

“I’ve transformed my life – and I feel amazing!”

Emma Carlton has finally banished her diet demons for good

My weight problems started from a very early age. I was just seven-years-old when my parents split up and it hit me quite hard. I didn’t realise it at the time, but I began turning to food for comfort. I would eat a lot of bread, butter and jam, and I was very good at hiding it. It was a case of ‘while nobody’s looking eat it quick!’

I was sad about the family breakdown, and also very angry, but I soon discovered that eating would actually make those feelings go away. My problem was, I wouldn’t know when to stop, and this cycle continued for some time.

When I was about nine or 10, I remember walking home from school one day with a friend,

and she said to me, “I’m going to the fish and chip shop for my tea.” I replied, “I’m not allowed to do that!” but we went anyway. And this lovely lady gave me a big portion of chips with some fried batter on the top and it was heaven! I was hooked.

The weight was really starting to pile on by now and I developed a very round face. School became an unhappy place for me, because I was bullied for my growing frame. So, the moment we’d finished for the day, if I had some pocket money, I’d go straight to the fish and chip shop. But I knew mum had cooked

me dinner too. I remember returning home and she would have this wholesome meal ready for me on the table and I’d already be full. I’d still have the beef dripping that the chips were fried in all around my mouth, as I sat down to eat again. I had crammed them into my mouth so quickly that I don’t think I even tasted them.

Secret eater

On top of the chips and mum’s meal I’d also have pudding, and afterwards I’d feel very uncomfortable and sick. Then I’d start to feel guilty because I’d eaten so much. I was so ashamed. But, later, when my dinner had gone down, I’d sneak into the kitchen and make some toast, or have a biscuit, or down a bottle of milk – whatever I could grab really. I knew I had to be quick in case anyone caught me. I don’t think my actions were going totally unnoticed, but I think it was tolerated because I was going through a difficult time. I was quite aware of what I was doing but I didn’t

realise I could take a bit more responsibility for it. I would just see something and eat it because it would make me feel better. I needed a release and, for me, food was it.

By my early teens I’d hit 12½ st. I tried loads of different diets and even drew before and after pictures of myself to motivate me. Looking back, they were quite cruel depictions of what I thought I looked like, but I always tried to add humour to

them. Everything was a bit of a joke, but it was actually masking quite a lot of pain. I felt constantly ashamed of my appearance and I

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didn’t know how to deal with it, so I’d go back to the only way I knew that would make me feel better – eating.

Ironically, I was quite an active child. I rode horses and I loved to cycle, but if I’m honest, as much as I knew they were doing me some good, I just wasn’t doing enough of them to make a difference. And once I started working full time, I’m afraid to say they were abandoned altogether.

I’d always been very passionate about food, so I trained as a chef, which was a bit of a double-edged sword. I had this passion to create, but at the same time, I was also constantly surrounded by food! I took on a position in a patisserie at a hotel in Newcastle and my weight increased some more. Making all these wonderful pastries meant I had to taste them along the way – so I was continuously nibbling. And when it came to having a proper meal I didn’t actually eat that well. I was working very long hours, and I actually lost some weight without even trying. So I fluctuated between 12-14st, because there were times when I’d think ‘I’ll have this piece of





vital stats

NAME:
Emma Carlton
AGE: 37
HEIGHT: 5'6"
PAST WEIGHT:
17st 2lbs
CURRENT WEIGHT:
10st 5lbs
TIME TAKEN:
18 months
LOST:
6st 11lbs

menu then

BREAKFAST: white toast with butter, orange juice
LUNCH: tuna mayonnaise sandwich, crisps and muffin
DINNER: pasta with chorizo and crème fraiche with garlic bread, red wine
SNACKS: white toast and butter and jam, milky coffees

menu now

BREAKFAST: oat porridge with soya yoghurt, stewed fruit and seeds
LUNCH: spinach, avocado and roast squash salad, apple, banana
DINNER: salmon with lots of veg and brown rice, Brazil nuts or dates
SNACKS: oat cakes, nuts

Lost
6st 11lbs

pie and deal with the consequences later' and others when I was just too busy to eat at all.

My weight continued to yo-yo in this manner when I moved to Jersey when I was 20. I changed careers and went into telecommunications, but this meant I would be sitting down all day and barely moving around at all. Any sort of activity had now ground to a halt. Looking back, I can see that because I wasn't active, I wasn't very happy either. I didn't know it at the time, but I was actually suffering from depression and I believe it was compounded by the foods I was consuming. My weight had escalated to 17st and I was continually comfort eating to make myself feel better about my size. But it didn't last long – it was just a quick fix.

Feeling alone

I tried Weight Watchers three times, and I did manage to lose 4st in just nine months, but I put it all back on again – and more! The overeating was out of control! But I hadn't lost the weight for me – I'd lost it so other people would say how good I looked and make me feel better.

