

THE FIRST 40 LBS

A Look Into
How I Lost it -
My Honest
Advice and
Tips

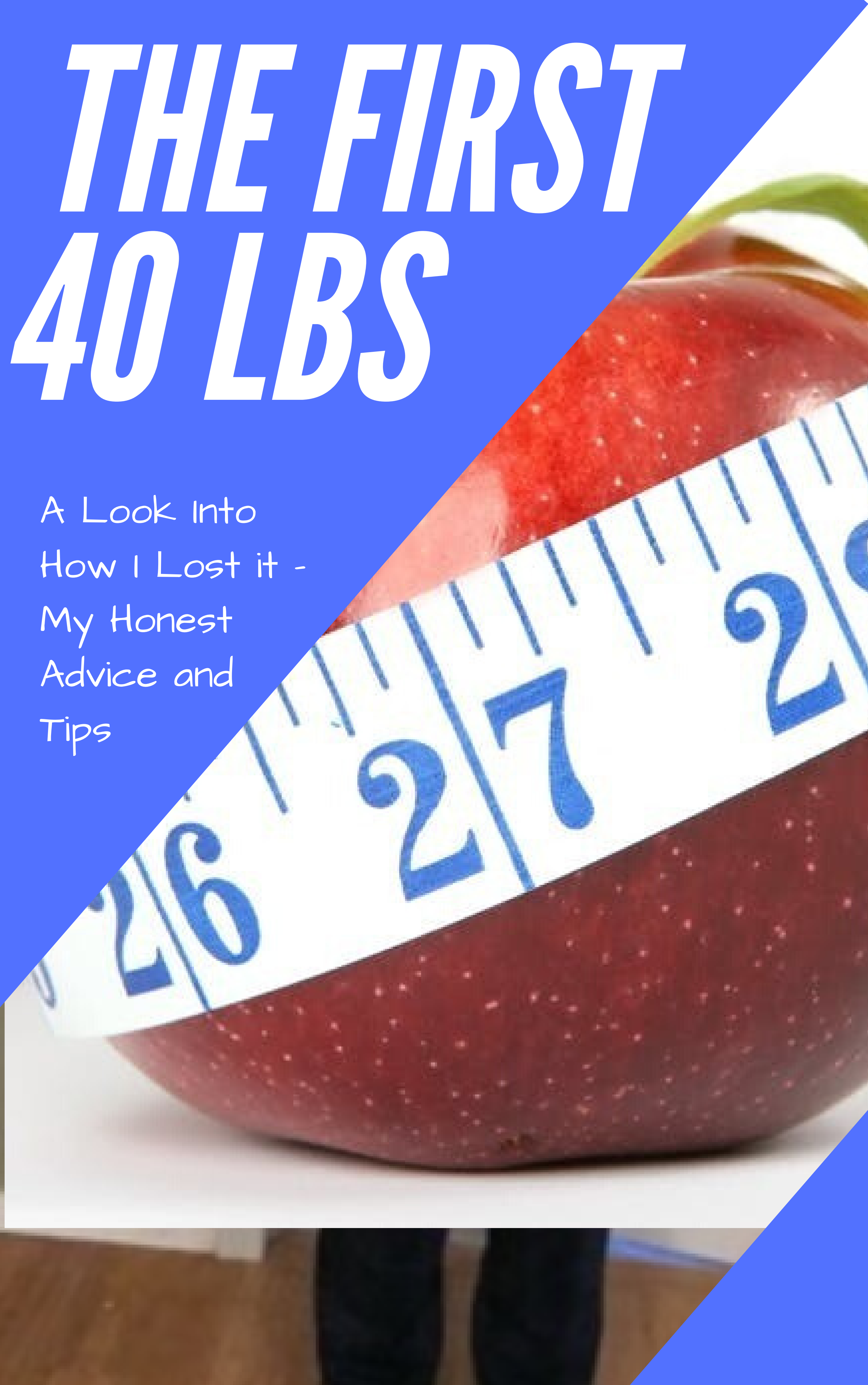


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Introduction

First and foremost, let me be clear about one thing. I'm not an "expert" at weight loss, nor am I a nutritionist, dietitian, or personal trainer. What I am is an ordinary girl who has lost weight on her own - no pills, insane workouts, or crazy crash dieting.

