

I'm John and this is a description of a change that took place in my life.

Where I was:

I was fat. I was about an M&M shy of 300 pounds. I had no control over my diet and was doing no exercise whatsoever. I was eating anything I wanted and lots of it. It was all bad. I ate nothing but pizzas, burgers, burritos, etc. I drank lots of beer and soda as well. I played lots of video games, worked on computers, and basically did nothing, but sit on my butt. Because of this life style, I developed high blood pressure, high cholesterol, the beginnings of Diabetes, a fatty liver, heart palpitations, and many other things associated with obesity. I believe that my weight also contributed to me suffering from depressive symptoms, anxiety, lack of any self-esteem/respect, poor self-image, and no self-confidence. I was an unhappy person and I felt like I wasn't useful for anything or to anyone.

It all started for me January 2, 2006:

I had grown tired of being tired, feeling down, and being unhappy. I knew that my life could be better. I told myself (so did my doctor) that I needed to make a change or I was going to die a miserable death at an early age. I was in terrible shape and I felt even worse. At the end of 2005 I resolved to lose weight starting January 2, 2006. I couldn't do it on the 1st. There was too much to drink and too much food to eat in celebration of the New Year. It was obvious, even to me, that although my resolution had good intentions, it really was only half-hearted at best.

A beginner:

I knew nothing about weight loss, but I was going to give it a try anyway. I tried all of the classic things that we all have heard over the years to drop weight. I reduced fats, reduced calories, ate salads, ate less carbs, walked miles (running was too difficult), lifted weights, etc. I managed to lose about 20 to 25 pounds in about 4 months and was actually feeling a little bit better. I still didn't have my diet and alcohol consumption under control and I still didn't know anything about how to lose weight, what I should really be eating, or what I should be doing in the gym.

The Catalyst - My life changed forever on a Saturday afternoon in April:

It was mid April of 2006 and Summer was approaching. The weight was slow to come off and I was starting to get lazy with my efforts. I kind of expected that I was eventually going to quit and give up at some point. I was just happy that I had lasted as long as I did. I started getting back to my old routines and I was becoming more sedentary each day. Thankfully, Something humiliating happened to me one Saturday in late April...

I went to a cookout over at a friends place. Prior to my arrival a couple of guys made a bet about what shirt I would wear over. One bet I would wear a Florida State t-shirt and the other bet that I would wear a New Orleans Saints t-shirt. I arrived at the party a short time later. As I was walking around greeting some of the people that were already there, a girl walks up to me with a smile on her face and looks me dead in the eyes and says "Hey John, ha ha ha, I know who won the bet." "Its the FSU shirt." It was at that point that reality started to sink in. I knew what was going on. I was crushed and embarrassed. My self-esteem was already pretty low, but now it was totally in the tank. I felt like I was nothing more than the butt of Life's joke. I was upset and in my mind I had started blaming the people at the party for my life being in shambles. After the party I went home and thought about what had happened. I thought about it very deeply. That night I looked at my pathetic self in the mirror...BAM..out of nowhere....epiphany....I somehow realized that I was the only one on the planet that could have put me where I was at. It was all me and nobody else. Although the people at the party didn't realize they were saying it, I totally understood what they were telling me. They were telling me that I didn't care about myself or my

appearance, that I was lazy, that I had no self-respect or self-esteem. I told myself that I was better than that, that that wasn't me, that I was going to CHANGE and become more like the authentic person on the inside.

That joke at the BBQ ignited a huge fire in me and I am still motivated by it to this day. Thankfully, because of that bet, my life was about to take a turn for the better.

A new person:

The very next day was a gift, a second chance, a new opportunity at life. Thankfully, I realized several important things that day. I knew that weight loss was going to take some time and effort. I knew that I needed to educate myself about what I was going to do. I knew I needed to set some goals and write all of them down. I knew things could be better and I understood that I was the one that had to take control and follow through. I made the decision to change my life in every way possible. First things first...I swore I would never wear a football t-shirt around the people from the cookout ever again. To this day I still don't wear one when I am around them. I actually went and bought some new clothes (no t-shirts). Next up - goals. I started making goals for everything. I made goals for weight loss, running, weightlifting, exercises, my work, my personal life, my marriage, even video games. Anything that I had an inclination of doing I made a goal for and I wrote all those goals down. To me, this was the key to completing the tasks. After goals I knew that I needed to get smarter about what I wanted to do. I started reading and learning about nutrition and weight loss I also read anything that I thought would help inspire me to achieve my goals. I read many stories of people that lost weight and changed their lives. I read every article in the Men's Health Belly Off Club several times over. I could relate to a lot of those guys and their stories. I also read a lot of other motivational and success books by authors such as Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins, Phil McGraw, etc. One common thread that most of these books had was that the authors themselves all lost weight. It was almost as if weight loss was the foundation for their life's successes.

