



Lessons Learned from Losing 40 Pounds

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

Six years ago, my mother passed away and I gained 60 pounds. I went through a period of eating everything in sight, much of it not being my usual Mediterranean fare. I have a vivid memory of going out to eat one night at an Indian restaurant with my wife, my cousins, and my aunt. I not only ate all of my meal, but I also ate what was left on everyone else's plates as well. I was emotionally eating and I didn't stop for a year. At that point, I was heavier than I had ever been, and terribly out of shape. I couldn't make it up the stairs without pain in my knees and losing my breath. I had digestive issues and I was exhausted. It took another year for me to start taking action. I did a 120 day hiking challenge, I started eating better and started practicing mindfulness. The weight started to come off and I feel it was because I wasn't dieting in an unhealthy way. I've followed these practices for four years, I still have 20 pounds to lose, but it continues to come off over time. Here are some of the lessons I learned during my weight loss journey:

- 1) **Take your time.** A recent study showed that contestants on the television show "The Biggest Loser" lost massive amounts of weight in a short period time and that almost 100% of them gained all their weight back and then some. Rapid weight loss creates a no-win result. There are many reasons for this, but the bottom line is that the best way to lose weight is to do it slowly. The slower the better. Slow weight loss gives your body time to adjust to its new weight.
- 2) **Change how you live your life.** Being a Registered Dietitian, I already knew the healthy way to eat, I just hadn't been doing it. Over the last 4 years, I have taken what I teach to heart. I eat mostly a Mediterranean Diet, I try to do some form of movement every day, and I rarely overeat to the point of being uncomfortable. These changes have led to weight loss, increased energy, and a happier me.

3) **Move.** For me, movement is the key to losing weight and having more energy throughout the day. I was brought up as an aspiring couch potato and became quite an expert at it 6 years ago. Changing my sedentary habits was key to my success. Besides the 120 day hiking challenge, I also finished my first triathlon and then did another. I got over my distaste for gyms. I now exercise every morning and look forward to whatever movement I do.

4) **Stay calm.** Another key to successful weight management is to learn and use positive strategies for dealing with difficult emotions and stress. 4 years ago, I started a meditation practice. I would sit quietly, focusing on my breath, for 20 minutes in the morning. This led to me feeling less stressed out and when I did get stressed I handled it better and was less likely to overeat. Most people who are successful with weight loss and maintenance have some kind of a daily practice that helps them deal with emotions during hard times.

5) **Take a look at your habits.** Most of what we do is defined by our habits and for most people, weight loss, weight gain, and weight maintenance success is habit related. The good news is that habits can be changed, though it will take some work. In order for me to lose 40 pounds I had to change many of my “bad” habits. I set realistic goals and tried not to change too much too fast. There are a few I am still working on. For example, I rarely overeat at dinner anymore, but until recently I was still snacking after dinner. In the last few months, my after dinner habits have changed. I have stopped eating popcorn or leftovers and now just eat fruit. It has taken awhile to “click,” but most nights I enjoy my new habit. For more on habits and how to change them I would highly recommend *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg.

6) **Don't be harsh with yourself.** There are times on my journey when I would veer off the path and spend a week eating barbecue or forget that there was such a place as a gym. I might temporarily gain weight, yet I would always return to eating Mediterranean, moving, and taking care of my stress. The truth is I have created new habits of eating delicious, healthy food, exercising, and practicing mindfulness.

7) **Enjoy the journey.** Over the last 4 years I have eaten a lot of delicious food, seen beautiful views from the tops of mountains, accomplished some physical feats that I didn't know were possible for me, and, simply put, just had a lot of fun. Studies show that if you aren't enjoying what you are doing, then you are less likely to do it. Find healthy habits that you enjoy. Experiment with things you haven't tried before, and most of all have fun!

Have you had success losing weight and keeping it off? Let us know how you did it! Send your feedback to Mary Harrington, mharrington@mma.org.