The reason why I'm writing this book is to share REAL tips and advice for weight loss, beyond the hyped up advice of the diet and fitness industry. There are a million programs out there that all claim to tell you the **secret** to weight loss as that is what so many desperately seek. But the truth is, there's no "secret" - it takes hard work to make it happen, and it definitely doesn't happen overnight.

Experience has shown to me that just jumping on the weight loss bandwagon and staying motivated long enough to even just lose the first 5 or 10 lbs is seriously the HARDEST part.

This is especially true when you're transitioning from super bad habits - constant junk food, fast food, sweets, and pop (aka soda/coke/fizzy drinks - whatever you may call it).

Every single day I'd tell myself "I'll start tomorrow", or, "I'll start next week". "This will be the LAST time I totally binge on pizza and ice cream!" Only, I think you know that this "tomorrow" I keep talking about never comes.

Each day I'd wake up and set a new promise to myself that it'd be the last time, yet I always managed to stretch out "the next day" for months, which turned into years. Which then turned into me being in my early 30's and the heaviest I have ever been, which was basically 300 lbs in the summer of 2018.

Since then, I have managed to put things in reverse and get my weight down quite substantially. It has made me feel better, and my feet no longer send shooting pains up my legs when I stand up.

Although I'm not near my goal weight yet, I wanted to share some tips that helped me get started and stay motivated in the beginning.

Taking baby steps

When it comes to losing weight, taking small steps can totally help you. You may think the only way to go is to do a complete 180 lifestyle change, but that doesn't work for everyone.

The thought for some people can be so overwhelming they just end up never making any changes at all!

So, here's what I did. In the summer of 2018 when I noticed I was getting quite heavy, I decided I needed to do something. I wasn't mentally ready to start a total "diet" or get really serious about weight loss, but I knew I couldn't keep going down this road.

I wasn't sure just how heavy I was because I was terrified of stepping on the scale, but I knew I was heavier than I had ever been.

I could tell this from the way my clothes fit and the way I felt. My body was starting to hurt in ways it never had before, and sometimes my feet would send up shooting pains from just standing up.

Change #1: Eliminate pop (soda) and all calorie filled drinks

So the first change I made was to give up pop. I had gotten in this horrible, awful habit of purchasing it to drink at home. When I'd buy it, I'd always tell myself it was just for a "sometimes" treat but the reality was I'd drink 3+ cans a day.

Honestly though, that was just the tip of the iceberg of the total crap I was putting into my body.

Looking back, it seems gross. It's so awful for you, and when you're not deep in the habit of drinking it all the time, you realize just how thick, syrupy, and overwhelmingly sweet it really is. Not only is it full of sugar and calories, it's *so* bad for your teeth!

I didn't just give up pop either, I basically gave up any drink with calories (I make exceptions for coffee). But no energy drinks, gatorades, or juice, not even orange juice! A lot of people think orange juice is healthy but it still adds a lot of calories if you drink a lot of it. It's better to just eat an orange.

This is probably the simplest step most people can make to cut out extra calories without making any changes to their diet.

That being said, it's not exactly easy to do this, but once I made it past the first few days it really wasn't hard at all. The cravings for it just go away, and I found myself actually wanting to drink water instead.

Now for me, I have always liked water (especially with ice) so I didn't find drinking it awful like some might. But I still didn't switch to only drinking plain water.

At first, I drink plenty of those 0 (or low-calorie) flavor packs you put in water. They were definitely a life saver.

As time went on, I found myself craving plain, cold ice water more. The zero calorie flavor packs sort of left a funny taste in my mouth and I decided it would just be better to drink it plain. (If you find yourself **NEEDING** extra flavor though, I would recommend using them!)

Change #2: Get more active

After I stopped drinking pop (and other calorie filled drinks) and got comfortable with it, I then added in a walking routine. I started this about 2-3 weeks after I gave up drinks with calories.

The key here is **BABY STEPS** - making small changes one at a time. I didn't start lifting weights or doing P90x - I simply walked!

There's common advice out there that it takes 21 days to make a habit, but it might take more or less time for you. I didn't use that exact number when deciding when to make the next change, I just did it when I felt like I was ready.

At first I just strolled down the street - probably about half a mile total. I'd be sweating, hot, and super uncomfortable before it was even over. While it was pretty hot, and I was pushing my daughter in a stroller, the walk shouldn't have been that hard for me.

When I was in my 20's, I used to walk 6+ miles per day with no issues. The fact that my body was having trouble managing the half mile walk down the street and back was a wake up call like no other. I may be a bit older, but not old enough to justify my body not working like it should.