A long road to weight loss recovery:

I knew changing my life was going to be a massive undertaking. Thankfully, I accepted this and was at peace with it from the start. On day number one I started working on a few of my long term goals. My first goals were losing 70 pounds by April 15, 2007 (a year away), completing an organized 5k run, and various other fitness/health related goals. Once I had the long range goals in place, I set short and mid range sub-goals for each of my larger goals. I did this so I could keep tabs on my progress and keep myself in check. I started out on my fitness quest by re-learning to run and following a basic total body workout plan. I hadn't done any running since I was a kid. I lifted weights off and on. but never anything seriously. I was so out of shape that I couldn't jog on the treadmill for 30 seconds or hardly bench press the bar. I was a long way from a 5k run and being 70 pounds lighter. My first day out I think I may have walked/jogged a mile. It was very disheartening at first, but I kept thinking about what I learned about myself that day at the BBQ.

I worked diligently at running/walking and eventually started increasing my exercise time and distances very slowly. My shins, feet, and joints would hurt for days. I'm not going to lie. Learning to run beat the hell out of me mentally and physically. The pain, however, was nothing compared to the suffering I incurred in my old life. Over time, however, I noticed that the pain was becoming less and less noticeable. After several months of practice, I was starting to run to the 2 to 2.5 mile mark without stopping.

I spent the rest of 2006 walk/jogging, lifting weights, and learning about health and nutrition. During this time there was a lot of trial and error in my diet and exercise plan. I was having to put together the pieces of the puzzle on my own. It was by no means easy. The human body, especially your own, is an amazing thing to study. Thankfully, I realized early on that the fad diets and exercise plans didn't work in the long run. Following those would have made my journey much more difficult than it already was.

Unfortunately, I didn't make my mid-range weight goal for the end of 2006, but that didn't cause me to lose sight of my long range quest for 70 pounds. I kept working at it and managed to hit my year end goal a couple of weeks into 2007.

#### The 5k:

A couple of months after getting to my year end goal weight I was invited to run in my first 5k. This was an opportunity to test myself and accomplish one of my larger goals. Even though I had been running a while, I was barely beyond the ability to run the 5k mileage. The run was tough. I started out too fast and had to slow down a good bit. I stupidly let other runners set my pace. I ended up being passed by people running with baby strollers, by people with dogs, and even by a speed walker! I jogged the entire 5k in about 35 minutes and was hurting at the end. I was tired and winded. I didn't even stay around for the party afterwards. I did, however, feel good about what I had done. It was a major accomplishment and I was inspired to keep working.

#### Weight loss goal achieved and then some:

I was always working on my diet and trying to correct things that I was doing wrong. I had hit a plateau during my journey that I couldn't seem to get by and decided that I needed to look for ways to change what I was doing. I was browsing the Men's Health site looking for tips and tricks when I clicked on a link for the "Abs Diet." I read several of the articles on the site and decided to give the book a try. I really liked what the author said about eating several smaller meals over a day. I decided to incorporate his ideas into my diet and fitness plan. Within a couple of weeks I was starting to lose a little weight and I noticed that I was also putting on some muscle. People were really starting to take notice. Using the ideas presented in the book I was able to hit my target weight of 215 pounds a few days before April 15, 2007.

Once I hit my goal, however, I felt like there was still some work to be done. I had a little belly fat and I thought I could drop another 10 pounds by June. I worked hard exercising and tweaking my diet over the next couple of months and managed to drop down to 205 pounds. I couldn't believe how much I had lost in a little over a year! I was down 80 pounds!

Toward the end of June, for various personal reasons, I decided to give up alcohol. Because of this, I was able to lose several more pounds in the next few months and in the August/September time frame I eclipsed the 100 pounds lost barrier. I looked like a totally different guy. People I had known for years didn't even recognize me. My weight loss was starting to help me in all facets of my life. I was gaining more confidence, self-esteem, self-acceptance, and security. There was a reduction in my blood pressure, cholesterol, and my depressive symptoms. There was also a lowering of my A1C number. I was reversing the diabetic numbers! I was also starting to become more successful with my marriage and my job.

#### The Half-Marathon:

When I finally completed my first 5k run in March of '07 I immediately made a couple of new goals. I had chosen to train and run a 10k on Halloween of the same year. I also decided to make a half-marathon run in March of 2008. That was a year away. I knew that these targets were a good distance away and that I would need something to keep me pushing myself in the mean time. Therefore, as a sub-goal I chose to compete in all of the organized runs that were advertised for my area in our local paper and on [www.active.com](http://www.active.com). I ran several 5Ks and a couple of 4+ milers over the Spring, Summer, and fall. I trained for each and every event as if it was my main goal. During this time I was able to increase my mileage and speed. By the time the 10k run came I was pushing the 7 mile barrier. I ended up running the

Halloween 10k in a little under an hour. I was elated that I was able to complete the run and finish it in that time. I had come a long way from where I started.

