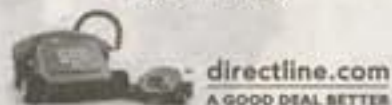


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I DIDN'T notice that I had turned into a porker until four months ago when I tried on my favourite dress. I couldn't do up the side zip where once, alas, it'd hung off me. For two years I'd known I was getting bigger but I promised myself that I'd drop the extra weight "next month". But next month came and went several times and the pounds crept up to more than a stone.

I went from 8st to 9st 3lbs and a size eight to 14, which for my petite 5ft 1in frame made me feel like a diddy sumo wrestler. I wanted my slim body back which is why I embarked on four diets in four months to discover which approach would work best.

In my bid to lose at least half a stone I finally learned what to eat and when in order to slim successfully and keep it off for good.

**DIET ONE: THE COMMON SENSE APPROACH**  
**THE RULES:** Cut out all food with added sugar, takeaways and reduce portion sizes.

The first week was a doddle. I cleared out the jam, chocolate, tomato ketchup and other sugary food from the larder. With my new regime I had rice cakes and a boiled egg for breakfast. Lunch was soup and a cheese sandwich, dinner a big pasta dish with cheese or pesto sauce. I ditched my 11 o'clock cake treat and pick 'n' mix sweets and by day 14 I thought this diet was going well.

I kept up with walking the dog for 45 minutes every morning and going to the gym twice a week. By week four I hadn't cheated and then I weighed myself three days before the end of the diet. I'd only lost 2lbs and I was outraged. I bought a Bakewell tart that I savoured with a cup of tea, heaven. I'd fallen off the diet wagon and my partner Chris came home to find me eating pizza and oven chips.

At the end of the month I'd regained the 2lbs thanks to pigging on cakes and carbohydrates. This blow-out made me realise that I needed a more calorie-counted approach, which is why I embarked on diet two.

**START WEIGHT:** 9st 3lbs. **END WEIGHT:** 9st 3lbs. **WEIGHT LOSS ON DIET ONE:** None.

**DIET TWO: THE HOME DELIVERY DIET**

**THE RULES:** Only eat the meals and snacks delivered by Soulmatefood. For a month I received fresh, organic meals directly to my door. Every day I was eating 10 portions of vegetables with pulses, grains, complex carbs, protein, fruit and nuts. The meals and snacks planned by nutritionists were tasty and came in at around 1,400 calories a day compared to my old diet of 2,200 calories.

Breakfast was yogurt and nuts or pancakes with cream cheese. Lunch was a tasty soup or a massive variety of salads or stir-fries with quorn (I'm vegetarian). Snacks were smoothies, dried apple and nuts, chickpea paté and oatcakes or fruit. Bread, pasta and rice were scarce, though they did appear in some of the lunches.

Chris tried some meals and his verdict was the same as mine. "If we won the lottery we could have this food delivered all the time. It's great." The results were as good as the food tasted. In the first week I lost 6lbs and during the next 21 days I lost 11lb a week. It was fantastic and I didn't feel hungry or tired once but there were some downsides. My food box was delivered twice a week on a Tuesday and Friday before noon. Quite a few times the driver was late or left a card saying no one was in when I was upstairs. I then had to ring the depot and rearrange the

It's the time of year when we want to shed extra pounds. To help you beat the battle of the bulge **MONICA CAFFERKY** road-tested four weight loss regimes over four months and the results are surprising

delivery. But the 9lbs loss outweighed any of those hassles. More importantly I learnt how I should be eating: three meals a day with two snacks and no processed food.

**START WEIGHT:** 9st 3lbs. **END WEIGHT:** 8st 8lbs. **WEIGHT LOSS ON DIET TWO:** 9 lbs. **TOTAL LOSS:** 9lbs. **COST:** £150 per week. **CONTACT:** Soulmatefood, which delivers nationwide, on 0870 803 3833 or go to www.soulmatefood.com.

**DIET THREE: THE SPIRITUAL WAY**

**THE RULES:** Say a daily affirmation, followed by a visualisation.

It's confession time. I did lose 9lbs on Soulmatefood but for the last two weeks I indulged in cakes twice a week. This lack of willpower made me realise I needed extra help. I contacted Seka Nikolic, a world-renowned bio-energy healer whose clients include singer Kylie Minogue and actress Joely Richardson.