As time went on, I added more length to my walks. It did get easier, especially as the summer was ending and the weather cooled down (and as I lost weight and got more fit).

If you live somewhere super hot, I'd recommend using indoor equipment to workout if you're heat sensitive. You don't even have to have anything fancy if you don't want to buy expensive equipment or a gym membership.

I used to do those Leslie Sansone "Walk Away the Pounds" DVDs back in the day and I always liked them, even if they were sort of cheesy. They have some of them on YouTube now, so you can check them out!

Change #3: Tracking my food intake

A couple of months after all of this, I finally was ready to think about changing my diet. Now, I didn't start with any hardcore diet - no keto, low-carb, grapefruit fast - nor did I start starving myself.

I wasn't even ready to eliminate a lot of the bad stuff I was eating, but I was ready to start incorporating more healthy food and practicing moderation. (Hey, I took this baby step thing 100% serious!)

MyFitnessPal

So, I decided to start with an app called MyFitnessPal. You've probably heard of it because it's like THE most popular calorie/food tracking app on the planet.

I used it to calculate how many calories I should eat per day based on my personal stats, and set it to lose 2 lbs per week. You can change it to 1 lb, or ½ lb, or to maintain.

It gave me somewhere around 1,800 calories per day so I went with that.

When you first start using a calorie tracking app, it's super tedious and annoying for the first week or two when it's still learning all the different foods you eat. You have to search (or scan labels) for everything and enter each recipe, it just takes up so much time!

However if you stick with it, eventually it will have a pretty good history and database of all the foods you eat, and you'll be able to easily add meals just by clicking a button. If you eat the same meals over and over again, it's pretty brainless.

And even if you don't, there's a good chance you're eating at least a portion of the same food from day to day (or week to week) so it does take a lot of work out after it gathers up a decent history of the foods you track.

I wasn't about to start eating 100% "clean" or anything here, but I did start at least tracking what I put in my mouth, which is a very important step! I also started eating more fruit and veggies, and less pizza and ice cream.

There is so much debate over what you can and can't eat to lose weight, but personal experience has taught me that eating less (and tracking it) works perfectly fine. The weight won't melt off in a week, but over time the whole "eat less, move more" thing really is true.

It's just important to know HOW much you're eating and how much your body actually needs, as you need to be in an actual caloric deficit to lose the weight. What that is will be different for everyone.

Change #4: Amping up the activity (using a Fitbit)

So at the same time as I started to track my food, I also started getting more active and using my Fitbit more seriously. I aimed for 10,000 steps a day.

I had taken things slow enough that by this point, I was ready to make more substantial changes at once.

I actually already owned one that had been sitting in a drawer for awhile... If you don't know what a Fitbit is, it's one of those activity trackers that tracks your steps and calories, and it even tracks your heart rate and sleep patterns too.

You see, I've sort of been a little Fitbit obsessed since way back in the day - probably around 2011 or so - and I've owned several different models. This was way back before they made any that were wristbands, and you had to clip it to your pocket or bra!

While I was super inactive and obese at the start of this journey, it wasn't always the case. I used to aim for 10,000+ steps per day. But after I had my first baby in 2017, the weight slowly piled on. A lot of it had to do with the stress of motherhood, but there were a lot of reasons at play.

While I still wasn't doing a strict workout routine at this point, I increased my activity and got more serious about it. Simple 1/2 mile strolls were now too easy for me, at this point I was trying to take 3-4 mile walks every day.

Stepping on the scale, taking measurements, and starting photos

At some point during these baby steps, you'll need to find the courage to do 3 things - step on the scale, take measurements of your body, and take the "beginning" photos.

I'm not one of those people who thinks you should let the scale rule your life, but having a starting point is SO important to your journey. You may not see your true weight loss results because you look in the mirror every day, but if you look back on your measurements and take progress photos each month over time you will notice a difference.

When you can look back and check your progress along the way, you'll find much more encouragement to keep going. If you don't do this, you'll be kicking yourself in the rear after you lose the first 20-30 lbs!

For me, I did this right before I started tracking my food, because I needed a real weight to enter in MyFitnessPal.

My scale read 295.6!

That was 2 months *after* I gave up pop and started walking more, so there's really no doubt in my mind that I was over 300 lbs at one point! And to think, I thought I would never let myself get over 250!

