

# I looked like a big blue pig!



**Zoe before size 22**

When Zoe saw a photo of her size 22 body in a blue tankini, she was forced to deal with her food demons. **By Caroline Reid**

**As Zoe lusted looked at the photographs from her dream holiday to the Caribbean, she barely recognised the woman staring back at her.**

"In a mad moment, I'd splashed out on a size 22 blue tankini, convincing myself it looked OK. "But when the photos came back I was horrified. I looked like a huge, blue pig. It hit home how much I'd let myself go."  
Instead of the confident, curvy woman she imagined, Zoe, who lives with husband Steve, 46, and children Tanya, 17, and Tash, 15, saw a sad, overweight figure.

**Diabetes risk**  
"I was pushing 18st but I told myself I wasn't that big. For the first time I saw what other people saw - and I was mortified."  
"My parents are diabetic and I didn't want to go down the same road. Type 2 late-onset diabetes is all to do with diet, and mine was awful. I loved all food!" says legal secretary Zoe, who lives in Kent.  
"My health was a major concern. I realised I had to do something to slim - and fast."  
Zoe, 44, had tried every diet under the sun, but had been overweight since childhood.

"I was one of the biggest in my class and the other kids called me Thunder Thighs," she recalls.  
"It hurt. It was the 80s and rah-rah skirts and tight leggings were all the rage. I felt huge next to my friends. So I started skipping meals. I'd lose a few pounds, but when I started eating properly it all piled back on."  
The fad diets continued into Zoe's early 20s as she tried everything from slimming pills to injections.  
She says: "I lost over a stone with appetite suppressants, but the side-effects were awful. I couldn't sleep and I felt

totally hyper. Another time I invented a 'vodka and potato' diet - a baked potato for lunch, another for tea, followed by a few vodka and slimline tonics with my mates. But still the weight didn't stay off."  
Zoe married her childhood sweetheart Steve, a chartered surveyor, when she was 24 - crash dieting to fit into her size 12 wedding dress.  
Within two years she was pregnant and her weight ballooned. By the time Tanya was born, Zoe had put on five stone, hitting 16st 7lb - and a size 20.  
"I was so fat I stayed in my maternity clothes for another nine months," Zoe recalls.  
"I didn't join in with the mother and toddler groups because I felt too self-conscious."  
Then several major back operations meant she couldn't work or exercise.  
"I just felt trapped and miserable. Eating was my escape. I've always been an emotional eater -



**FAT FILE:**  
**AGE** 44 **HEIGHT** 5ft 6in  
**TOP WEIGHT** 18st 1lb  
**WEIGHT NOW** 10st 7lb  
**TOP SIZE** 22  
**SIZE NOW** 10/12

**Zoe after size 10/12**

happy, sad or stressed I eat. By day, I'd finish the children's leftovers, then at night I'd eat a huge homemade meal, or have a takeaway and a few glasses of wine."  
Over the next decade, Zoe did the rounds of slimming clubs. "I felt a failure. I went to bed before Steve so he wouldn't see me undress, and wore dark glasses out so I couldn't see people react to my size," she says.

**Tent skirts**  
But the crunch came with a trip to the Dominican Republic in 2005. "I took the girls shopping - they had the pick of strappy dresses while I wore XL T-shirts and tent skirts." Zoe even thought

of gastric band operations until in 2006 she heard about the Lighter Life programme that combines meal replacements with counselling.  
"I learned not to use food as a prop and avoid over-eating. My counsellor was there for me if I had a wobble."  
In the first week Zoe dropped half a stone. By sticking to the diet plan of shakes and bars, within six months she was nearly seven stone lighter.  
"I ate 500 calories a day. I wasn't starving because the replacements are balanced and fill you up."  
"You then reintroduce foods like fish and chicken with salad, then bread and pasta to see how you feel."  
Zoe's since lost half a stone more and reached her target size 10-12.  
"The first time I tried on a 12 dress in a shop I burst into tears. I was amazed it fitted and looked so good," she says. "Now my daughters borrow my clothes - I can't think of a better compliment than that!"

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**I DID IT - YOU CAN TOO!**

- Control your portions and stop eating when you feel full.
- Be determined and focused. If you really want to lose weight, you will.
- When I feel hungry, I snack on olives and drink low-fat hot chocolate instead of a chocolate bar.
- Bananas are great because their sweetness tricks my mind into thinking I've eaten something naughty.

**Zoe's diet makeover**

**●● Menu before**  
**Breakfast:** Rice Krispies, cream and sugar  
**Snack:** Cheese & onion crisps  
**Lunch:** Cheese and ham toastie. Hot chocolate with cream  
**Dinner:** Large spaghetti Bolognaise, extra grated cheese. Lemon sorbet.  
**Snack:** Cheese chunks and Marmite, wine  
**Total calories: 4,000**

**●● Menu after**  
**Breakfast:** Lighter Life milkshake  
**Snack:** Flavoured water, apple  
**Lunch:** Chicken salad, grapes  
**Snack:** Carrots  
**Dinner:** Low-fat mince chilli & rice, small fruit pavlova  
**Total cals: 1,400**

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