Seka confirmed that sugar craving was an issue she treated often, along with more mainstream health problems such as infertility. During the 30-minute session at her West Hampstead clinic in London she explained that bio-energy healing is a hands-on technique that aims to rebalance the body's electro-magnetic circuitry system. This system can be seen by bio-energy healers and corresponds to the meridian lines used in



**BALANCE:** Monica knows carbohydrate-heavy food is out and a mixture of fruit, veg and no dairy suits her best



**ANALYSIS:** From Simplicity Health



**HANDS ON:** Seka Nikolic at work

acupuncture. Any imbalances can cause illnesses.

Seka began her treatment at my crown, hovering her hands inches away from my head for a few minutes, then moving to my throat, shoulders, neck, heart and groin. I felt incredibly relaxed. Every few minutes she flicked her right hand (as if swatting away a fly) to disperse the negative energy that she'd drawn out of my body. As she was healing me I felt incredibly hot. "I'm filling you with positive energy and you can sense it," she explained.

At the end she said: "People eat for more reasons than just being hungry, sometimes they are unhappy, sometimes stressed or have a work issue. After tuning into your body I pick up that your sugar cravings are stress-related."

She explained that when I've a

to get rid of the clutter in my life. I felt like a new me with new habits and the good habits stuck. I lost 3lbs - and still ate cake on a Saturday.

**START WEIGHT:** 8st 8lbs. **END WEIGHT:** 8st 5lbs. **WEIGHT LOSS ON DIET THREE:** 3lbs. **TOTAL LOSS:** 12lbs. **COST:** £120, 30-minute session. **CONTACT:** Seka on 0207 443 5544, or go to www.sekanikolic.com. You Can Heal Yourself by Seka Nikolic (Macmillan, £10.99) is out now.

**DIET FOUR: THE BLOOD TEST DIET**

**THE RULES:** Ban all food containing cow's milk.

Although food allergy testing is not aimed at weight loss everyone I know who has taken a test and changed their diet following advice has lost weight and felt better.

I sent off for the Fast Check Food Allergy Test Panel from Simplicity Health. The instructions were easy to follow, all I had to do was prick my finger with the surgical needle and squeeze out enough blood to fill a small sampling tube. This was sent off in an envelope and tested in a laboratory for reactions to foods.

My results arrived by e-mail two days later and showed sensitivity to cow's milk. This surprised me but I cut out dairy to see what would happen. Within a week my bloating had vanished and by the end of the month I'd not had a migraine, which was unusual. My eyes were sparkling, my skin was glowing and my face wasn't puffy. This diet marked the end of my journey. By then I realised that I shouldn't be living on a mono-diet of carbohydrates and should be cooking from scratch.

Cutting out dairy was the final step to eating the right way for me. Without trying I lost 2lbs in this month, bringing my total loss to a stone. Now when I look in the mirror I like what I see and I've promised myself that I'll never let the pounds creep on again.

**START WEIGHT:** 8st 5lbs. **END WEIGHT:** 8st 3lbs. **WEIGHT LOSS ON DIET FOUR:** 2lbs. **TOTAL LOSS:** 14lbs (one stone). **COST:** £29.99. **CONTACT:** Go to www.simplicityhealth.co.uk

**'I cut out dairy; my bloating and migraines went'**

deadline I experience a surge of energy and need the sugar to pick me up afterwards, which is true.

"Swap manufactured sugar for natural fruit sugars but allow yourself cake once a week. When we deny ourselves something we crave it more, having a weekly treat won't harm you," she said.

She gave me a daily affirmation: "I'm in control of what I eat."

It helped because after two weeks I felt in control of my cake habit. My new diet was porridge with fruit, soup and pitta with cheese and vegetarian sausages with lots of vegetables for dinner. Snacks were fruit or hummus on oatcakes.

I also did the daily visualisation Seka suggested and every night imagined myself at my ideal size. The idea is that you reprogramme your mind to change bad habits and think like a slim person. A strange thing happened during the third week after seeing Seka, I had a massive clear-out because I wanted

**TOMORROW: THE SCIENCE BEHIND A SUCCESSFUL DIET**