After a couple of days rest I began training for the half-marathon slated for March of 2008. I was about 5 months away and I needed to double my longest run in order to complete the half-marathon. Over the next couple of months I ran a lot of miles, but I eased into increasing the mileage. By the end of the year I had run my first 10 miler. I was running tons of miles and the training was starting to become more and more difficult. I had never put in those kinds of miles and my body was letting me know it. I was starting to have serious thoughts of quitting my attempt. I thought that it might be too extreme for me, that is was beyond my capabilities. I ended up taking a few days off to rest and to contemplate what the half-marathon meant to me. I thought about how I had let myself down in the past. I realized that I had often given up and quit on myself. I decided that by quitting I would only let myself down again. This would do nothing but destroy my self-esteem that I was working to build. I had come a very long way and I wasn't going to stand for quitting, giving up, or having a low self-esteem anymore. I challenged myself to finish my goal and complete the run. At this point I was focused only on running. The weights would have to wait. I spent the next few months pushing myself. I pushed myself through lots of aches and pains. In early February I ran the 13.1 miles that I would need for the 1/2 marathon on the treadmill. I was ecstatic! I just knew I had this in the bag! Funny thing though, for some reason I had difficulty getting the distance on the pavement. There was just over a week to go before the run and I should have been well into tapering my miles and doing some resting. I still hadn't done the 13.1 miles on the street and I was getting very concerned. I finally accomplished the street mileage with exactly 1 week to go before the run. I was physically destroyed and in need of a long rest. Usually, when you do a extremely long run you need an extended rest period afterward. I was going to try again just a week later. Not to mention that I had to do a few shorter runs over the week to keep warm.

I didn't feel all that well the day of the run. I was tired and my body was beaten up. I knew it was going to be rough, but I wasn't about to let myself down. That morning I thought about all the things that had brought me to this point in my life. I actually wore an FSU Football t-shirt under my running shirt as a reminder of where I was at just a year and some odd months back. Those thoughts soon faded as the starting gun sounded. The run was brutal. The road was unlevel at times and there were many more hills than I had anticipated. I thought I was going to die at the 10 mile barrier. All of the training was wearing on me and my body was rebelling. I kept telling myself over and over..."There is no quitting." I searched my mind for anything that would give me strength to finish. I thought about my Mom and her recent hip replacement surgery. I thought about my Dad and his victory over lung cancer. I thought about my wife and how she overcame her addiction to pain killers. I thought about my dreams and aspirations and where I wanted to be. All of those thoughts were screaming "perseverance." Because of the strength that I saw in each of those things, I was able to keep pushing myself until I crossed the finish line.

I had completed the run! My body hurt all over. I was wiped out physically, mentally, and emotionally. When I was done and had collected myself I stood near the finish line for a few moments and looked around at all the people and things that were making up the event. I tried to take in as much as I could. In that instant everything seemed surreal. It was almost as if I was watching some one else's life unfold. I never dreamed that I would ever put forth the effort to accomplish this task. I was happy.

I have done some things in my life that I am proud of and will never forget, but I feel that the half-marathon will always be one of the greatest achievements of my life. To this day I still look back on that moment and think "WOW"..."I can't believe I did that."

After my Half-Marathon I took nearly a month off from all training to rest, recover, and heal. I desperately needed it. I gradually returned to running and started doing more cycling to help alleviate the stresses of running.

Currently:

Currently I am not training for a specific target. I do, however, have goals for the end of the year and beyond. I do plan to run the Halloween 10k and Half-Marathon again later this year and early next year. I have aspirations of attempting my first marathon sometime in 2009/2010 and am considering my first triathlon. I am also working to keep my weight steady or no more than +/- 5 pounds by the end of the year.

I have maintained my weight for almost a year and I continue to watch what I eat and exercise regularly. I still read and listen to tons of motivational/inspirational books, tapes, and of course pod casts. I continue to learn new information and try new things. I often review my completed goals to remind myself where I was and where I want to go.

Forever Grateful:

Weight loss and fitness have completely changed my life for the better. It has helped me overcome many things that I thought were going to kill me or make me miserable forever. It has given me more self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect. It has helped me beat depression, anxiety and diabetes. It has given me the ability to do things that I never dreamed of doing. I now know that Health is the foundation to a happy and successful life. I used to dread what the next day would bring. I now look forward to the changes, challenges, and opportunities that await the days ahead.

Things I learned throughout my journey:

Find motivation wherever you can and use it any way you can.

Diet does not mean starvation

Eat several smaller meals a day

Eat Breakfast

Use the scale as a tool for weight loss, but don't rely on it. The way your clothes fit is a better barometer.

Rest is just as important as exercise

Listen to what your body is telling you

Meal planning works

Celebrate ALL of life's victories...EVEN the tiny ones

Never give up

Fat is not evil

Carbs are not bad

You can do anything that you set your mind to do

You are the only one that can put you where you want to be

Fad diets do not work.

You must educate yourself about what it is that you want to do.

It essentially all boils down to calories in versus calories out.

Weight loss is not about changing your diet. Its about changing your lifestyle.

Set short, mid and long range goals.

Figure out what works and what doesn't. Correct your course as needed.