

"I lost 33 kilograms"

Alyssa Jowett, 17, hated buying clothes when she was overweight. Now, after losing over 30 kilograms, she's a shopaholic.

I've always been overweight, as have most people in my family. I first realised I was bigger than other kids when I was 10. I suddenly didn't want to go out with my friends or go shopping because I thought I looked different.

I was teased, but mostly behind my back. Sometimes, it wasn't even what people said but the way they looked at me. I wasn't very confident because of this and didn't have many friends until Year 9, when people started accepting me for who I was, not what I looked like.

My friends didn't leave me out and they gave me a lot of support. But they were all really slim, which sometimes made me feel a bit funny around them.

I never went shopping with them because I felt self-conscious that I wouldn't find clothes to fit.

I've tried to change my weight for the past five years. I tried Weight Watchers first and then another weight-loss program. I even went to the doctor and got my thyroid checked for a thyroid imbalance (which is a cause of weight gain) – but nothing that I tried seemed to work.

What changed everything was seeing the success my aunty had with losing weight. She joined Weight Watchers and lost 20 kilograms. Knowing that she could do it made me see that I could do it, too, and I decided to rejoin the Weight Watchers program. My mum had the same idea and she and I joined together – which made it even easier to keep on track.

I weighed 99.9 kilograms when I joined and knew that was way too much for my height. The great thing was that it wasn't a diet; it's more like a healthy-eating plan. Of course, I had to cut out all the chips and ice-cream!

As well as eating well, I had to exercise. I was walking, going to the gym, and my mum and I joined a jazz aerobics class for a while. I also had a friend who went walking with me, so we motivated each other. It was hard getting into an exercise routine at first, but after a while I looked forward to it. I used to love sport when I was growing up – I played netball and swam – so it was just getting back into the habit again.

At the start, it was really, really hard, but Mum and I kept each other going. I was determined to make a go of it this time. I also met a girl who joined about the same time as I did, so we kind of stuck together and the added support really helped. The leader was really nice too; she helped us out along the way and was so encouraging. A group of us got together once a week to weigh in and go to a meeting where we got tips and encouragement. Sticking to my new diet was easy because of my friends, who are all pretty healthy anyway.

It was after about a month or two when I first noticed that the weight was coming off. My clothes got looser and they fit a lot better. It was just before my Year 10 formal. I had already bought a dress, which was a bit of a tight fit. But by the time the formal came around, it fit me perfectly. I was stoked. I received so many comments from friends and family. They said things like, "I can't believe how well you're doing", and "You look great", which made me feel pretty good.

Earlier this year I reached my goal weight of 68 kilograms. My clothes stopped fitting me, which meant I had to shop. I didn't buy a lot to start with, just enough to keep me going, as I knew I wanted to lose more. But now I've had to buy a whole new wardrobe!

For the first time ever, I love shopping for new clothes. I was dying to hit the surf stores. Before, I would



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go in there and never be able to find anything that fit, and now I can walk into any shop and pick something up off the rack and know that it should fit.

Last summer was a turning point for me, as I felt so much more confident because of my new figure. I bought a bikini – a huge step for me. It's been a year since I joined Weight Watchers and I've lost 33 kilograms!

People treat me differently now, which is good and bad. Good because their compliments give me confidence, but bad knowing that people judge you for the way you look. I get lots more attention from boys, which is good, and I can talk to people now, and not feel like they're judging me. My self-esteem is so much higher.

I still have to eat well to maintain my weight, but now it's a way of life so I'm unlikely to slip back into unhealthy eating habits.

I think I'm proof that you can change your body and feel better about yourself as a result. Believe me, the hard work is worth it.

As told to Christine Knight

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