

New Body, New Life

Losing weight has plenty of rewards: better health, more energy and (finally!) fitting into that little black dress. But sometimes, as these four women learned, it brings unexpected gifts as well.

By Norine Dworkin-McDaniel

REBECCA BARNES

45, consultant, Atlanta, GA

HEIGHT | 5'1" PREVIOUS WEIGHT | 225

CURRENT WEIGHT | 133

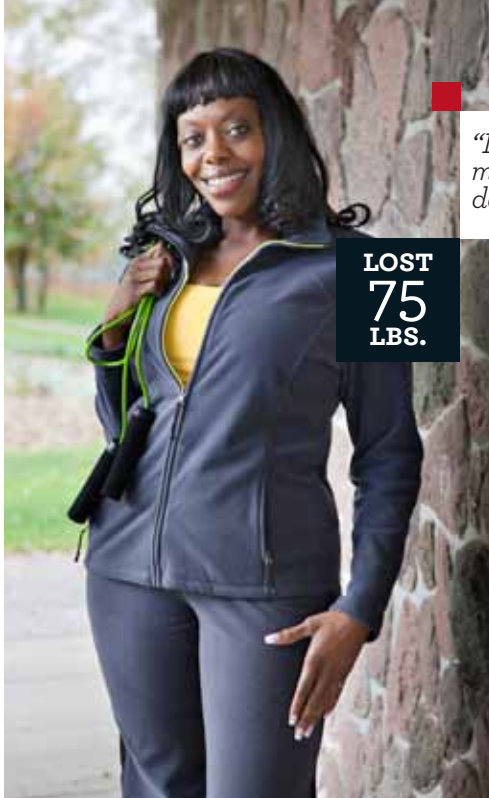
POUNDS LOST | 92

TURNING POINT → Before I had kids I was an actress and never had a problem being the center of attention or walking into a party where I didn't know anyone. I could always make friends. But when my weight rose to 225, my personality changed. I started asking myself if I was the fattest woman in the room—and I usually was. I became less outgoing and more self-conscious.

HOW SHE LOST IT → For three months I participated in the moms' edition of *Atlanta's Biggest Loser*, a local version of the national television show. We followed a 1,200-calorie-per-day diet with vegetables filling most of the plate. I learned how to eat more fiber, by sprinkling flaxseed on whole-grain rice and cooking with beans. In addition to our diet intervention we exercised with a trainer five days a week. At times the workouts were so tough I wanted to die right there on the mat. But I stubbornly kept going. In

LOST
92
LBS.

"I surprised myself when I realized I actually liked exercise." —Rebecca



**LOST
75
LBS.**

"I wanted to be a role model for my 16-year-old daughter." —Theresa

where they have to run down the driveway, go up the stairs, around a tree, step through hula hoops or jump over something. They love it! The best part? I can keep up with them again.

THERESA LOU BOWICK,

42, registered professional nurse, Rochester, NY

HEIGHT | 5'7" PREVIOUS WEIGHT | 235

CURRENT WEIGHT | 160

POUNDS LOST | 75

TURNING POINT → At my daughter Jacyntha's sweet 16 party it struck me that she wasn't enjoying her teen years like she really should be because of her weight. Plus, I realized that as her mother, I'd never been a healthy role model. So, I decided I'd try to inspire her by getting into better shape myself.

HOW SHE LOST IT → I immediately started walking a half-mile most days of the week. (Now, three years later, I run five.) I also joined Weight Watchers and totally changed my eating habits for the better. For extra motivation, I bought a bikini and hung it up where I could see it every single day. It really did keep me from reaching for unhealthy treats. Each morning I'd look at the suit and say to myself, "I am going to wear this and wear it well." It took me three years to drop the 75 pounds, but now I have a whole bikini collection!

WHAT SHE FOUND → My main reason for dieting was to be an inspiration to my teenage daughter and yet I must admit I was still shocked when I did, in fact, motivate her. She got a big kick out of the fact that I entered the Weight Watchers Inspiring Stories of Change contest, and my essay "From Buffets to Bikinis" won one of the grand prizes. That's when she became serious about her own weight-loss goals. She began exercising and coming to Weight Watchers meetings

the end I was the "biggest loser" for my team, shedding 39 pounds in 12 weeks. Then I dropped another 53 pounds in the next 18 months.

WHAT SHE FOUND → I discovered an inner athlete I didn't know existed. I surprised myself when I realized I actually liked exercise. In addition to my everyday routine—walking the dog 2 miles, running for 20 minutes, ab work and a punching-bag session—I search for other opportunities to work out. When I'm with my kids, ages 11 and 7, at the playground, I run up and down steps, sprint laps or do push-ups. If I'm stuck in the carpool line, I get out and do squats, push-ups, stretches or lunges. Instead of feeling embarrassed I feel amazing, like I'm erasing a decade of not taking care of myself.

