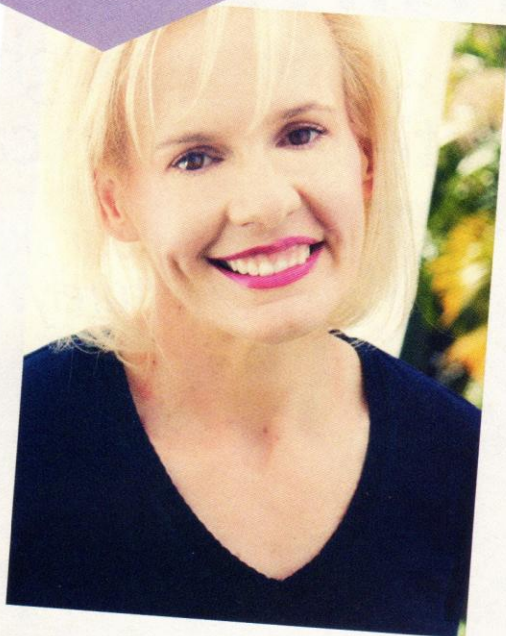


GET HEALTHY

Reader story



**Brisbane reader
Sally Symonds, 37,
lost a total of 45kg
in 33 weeks**



Half the woman I used to be

Self-confessed workaholic Sally Symonds' shock at realising she was morbidly obese was the trigger she needed to re-prioritise her life and finally get healthy

**GOT AN
INSPIRING
STORY
TO TELL?**

You could earn up to \$500. Submissions must be true, unpublished, original and 800-1000 words in length. See healthsmart.com.au for more details

IN JULY 2002 I was a 29-year-old workaholic. I'm only 162.5cm, but I weighed 106.5kg and wore a size 24. I realised for the first time that I wasn't just overweight, I was morbidly obese.

Every Friday night I'd climb exhausted into bed and sleep for 12 to 14 hours. I had almost-daily migraines, high blood pressure and felt tired all the time. I was eating lots of chocolate every day, I hardly ever ate healthy food such as fruit and vegies, and I hated exercise.

I was a normal size as a child and weighed 63kg (size 10) when I finished school. I was never super-slim – my butt and thighs were always “trouble spots” – but it didn't worry me that much. Before I lost weight, being a professional success was all that mattered. I used to work about 60 paid hours a week as a school-based private speech and drama teacher. In addition to this, there were

countless hours of preparation and organisation. I remember when I completed the 2001 census, one of the questions was *How many hours have you worked in the past week?* My answer was 116! My weight was also contributing to my stress levels and my efficiency in the workplace.

I'd just spent time in Sydney, after winning a scholarship to study accents at NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art). Surrounded by “beautiful people” and the even more beautiful clothes in the Sydney shops – most of which wouldn't fit me – made me think.

I was also turned down for a promotion at work that I had really wanted, and I was devastated. After the initial shock wore off, I realised that it was only a job. Where was my sense of perspective? I had separated from my fiancé a year earlier, and my working too much was a factor in the break-up.

So, on July 14, 2002, I decided to lose weight and put as much effort into my health and personal life as I did my work. I soon realised that becoming fit and healthy meant I'd be more productive at work and happier as a person overall.

I didn't set myself a specific goal weight. I didn't use any particular diet or exercise plans. And I didn't tell the world I was going to lose weight. I did, however, lose 45kg in 33 weeks, kept it off for years, and even lost a few more kilos. So I've lost over a whopping 50kg. From an outsider's perspective, that might seem like too much, too quickly. But I had a lot of weight to lose, I did it sensibly, and I've kept it off without too much trouble.

It was a step-by-step process of food and activity changes. Initially I just started walking, three times a week for ten to 20 minutes. After a few months I was walking most days for an hour. Previously I'd paid someone to walk my dog! After I'd lost 17kg, I joined a gym and started strength training and boxing. I also began Latin dancing (heaps of fun and a great work-out). Gym-time was also me-time; I now had a chance to de-stress and problem-solve.

I also gradually changed my diet: I started off with more fruit and vegetables, then worked on eating less fat, more high-quality protein, and fewer high-GI carbs. The only drastic change I made was telling myself I wasn't going to eat any more chocolate. Although I had one slip-up, at one point I hadn't eaten chocolate for six months!

Impractical, trendy diets or strict exercise regimes weren't for me. I knew I needed to get to my "healthy" mindset on my own terms – taking into account my personal and work commitments, then making time for all of them. Five months in, I started keeping a food diary and was scrupulous about listing exactly what I ate.

I had days when I considered giving up – especially when I reached a plateau. But that's when I'd shake things up. Weight loss stops when your body becomes used to new ways of eating and exercising, so I made changes to my programme to give my body the wake-up call it needed to push through the plateau.

When I went to my doctor, he'd encourage me to keep going as my blood pressure and stress levels were lowering, and I was so much more energetic and focused. I kept that initial weight off for over five years, then lost a few more kilos. Now I usually weigh around 54kg, which is almost half of what I weighed when I started, but still within my healthy range.

I actually eat more now than I did before, I just make much better food choices. I can eat chocolate every day, just not a whole block, and I'm much better educated about healthy lifestyle habits.

At about six months in, I realised I didn't really like the place where I worked. My weight loss gave me the courage set up a home speech and drama practice, which gradually morphed more into teaching corporate communication and public-speaking skills. It has turned out to be one of the best economic and lifestyle decisions I ever made.

Eventually I met my (now) husband, and ten weeks later we were engaged. He was very sporty and played professional rugby league into his early 30s, but when we met he was morbidly obese. However, he too has learnt how to embrace a healthy lifestyle without going overboard: he's now lost more than 30kg and is in the best shape of his life.

Losing weight is just so empowering. I know I can achieve whatever I want in life. I'm extremely strong physically. I'm also much more emotionally, spiritually and mentally tough.

Everyone can strive to be a more fit and healthy version of themselves without too much time, money or effort if they only knew how. So now I'm hoping to be able to help others overcome their battles with weight and work/life balance, and that's really exciting to me. ●

I actually eat more now than I did before, I just make better choices. I can eat chocolate every day, just not a whole block



Now a personal trainer and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner, Sally can be reached via sally@sallysymonds.com.au.