Even though my job kept me busy, I was pretty lonely. Comfort eating is actually quite alienating, and I found myself withdrawing from everyday activities like meeting friends and going out. I became a bit of a hermit and would turn down invitations thinking I wouldn't fit in. I felt so self-conscious!

But, I was aware that I wasn't going anywhere in my life and I was frightened of what to do next. It took me another year of dabbling in some health books, and doing a bit of research into diets, before I finally faced the issue. Then, when my colleague Angela made one simple comment something finally clicked. "I see you've got that big jumper on again!" she said simply.

Her comment stirred something inside me. I didn't want people to know how bad I felt about myself, so I would hide under these big, bulky, unattractive clothes. But I realised that she knew how I was feeling. She had been brave and kind enough to ask me what was going on, and that suddenly gave me the courage to take control of my spiralling weight. Angela had recently lost 3st herself, and I could see how amazing she was looking. I felt totally inspired, and when I asked her what her secret was, she told me it was Slimming Together.

I didn't rush to join though – I was scared stiff. I had procrastinated for so long that I had become frightened of what I might find. So it took me another nine months before I actually signed up,



Photography: Ant Jones
Styling: Boo Hill
Hair & make-up: Dottie Monaghan
Location: Shoot Spaces

Cream top £55 and black skirt £59, Principles
Shoes £19.99, TK Maxx
Bracelet £3, F&F at Tesco
Blue dress £120, Debenhams
Shoes £35, Freemans
Necklace, models own

and when I was 34, in June 2006, I began following the Slimming Together plan and principles.

I wanted to lose 6st and Joanne Reid Rodrigues, who runs Slimming Together, said it was a realistic target, but advised me to tackle it a little bit at a time. I was to aim for 7lbs at first, then another 7lbs after that, and so on. Suddenly I didn't feel like I had a whole mountain to climb at once – I would take small steps, and this seemed far more achievable.

I followed Joanne's book, *The Life Transformation Diet*,

which taught me about how different foods could nourish me and make me feel. It was a real eye-opener,

as I discovered that any flour and sugar in my diet had been depleting my energy to the point where I found it difficult to even walk. I also learned about foods that can help lift your mood, so this really helped me with my depression.

A new start

Food-wise, I had a 1,250-calorie allowance and could eat up to 30g fat per day. I was encouraged to make healthier food choices, like filling up on fruit and vegetables, and within just four days I started seeing some dramatic changes. By cutting out white flour my energy levels started to rise and I felt less bloated, and by the end of the first week I'd dropped a whopping 5lbs!

I remember when I'd lost about 3st I once woke up in the middle of the night absolutely bursting with energy! It was such a fantastic feeling after being lethargic and sluggish for all those years. At that moment I realised that I had so much energy that I needed to do something with it, so I decided to take up some exercise. I needed to tone up while doing something gentle, so I joined a Pilatés class, which also helped me relax. I walked a lot too, so I was becoming much more active on the whole.

Angela noticed my weight loss quite early on, as she saw me at work everyday, but other people started to do the same when they saw me smiling more. I was becoming more confident and looking healthier – I was glowing! It was motivating to hear so many words of encouragement and that really kept me going. Some people's reactions were hilarious. One woman I knew walked straight past me and didn't recognise me when I called after her. She was convinced I'd won the lottery and used the money to help me lose weight!

These days I'm very aware of the choices I can make. For me, there's a left and a right road. I know where the left road will take me and I will always have the option to use those old behaviours. I'm conscious of them, but I choose to go the right way.

Within 18 months I dropped from a size 24 to a size 10-12. I'm very happy, but I think the best thing about this whole process is that I have found the real me, and I have got an identity now. I had handed it over to my overeating, but it wasn't the true me. I think there are things that come along in

life that you have to face, and how you decide to react to them is entirely your choice. You can learn from these lessons or you

can choose to eat. It's up to you!

Angela and I completed the Jersey ITEX Walk this June – 48.1 miles around the entire island! I always thought that walk was way out of reach for someone like me, as it's very physically tough. But reaching the finish line was a massive achievement and it felt so good.

I love my shape now, and it's great not having to worry about ripples of fat showing through my clothes, or fitting into figure-hugging clothes. I'm very proud of my achievement, so much so, that I'm looking to re-start a career in food, specialising in nutrition. Losing weight and learning about the health benefits of food fuelled a passion for nutrition that I didn't know I had. I want to help other people like me and I hope that I can inspire them to change – and help them realise that they have choices too!

For more information on *Slimming Together* and *The Life Transformation Diet* by Joanne Reid Rodrigues visit slimmingtogether.com



“I'm very happy. I have found the real me and I have got an identity now”