This experience didn't just change my life—it changed my family's too. During the contest I'd say, "I'm going for a walk." Then one kid would say, "I want to come." The next would chime in, "Me too!" And my husband would say, "I guess we're all going." Now, instead of hanging out in our home on the weekends, we're getting outside to play catch or kick a soccer ball. When my kids want to watch TV or play on the computer, I make them earn it by doing an obstacle course I set up



LOST
65
LBS.

"I learned how to handle stress without turning to food." —Sandra

HOW SHE LOST IT → I knew what I had to do to lose weight: exercise regularly, eat more fruits and vegetables, and toss out all the junk food. But the weight-loss programs I tried didn't explain how a working mom with three boys, ages 14, 12 and 9, could suddenly find the time to work out. Nor did they reveal why I ate when I was overwhelmed. Then on a whim I decided to see a hypnotherapist. He didn't focus on what I ate (though he did send me to a nutritionist to learn to eat better). Instead, he helped me improve my self-image and attitude. He also taught me how to handle stress without turning to food.

When my dad passed away recently, I caught myself in the cupboard eating cookies. I'd had maybe two and then I stopped, stepped back and headed outside for a walk instead. With my therapist's help, I also found time for exercise. When you have a can-do attitude it's easier to get out of bed a little earlier or to get on a treadmill instead of plopping down in front of the television after the kids are asleep.

WHAT SHE FOUND → My husband and I have rekindled our romance. We meet for lunch, send each other "I love you" texts and started sailing again—that's how we met, but we hadn't taken a boat out together in years because I'd gotten so big. Now we're even competing in races. And recently we went away for a night, just the two of us—something we hadn't done in the 14 years since our first child was born. We chose a beautiful hotel, just 15 minutes away from home, yet it made a world of difference. I'd bought a special outfit that showed off my new curves. After an intimate dinner and a long walk through a quaint town, we discovered that we are more than just mom and dad, we are a couple in love.

(continued)

with me. It wasn't about me making her do it—she did it all for herself. So far she's lost 22 pounds.

Being in control of my weight also showed me that I can take action in other areas of my life. I'd never forgiven myself for getting pregnant and dropping out of college before earning my degree. So when I'd proven I could lose the pounds and keep them off, I thought, "Now's the time. I'm going to get that bachelor's degree." Not only did I earn my BS in nursing, but I also received the highest honors at my school for a graduating senior.

SANDRA CZERWINSKI

46, accountant, Buckingham, PA

HEIGHT | 5'7" PREVIOUS WEIGHT | 230

CURRENT WEIGHT | 165

POUNDS LOST | 65

TURNING POINT → I'd been pregnant for almost three years in a row. With each pregnancy I gained more weight, and for years after it just never came off. I even skipped my college reunion because I didn't want anyone to see me with the extra pounds.

MAUREEN ALBRECHT

57, retired deputy coroner, Arcadia, CA
HEIGHT | 5'4" PREVIOUS WEIGHT | 280
CURRENT WEIGHT | 165
POUNDS LOST | 115

TURNING POINT → About six months before retirement I started having breathing problems. I set up an appointment with my doctor. Just hustling into her office sent my blood pressure off the charts. The doctor did an EKG and said, "This isn't good." My cholesterol was high too. The doctor started me on medication and of course told me to lose weight. I realized I had to do something or I was going to die.

HOW SHE LOST IT → Shortly after the trip to the doctor my office launched a 10-week weight-loss competition. We were encouraged to exercise, so I decided I'd walk. My first time out I had my husband drop me 5 miles from home. It took me longer to get back to our house than I'd like to admit. Those first couple of walks were tough, but it got easier. I



LOST
115
LBS.

"After two months of walking my cholesterol was normal."—Maureen

was able to go off my blood pressure medication within a month, and after two months my cholesterol was normal. I continued exercising and eating healthy after the contest and when I retired. Within a year I shed 115 pounds.

WHAT SHE FOUND → I

don't feel 57! My feet don't hurt. I don't get winded. I used to get so tired I'd have to nap. Now I get up at 6 A.M. and don't stop until 11 at night. I walk 6 to 10 miles a day. I swim and snorkel and even learned to scuba dive. I can buy jeans at any store; size 28 used to be tight, now I wear a 10. Last year, for the first time in my life, I sat on

Santa's lap. I'd never been on his lap as a kid because I was always fat—over 200 pounds in fifth grade. Recently I bought a sports car—a black, convertible Crossfire. Never in a million years did I believe I'd own a tiny car. ●