Staying on Track

If there's only one lesson I could tell you that I learned from losing the first 40 lbs, it's to always be prepared (Girl Scout motto!).

This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to meal prep an entire week in advance and stock your fridge full of food prep containers. I personally never did that (not my style) and I am proof you can be prepared without it.

To me, that is just so dull and monotonous I wouldn't last 2 days! But, to each their own. As long as I was prepared with food and snacks in my house, I was good to go.

Preparing for meals AT home

For me, what kept me on track was simply having good food options available at home and being realistic about it. I don't have the time to prepare meals that take hours each and every day, so I had to make sure what I planned for was easy enough I'd actually make it. I also had to make sure I had easy breakfast options and healthy snacks.

One thing I liked to do was buy frozen, already prepared meats. I tried to look for healthier options and not the heavily breaded chicken tenders or anything like that.

Two of my favorites were Tyson's Black Pepper and Herb Chicken Tenders (no breading, just plain chicken with seasonings) and Tortilla Crusted Tilapia. I found these both at Costco, but if you don't shop there I'm sure you can find alternative options at your grocery store.

This let me easily make healthier dinners on the fly, and all I'd have to do was bake them in the oven and whip up a couple easy sides. I didn't have to worry about seasoning or anything as that part was already done for me.

For times I did a bit more actual home cooking, the kitchen gadget that helped me immensely was my Instant Pot. The ability to prepare dishes in ONE pot and turn on and be hands-off really helped me cook at home more often.

I also liked to make dishes that would give me some leftovers (and leftovers I'd actually enjoy eating, because to be honest not every food tastes that great leftover). This meant I would frequently make things like soups and chili, since they yield a lot and taste good reheated.

A few things I would make often are instant pot chili, lasagna soup, and chicken meatballs (or chicken chunks) with general tsos sauce. You can find these recipes (and more) on my blog, under the "recipes" tab!

If you don't remember, it's <https://wendysweightjourney.com>

Additional things I'd like make were Instant Pot mac and cheese and turkey meatloaf. I'd also always have veggies to quickly make up fresh with dinner, as well as a quick side like potatoes, couscous, or rice.

To me, carbs weren't the enemy. I was still eating plenty of them. The most important thing was calculating the calories and tracking them so I knew I was staying within my calorie range each day.

Snacks on the go

Another part of being prepared was also to have a plan for when I was out and about. I started carrying protein bars and snacks in my purse, so I'd never get so hungry I'd break down and order fast food or something.

To be honest, this plan was not foolproof and I may have fallen to cravings a time or two, but for the most part it helped a lot.

My favorite snack to carry was Quest or (Costco's Kirkland version) protein bars. I'm actually not a huge protein bar person because I feel like they have a funny taste, and they're usually really high in calories with tons of sugar (so why would I not just eat a candy bar instead?) But the Quest or Kirkland bars only have 190 calories and 1 gram of sugar, and they taste better to me. They also are pretty good at keeping hunger to a minimum, at least for awhile.

Other snack options I'd take on the go were string cheese, grapes, apple chips, or Grains First crackers (or any whole grain crackers).

Desserts

I'm a HUGE sweets person, so I definitely needed alternatives to more traditional super calorie dense desserts that I loved. Some people may be able to just give up sweets altogether, but that is too much of a change for me to make right now.

A few products I found to be delicious were the Archer Farms Low-Calorie ice cream pints (I found them at Target), Skinny Cow ice cream bars, and sherbet. These were lower in calories and fat and allowed me to have treats without going overboard.

For those who don't cook...

I realize we all lead busy lives, and for some it's just not realistic to be prepared and cook meals all week. Even if the meals are "easy", it still takes time to do all the planning, grocery shopping, preparing, and cleanup.

I'm able to manage it alright since I work from home and only have 1 kid, but even then I admit it does require extra time.

If this is you, a little tip I have would be to try a meal delivery service. Hello Fresh and BistroMD are popular. The thing that's cool about BistroMD is they're doctor-designed and specifically tailored for healthy weight loss. They have different meal plans you can choose from based on your dietary needs.

I've never tried it, but a lot of their food actually looks delicious to me and I'm a picky eater. They also have options for breakfast and snacks!

You can learn more and find their meal plans here. It's a little costly, but if it can keep you better prepared and staying on track, I'd say it's worth it. Especially if it means you have much less grocery shopping to do.

