS.!”

MaryKay Berry | 36

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 329
CURRENT WEIGHT 179
TIME IT TOOK 18 MONTHS

MY STORY I was an obese teenager: At 14, I clocked in at 200 pounds. My senior year in high school, I went on a crash diet and lost half of that. I remember eating bouillon, celery, and a diet shake at my prom—how depressing! In college, I gained it all back. I got married but then had a miscarriage, at which point I started eating all the time to numb the pain. During my next pregnancy, I ate Dairy Queen Blizzards a couple of times a day, and the pounds piled on fast (big surprise). When my son was just 9 months old, I got pregnant again. I had to go on bed rest, and my weight really skyrocketed.

WORST MOMENT I went on a field trip with my biology class in college and, as part of a science experiment, we all had to walk into this river. Later, I learned that the professor had made a wisecrack to another student—saying that I was so large, the river's water level went up when I stepped in. When that got back to me, I just cried buckets.

TURNING POINT My weight was putting a strain on my marriage. Although my husband was never mean, I think he was surprised that he'd married a woman who looked one way, and then two years later, she was twice that size. I was so miserable that I went to my doctor and said, “Give me pills or schedule surgery.” She replied, “Do something for me first. Try Weight Watchers.”

HOW I LOST IT The very next day, I had a huge slice of cake for breakfast, then signed up for a Weight Watchers class. Their plan is so simple, it's easy to integrate into your lifestyle: You keep track of what you eat with a point system (for example, a bagel is 6 points, an egg white and tomato omelet is 1 point). I started losing right away. Now, when I'm out to dinner with my friends at home in Clarkesville, GA, and I get real quiet, someone will say, “You're counting points, aren't you?” And I am! When I cook at home, I measure everything to get the right portion—eyeballing it doesn't work for me.

FAVORITE TRICK I never deprive myself; I just make great substitutions. For example, I don't go to Dairy Queen (their Blizzards range from 12 to 22 points), but I will get a reduced-fat vanilla ice cream cone at McDonald's (only 3 points).

WHAT KEEPS ME GOING I posted this quote on the fridge to stop me from eating when I'm not hungry: “Nothing tastes as good as thin feels.”

“Biggest payoff: the first day I could cross my legs!”

This page, inset: courtesy of Alicia Forde. Opposite page, inset: courtesy of MaryKay Berry.

“I LOST 206 LBS.!”

Shelley Napier | 35

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 326
CURRENT WEIGHT 120
TIME IT TOOK 2 YEARS

MY STORY Fast food was always my weakness. During my 20s, I ate it for almost every meal. And I wasn't ordering a healthy salad with low-fat dressing—I was putting away Big Macs with supersize fries and a large Coke. For years, I would wake up and think, *I'm going to start dieting today*. Then I'd go to work (at a hair salon in Wadsworth, OH) and a pal would suggest going to Arby's for lunch. I'd immediately cave in, and the diet I had started in the morning would be over by noon.

WORST MOMENT When I boarded an airplane for a Cancún vacation, I was so overweight that I couldn't buckle up. The flight attendant had to find a belt extension for me. I thought I'd die of embarrassment.

TURNING POINT Five years ago, I went to my doctor for a checkup. He said he was considering putting me on blood pressure medication because of my weight. That scared me. Shortly afterward, my 64-year-old father suddenly died of sleep apnea. It was a real reminder that life is short. And it inspired me to take action and make some changes.

HOW I LOST IT On Slim-Fast, I dropped around 10 pounds a month for the first year and a half. It was great because I didn't have to think about what to eat—I could just open the fridge, grab a shake, and go. Every day, I followed Slim-Fast's recommended plan: a shake for breakfast, a shake and a snack (such as a piece of fruit) for lunch, and a sensible dinner (fish or chicken with veggies). Once a week, I'd treat myself to a few bites of something I was craving, like pizza or a hot fudge sundae. I also started walking on the treadmill 30 minutes a day. After I grew stronger, I began running and working out with a personal trainer.

FAVORITE TRICKS I'm a real planner. I carry around protein bars, because if I don't, my hunger takes over and I end up in line at a bakery. When I'm cooking, I splash Tabasco sauce on everything—the spicy kick makes me eat slower, so I don't consume as much. Another trick: If I have time on the weekend, I'll grill up six chicken breasts, steam some veggies, portion everything into containers, and pop the food into the freezer. Then on weeknights, when I come home from work hungry, I can have a healthy dinner in minutes. During the holidays, when I'm hosting big family dinners, I insist that my guests take all the leftovers.

BIGGEST PAYOFF Recently, after boarding a flight to Hawaii, I sat down and strapped myself in—and I had almost a foot of seat belt to spare!



“I insist that my guests take all the leftovers”



Shelley: “On planes, I couldn't buckle the seat belt because I was so overweight”

This page, inset: courtesy of Shelley Napier

“I LOST 141 LBS.!”

Catherine Rector | 39

HEAVIEST WEIGHT 280
CURRENT WEIGHT 139
TIME IT TOOK 2 YEARS

MY STORY Snacking was my downfall. I could sit in front of the TV and eat an entire sleeve of Ritz crackers. On weekdays, I'd grab some fast food on my way home from work. Then, back at my house in Franklin, TN, I'd sit down and eat a full dinner, complete with dessert. Later, I'd nuke a bag of popcorn to munch on. I kept eating all day, but I never felt full. I was also tired all the time—instead of running around with my two kids, I'd order them to play outside while I sat on the couch.

WORST MOMENT I went to a concert and the chair wasn't big enough—the fat on my thighs and rear spilled onto the seats next to me. People were pressed up against me on all sides. I was mortified.

TURNING POINT When I hit close to 300 pounds—a size 32—there was only one store that carried clothes big enough for me. The name of the place was Catherine's Stout Shop, which was especially awful because Catherine is my name. At the same time, my marriage was on the rocks because I was always so moody. I knew my husband didn't like my being overweight—and I didn't like it either! That's when a friend told me about the Weigh Down Workshop.

HOW I LOST IT The plan was perfect for me because I wasn't required to count calories or fat grams. And the workshop instructors told me that I could eat whatever I wanted, as long as it was in moderation. On past diets, I would never have allowed myself chocolate cake—but now I know I can have a few bites. I can even have a little of my mother's fried chicken! The key is to stop when you're satisfied. The best part of the program is that I can serve my whole family the same dishes I'm eating—I just put less on my own plate.

FAVORITE TRICKS The secret is to redirect your attention away from food. Instead of thinking about eating all day, I now put my energy into other things, like helping people. Recently, I cleaned my mom's house with her, which totally distracted me from food. The same method works when I feel a craving coming on: I resist my urges by picking up the phone to call a friend or turning to my Bible.

BIGGEST PAYOFF Once I started to drop pounds, I also had more energy to play with my kids. For me, losing weight has been the best antidepressant.



Catherine: “I used to eat as a hobby; now I eat when I'm hungry”

Inset: courtesy of Catherine Rector



Bonus! Get inspired by another amazing weight-loss story and find smart summer exercising tips at goodhousekeeping.com/diet-success-aug07