



The accidental weight loser



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Losing weight can be difficult for anyone, especially someone who has been heavy for a long time. Sometimes those who succeed do so more from circumstance than discipline. Ten years and 85 pounds ago, I went into a cycle of gaining weight I never seemed to be able to lose. It happened around the time I moved into an all-you-can-eat room-and-board situation, where there were no brakes on eating too much. Soon my Viking appetite had boosted my weight to 262 pounds on a five-foot-eleven frame.

The critical fork in the road occurred when I came down with a horrible stomach bug, which took away my appetite and completely emptied my bowels. I was sick only a few days and lost just about five pounds, but in that time I discovered that if I didn't constantly put food in my mouth, a little bit of hunger wouldn't kill me. I was finally able to take appetite control seriously.

Up until then, I had been constantly telling myself I couldn't sleep without food, I couldn't exercise without food, and I certainly couldn't work without food. I was not unaware of the unhealthy side of this. Obesity wasn't my only fear, though. High on my list was reduced energy illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease — not to mention other problems, from hernias to impotence. For quite some time, I had worked out but I found that an hour of light swimming and a bit of walking never made up for my high-calorie, high-fat diet and my largely sedentary lifestyle.

Seeking an exercise regimen that would complement my swimming, I started looking into

books and videos from stores and the library. I followed their regimens, and soon my physique soon started to improve. I felt great and weighed less.

At last count, I weighed 235 pounds, and I admit I have a long way to go before I reach my target weight of 180 on my newly muscular frame. I am trying to lose two pounds a week, but it takes a lot of discipline to get down to the pool and the weight room. Sometimes it takes a lot for me just to clear a space on the floor and get down to some yoga stretches. But, according to some experts, if you can work out regularly for just three months, there's a chance you will be able to keep it up for the rest of your life.

As for food, I have cut out restaurant and takeout meals, including my former faves: hamburgers, fries and pizza. I try to have all-vegetarian meals whenever I can.

A friend I swim with told me about the sugars in juices and the risk of pre-diabetes. Fruit juices seem super healthy, but their high sugar content will spike your blood sugar levels because the digestive system doesn't have to do much to break them down. Whole fruits, on the other hand, have tons of fibre, and the sugar comes out much more evenly, making for healthier blood glucose levels. The same goes for pasta that is cooked too soft, white bread and other refined starches.

Not everyone needs an accidental gastrointestinal jump-start like mine, but some people swear that a colon cleanse or a brief fast is a good facsimile for launching a weight-loss regimen. But the main factors are fresh whole foods, lean protein, regular exercise — and plenty of patience. You didn't gain that excess weight in a few weeks and you won't lose it permanently in a few weeks, either. 