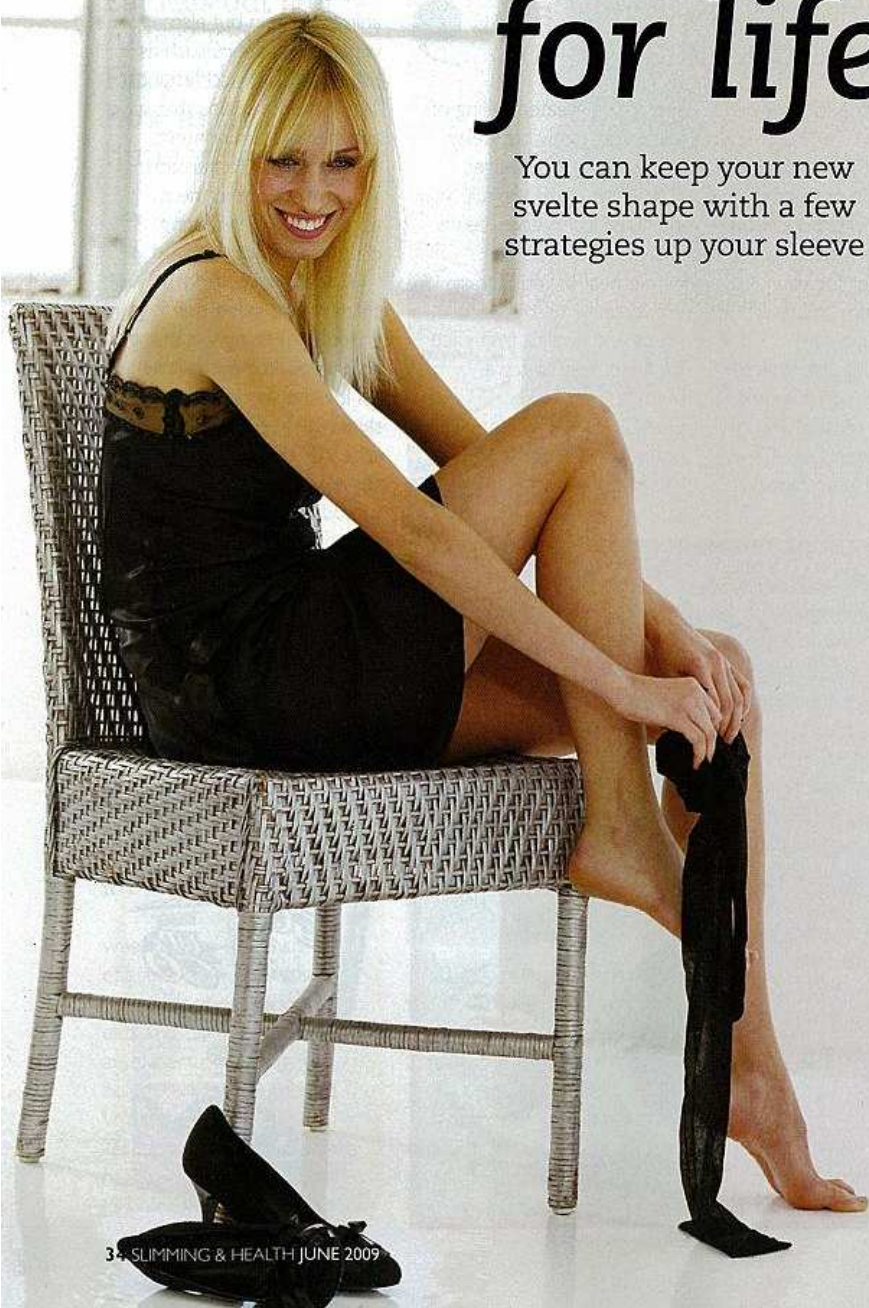


SLIM for life

You can keep your new svelte shape with a few strategies up your sleeve



The day has finally arrived. You triumphantly slide the zip on the size 12 LBD all the way to the top and suddenly all your hard work – 5am workouts and remaining tight-lipped when there's office birthday cake – has paid off. Journey over, right?

We're afraid not. Studies suggest that only 20% of individuals who have lost a significant amount of weight will be able to stay at their goal weight for good. But it's not all bad news. A study by the National Weight Control Registry in the US has shown that maintaining your goal weight for two years after weight loss will greatly decrease your chance of regaining the weight.

'The first year is crucial and that's when most people will revert back,' says nutritionist Joanna McMillan Price. 'It's almost as if the body is primed to be at that higher weight, so you have to allow it to adjust and reset at a lower weight.'

So what do you need to do to become one of the successful 20% of slimmers? We look at the dos and don'ts of successful weight maintenance.