Identifying trigger foods

If you struggle with overeating, you need to know your trigger foods. This is what gets me over and over again, is eating the wrong foods thinking I can handle them. I cannot.

For me, it's things like pizza, chocolate bars, ice cream, and cookies. I know I can have these things in moderation, but the problem is it's so hard for me to control myself around food like this.

What I've learned (and what I'm still working on) is finding alternatives to these foods that are still satisfying and I can eat more frequently. I started making my own pizza at home that was healthier than takeout, and I found eating low-calorie ice cream bars and sherbet still satisfied that sweet craving while reducing calories and fat.

These alternatives allow me to more easily eat less and not totally triggered to eat until I'm stuffed.

I still do eat regular pizza and cookies, but I try to do it only occasionally.

Staying Motivated

Being prepared for healthy meals and eliminating triggers is part of the equation, but there's an entire mental struggle with actually staying motivated to keep going with weight loss.

After awhile it just sort of gets boring, and it's so easy to slip up. For me, it usually starts innocently with a cheat meal, then slips down-hill into being off-track for weeks.

I have to be 100% mentally on-track for the cheat meals and cheat days to work.

Finding a reason to want to lose the weight

If you have a good reason why you want to lose weight, it will be easier to stick to it. It doesn't really matter what the reason is, just as long as it's your reason and YOU want to do it.

In the past, I always tried to lose weight to please others. It never worked. I realized I needed to do this for my health, and to be around a long time for my daughter and the people that loved me.

Documenting the journey

Another aspect to keeping motivated were weekly weigh-ins, progress pictures, and keeping track of my journey. I personally did this through my blog and YouTube channel, but most people might not want to document their journey that in-depth.

You could simply keep a personal journal and photo diary to help you stay on track, and you wouldn't have to share it with anyone but yourself. Weight loss can be a deeply personal thing for many and I understand not wanting to share it.

Financial incentives

The last thing I want to talk about in the motivational department, and something I haven't mentioned yet within this book, is if you keep a financial incentive for weight loss it may help you stay on track. (This has actually been proven in research studies)

You could do this by putting money aside in a jar each time you lost a pound, and only breaking into it after you lose all the weight. You could also keep it with a close family member or friend if you don't trust yourself to not dip into it early.

However what I actually did was place a bet on myself with a program called HealthyWage. This may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I personally think it's a great idea.

They have a bet called a HealthyWager, in which you bet a certain amount of money you'll lose weight (the amount of weight and the time it takes is determined by you). If you win, you get your money back plus a profit.

To me, this was more motivational because I would actually be making some money along the way rather than just getting it back.

I do know this is completely legit, and the company pays out winners. They've even been featured on NPR, Washington Post, ABC News, and other famous outlets. I also am in Facebook support groups for others on their HealthyWage journeys, and see people winning often!

I bet a total of \$900 over the course of 18 months that I'd lose 60 lbs. I know that seems like a ton of money, but you do NOT have to bet that much. It can be whatever amount you want, as long as it's over \$100 total. You can pay in monthly installments, so you could be as little as \$10/month if you wanted to.

You can actually use this link to play with their prize calculator and see how much you could potentially win. Hey, it's free to mess around with it so at the very least, you could see what is possible even if you don't want to make the investment.

To be completely honest, my bet was initially only \$600 over 12 months. The reason it turned into \$900 over 18 months was because I wasn't going to make my goal in time (you can extend your bet if you need to).

Still though, in the end, my prize is just shy of \$2,000. Which means I get my \$900 investment back plus an \$1,100 profit. That's over 2x my bet, so I'm happy with it.

You can make your bet something much less risky if you want. You only need to lose 10% of your body weight minimum, so losing 10% over a year is more than doable even if you go super slow!

I have until June 10, 2020 to meet this goal. I still have some weight left to lose, and will update this section once the date approaches.

Conclusion

When it comes to losing weight I realized that the most important, yet hardest, step is just getting started. Taking such small steps totally was a game changer for me in terms of actually DOING something, rather than just waiting around for the day to come where I'll suddenly feel inspired.

Just remember that you don't need to spend a ton of money on expensive diets or workout equipment, you can use totally free resources like MyFitnessPal to track your food, and even just take a walk around your neighborhood or Google some YouTube workout videos!

You might need to amp up the game a bit as the pounds drop off, but if you're like me and have a lot of weight to lose (like 100+ lbs), the first 40 lbs should be easy if you take these steps.