

# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

## I lost 10 stone in a year

This time last year, single mum Alicia Blaney, 38, was obese. Lacking energy and confidence, she shunned friends, hiding away at home eating. Now she has lost half her body weight, having dropped from more than 20 stone to less than ten. Alicia, who works in events management, lives with daughter Georgie, 14, in Harpenden, Herts.

Every New Year for the past decade, I've made the same resolution — to lose weight. Each year, I'd start a diet on 1 January, but then, like millions of other people, I'd fall back into my old habits within a few days.

Chocolate, cheese and bread were my downfall. I'd come home from work and, before dinner, I'd tuck into two cheese sandwiches and some chocolate. If I was bored, stressed and upset, I'd go to the fridge for comfort.

I always ate in secret. Friends and colleagues couldn't believe how little I seemed to eat, but that's because I would never have anything in front of them — I was too conscious of how it would look. I'd wait until I got home.

I was never fat as a child and, although I thought I was overweight as a teenager, I was a size 14, which is reasonably healthy. I was still a size 14 during my 20s — except when I was pregnant with Georgie when I was 23.

I am no longer with her father, and being a single mum was a struggle. I felt lonely, having moved from London, where I was brought up, to Hertfordshire for work. Money was tight and I started eating whenever I felt stressed. I also stopped weighing myself — the last thing I needed was to be reminded about how fat I was becoming.

I reckon I put on about a stone a year for ten years. I was miserable. I had no social life because, when friends invited me out, I'd say no, preferring to stay at home eating. My family just had to mention the words 'losing weight' and I'd burst into tears.

I had no confidence, and couldn't bear to be seen in public. I hated shopping for clothes; a new outfit was bought out of necessity rather than enjoyment, and I'd always go to shops for plus-size people and buy something tent-like to cover myself up, preferably in black.

Seat belts cut into me, I couldn't reach down to tie my shoelaces or paint my nails, and I felt permanently lethargic and out of breath. Although I had no obvious health problems, I knew I could develop diabetes or have a heart attack. I realised I had to lose weight.

In December 2006, I made a New Year's resolution to go on another diet but, by the summer, I was eating as much as ever. Then I went to Athens with some colleagues for



Every year, mum-of-one Alicia made a resolution to lose weight — and always failed. But when she hit 20 stone, she knew she had to change her life for good



explore why you eat so much. It made me realise that I turn to food when I'm down, and use it as an emotional crutch. It taught me that, when I get a craving, I should give myself a few seconds to think whether I want the food — or just the comfort.

The first three days were tough. I missed my old eating habits and, because I had so

much weight to lose — I wanted to get down to a size 16 — I couldn't see how I could maintain the regime for months.

But I soon got used to the drinks — I wouldn't say they were particularly tasty, but they weren't horrible — and the diet didn't seem so bad. When I got weighed at my group meeting, I found I'd lost a stone in my first week, so I knew I could follow it through.

The weight came off gradually, and sometimes it was very difficult. I couldn't drink alcohol or even a can of diet cola, which I used to love. The only drinks I could have were black tea and coffee, or water.

Fortunately my family, friends and colleagues were really supportive. My sister took me to a health farm for a weekend during my diet, and my colleagues bought me some new clothes as the weight fell off. Georgie was thrilled — she loves the fact that she can now put her arms right round me when she gives me a hug.

I'd been too embarrassed to join a gym before, but as I became slimmer and more confident, I began exercising, which helped with the weight loss. After nine months, I'd reached my target of nine-and-a-half stone — I'd halved my body weight.

Now I feel like a new person — and I look like one, too. I've never felt so good.

It's made a huge difference. I feel much more sure of myself with men and, while I haven't been on any dates, I'm not ruling it out.

This Christmas was so different from the last one. I've bought several new outfits, including a halter-neck top and a figure-hugging skirt — I'd never have dreamed of wearing that a year ago. I even danced at the work party — something I've not done for eight years.

People weren't cruel to me before, but I've noticed that they're nicer to the slim me. Yet really, what's changed is how happy I am. When I went to Spain recently with work, I even wore leathers and raced down a track on a motorbike. I could never have done that on the Athens trip, I'd been so hot and tired all the time. I'll never let myself get that big again. ■

Jill Foster

work. I felt so humiliated on the plane when I had to ask for an extension seat belt.

After the trip, I watched a video that my colleagues had made, and I was really upset by how awful I looked, struggling to walk and get on and off boats.

But watching that video was also the best thing that could have happened to me because, last year, when I resolved to lose weight I was determined to do so. I'd reached 20st 6lb. I didn't look at clothes labels any more, so I have no idea what size I was.

I joined the LighterLife weight-loss programme. It's very strict — you're allowed just 500 calories a day, and you have to eat pre-prepared milkshakes, soups and bars until you reach your goal weight. You also have to go to weekly group counselling classes to