DO ... Make exercise a part of your life

'The most crucial thing to do is exercise,' says Joanna. 'Food has a more immediate effect on weight loss, but exercise is the long-term success factor.'

But it's not just about hitting the treadmill. Weight-resistance exercises will also make it easier to keep the weight off, as the more muscle you have, the more energy you burn all the time. Making active choices every day goes a long way too, such as walking to the bus stop instead of driving to work, taking two steps at a time up to your apartment and going for a walk at lunch instead of staying at your desk.

...Make peace with your greens

According to Dimitra Arthur, psychotherapist for appetite control company Appetite Right (www.appetiteright.com),



appetiteright.com.au), if you view healthy eating as a punishment rather than a reward, you'll be more prone to a lifetime of yo-yoing weight.

'Changing the relationship you have with food from a negative to a positive one is very important,' she says. 'Don't view food as your enemy. Instead, look at its nutritional value and appreciate the nourishment it's giving your body.'

As well as providing your body with the energy-boosting nutrients it needs, a healthy diet doesn't have to be dull.

...Get support

A study conducted by the Kaiser Permanente Health Care group in California, which interviewed 44 women who had regained lost weight and 30 women who had maintained their weight loss, found that 80% of those who maintained their weight used social support, compared to just 38% of those who had regained the weight.

Ongoing support is vital. Whether it's from friends, family, a doctor, fitness trainer or weight-loss group, you're more likely to stay slim with a support network than going it alone.

... Eat au naturale

'Rather than obsessing over carbs, fats and kilojoules, if you just eat food that's as close to the way that it appears in nature, you're halfway there,' says Joanna.

Steer clear of heavily processed foods (which contain trans fats and excess salt and sugar) and fatty takeaways, and base your diet on fruits and vegetables, low-GI wholegrains, good-quality protein and small amounts of good fats. Get creative in the kitchen with nutrient-rich ingredients and you'll have lots of energy and keep the weight off, too.

DON'T

... Slip into old ways

'I see it all the time. People get to their goal weight and then go back to what they were doing before,' says Joanna.

Weight maintenance will only be successful if you have identified the

factors that caused you to gain the weight in the first place, be it too many takeaway dinners, inactivity or heading to the biscuit tin at times of stress.

'If you address your diet and lifestyle and change those things for good, then you won't regain the weight,' Joanna says.

...Give in to comfort eating

You may have tackled your comfort-eating demons in the short term but during extremely stressful periods, it's easy to revert back to old ways.

'If you're eating a lot to comfort yourself through stress, sit down and make a list of things that you could do instead to try and help you get through this difficult period,' says Dimitra.

Identifying ways to tackle the problem and putting them into action will make it more likely that you'll overcome the problem and avoid piling on the kilos.

...Stop monitoring your weight

Whether you measured your weight loss on the scales, with a tape measure, or by how your clothes fit, continue to make these assessments regularly.

'We know people who monitor themselves in a relaxed, unemotional way will be more successful,' says Joanna. 'It allows them to deal with small changes along the way, rather than waiting till there is a big problem again that is much harder to fix.'

... Be too strict on yourself

'If you're a chocolate lover, don't say to yourself, "I'm never going to eat chocolate again." You will end up desiring it even more,' says Dimitra.

Instead of the all-or-nothing approach, which can lead to bingeing, allow yourself small quantities of your favourite foods a couple of times a week. A few squares of good-quality dark chocolate will do nothing to expand your waist – but it will leave you feeling satisfied and help you stay on track. **S&H**



'I'M EATING MUCH YUMMIER FOOD NOW'

Arlene Barcikowski, 39

Height: 174cm

Weight then: 92kg

Weight now: 60kg

Kept it off: 12 years

After gradually piling on 32kg in her late 20s, Arlene realised she needed to act. By addressing her emotional issues and educating herself on nutrition and good and bad fats, she managed to lose the weight in around 18 months. Twelve years on, she's remained at her goal weight.

'I'm just living a more complete life now,' she says. 'The key is not to stress. Don't weigh yourself a million times a day and don't obsess about it. The most amazing thing for me was that when I adopted a balanced lifestyle, knowing that I was doing the right things, I stopped stressing about my weight, and before I knew it I went to a weight that is normal for me. I think it's important to be kind to yourself and, if you do deviate from the overall plan, don't beat yourself up – just get back into it and don't give up.'

Arlene is a naturally active person and mixes up gym workouts with dance classes, yoga and running in the park. 'For me, it's about doing something that I enjoy and have fun with,' she says.

Her success is also thanks to a healthy and varied diet. 'When you start to learn about food, it becomes more delicious and I've learned to be a better cook because of it,' she says. 'I'm eating much yummiere food now.'