

# Losing 16 stone has given us a chance to live life to the full

After years of failed diets sisters Michelle Robinson and Susanne Laws took drastic action to reach their ideal weights

## I LEARNED NOT TO EAT FOR COMFORT

*MICHELLE ROBINSON, 43, a PA, lives in North Shields near Newcastle-upon-Tyne with husband Paul, 47, a fire alarm engineer. They have two sons Mark, 21 and Andrew, 20*

I NEVER had a problem with my weight when I was younger. When I got married I was 20, weighed 9 stone 7lb and was a size 12. Even after my sons were born I lost my pregnancy weight easily and was back to a size 12 within months.

It wasn't until I was 29 that I started to put on weight. Looking back I'm not surprised. I started a job as a PA and spent most of the day sitting at my desk. In the evening I socialised with my new colleagues, usually going out for dinner and having a few glasses of wine. I had family troubles as well. My mum Delia, now 68, was diagnosed with cervical cancer and my aunt and uncle died even though they were only in their early 50s.

I am the sort of person who just gets on with things so that's exactly what I did. What I didn't realise was that I was turning to food for comfort. My weight crept up. At first I would blame the shops for making their sizes smaller when an outfit didn't fit. Then I just accepted I had to buy the next size up.

Over the next 10 years my weight kept increasing. It wasn't surprising considering how much I was eating. I'd have a fry-up for breakfast at the work canteen followed by a big lunch of pie and chips. Then I'd go home in the evening and cook a big chicken dinner. My real downfall was crisps. I could eat up to five packets a day. At the weekend I'd beg Paul to get a takeaway.

When my weight rose to 21 stone and I was a size 24 Paul finally voiced his concern. He said he thought I ought to lose weight for my health. I knew he was right. Since gaining weight I'd developed arthritis in my knees and had severe eczema on my hands.

I was taking 18 tablets a day to keep my various conditions under control. It was no way to



MICHELLE BEFORE



SUSANNE BEFORE

live but I couldn't stop eating. Then a visit to a consultant about my arthritis made me realise I needed to start thinking seriously about looking after my body.

I was a size 28 and weighed 23 stone. He warned me that unless I lost weight I would have to have both knees replaced in a few years. I was only 40 at the time and knew I was too young to have such extreme surgery.

## 'I was using food as an emotional crutch'

A few months later in the summer of 2006 we went on holiday to Cyprus and I had to ask for a seatbelt extension on the plane because the normal one wouldn't fit around my stomach. I was so embarrassed I resolved there and then to do something about my weight.

A work colleague told me about Lighter Life, a low calorie meal replacement eating plan. I'd tried other diets before but I decided to give this one a go in May 2007. At £66 a week it was

expensive but I was determined to lose the weight this time.

For the first 14 weeks I ate nothing but meal replacement soups, shakes or snack bars. After that I started to reintroduce proper food. I had to see a doctor every four weeks and most importantly I had counselling sessions once a week to discover why I was over-eating. There were 12 people in a class and we focused on developing a healthier relationship with food.

I realised I was using food as an emotional crutch. Over the years I'd dealt with mum's cancer and the sudden deaths of my aunt and uncle, but instead of confronting and working through these difficult emotional times I'd put on a brave face and reached for another bag of crisps.

In the first week of Lighter Life I lost 13lb and after that I lost five to six pounds every week. It was what I needed to motivate me to carry on. It took seven months to lose 11 stone.

Now I'm at my ideal weight for my 5ft 10in frame, which is 12 stone 12lb and a size 14. I've stopped taking pills for arthritis and no longer need a cocktail of painkillers to



**MICHELLE**  
**Height:** 5ft 10in  
**Weight before:**  
 23st  
**Size before:** 28  
**Weight now:**  
 12st 12lb  
**Size now:** 14

**SUSANNE**  
**Height:** 6ft  
**Weight before:**  
 17st 3lb  
**Size before:** 20  
**Weight now:**  
 12st 5lb  
**Size now:** 14

**ENLIGHTENING:** Michelle and Susanne have at last regained control of their eating habits and their lives

help get me through each day.

My eczema has cleared up and my blood pressure has come down. I know some people think Lighter Life is an extreme way to lose weight but I needed to do something drastic. The best thing is that my sister Susanne also joined the programme and we were able to support each other. I'm healthier and fitter than I have been in years.

## WE CAN NOW SHARE OUR NEW CLOTHES

**SUSANNE LAWS, 44**, works for the Department of Work and Pensions. She lives in North Shields with her partner Nigel Adamson, 46, a joiner and her son Shaun, 18

**WATCHING** Michelle's weight fall off spurred me on to join her. I had joined a slimming club and while I was losing a couple of pounds a week, Michelle was losing three or four times that amount.

When I was younger I weighed 11 stone and was a size 10 but that was too little for my 6ft frame. I looked like a beanpole.

I got married in 2000 and because it wasn't the happiest

of marriages I started comfort eating. My weight shot up to 17 stone 3lb.

I would often have a fry-up for breakfast and a sandwich for lunch. For dinner I would eat a takeaway or a kebab. I was also going out in the evenings and drinking quite a bit of alcohol, which would make me hungry the following day. Crisps were my weakness and I could eat two to three packets a day.

I divorced my husband after three years and was under a lot of pressure. I thought I was going to lose my house and faced bringing up my son alone. Everyone thought I was coping but in reality I was struggling. I had to try to get enough confidence up to start socialising and meeting new people again. I got together with Nigel, an old friend, a year after my divorce. At the time my health was suffering and I was on medication for high blood pressure.

I spoke to Michelle about how well she was doing on Lighter Life and she assured me that although the first week was hard she didn't feel hungry.

I decided to join up and lost 11lb in one week. I was thrilled. Seeing Anita, the counsellor, made me realise that I had

turned to food to cope with the pressure of my unhappy marriage and divorce. An unhealthy attitude towards food can draw you into a vicious circle and that's just how it was for me. I would feel stressed so I would eat, which in turn would make me feel bad because I was putting on weight. I would then eat more.

It took only three months to lose five stone. Now I weigh 12 stone 5lb and am a size 14. I have cereal or a poached egg on toast for breakfast, a tuna or prawn salad for lunch and salmon and vegetables for dinner.

If I do want a packet of crisps I'll have Quavers because they are low fat and I stick to just the one packet.

Nigel is proud of all the weight I've lost and Michelle is very supportive. We are always going to each other's houses for dinner and we make sure we eat healthily. As we're both a size 14 now we can share clothes too.

I feel I've finally broken the negative cycle of hating my body and overeating. I know I'll never be big again, however stressful life gets.

● *LighterLife*: 0800 2988 988/  
*lighterlife.com*