

Stay Motivated

Thinking of a better life for her daughter and herself kept her going



Before taking control of my life, I weighed 179 pounds and wore a size 12. McDonald's and Dairy Queen were frequent stops for a fast-food fix. I was always tired and ill, and wasn't sure why. After several illnesses, I looked at my lifestyle and decided I had to make a change. I couldn't possibly raise my premature daughter and tend to her health problems if I was always ill.

I went to the local health-food store, where they suggested some herbal cleansers and a multivitamin. I eliminated fatty, greasy foods from my diet and picked up some fitness magazines. Exercising was really hard at first; I trained at home, and motivation was a problem.

I kept thinking of a better life for my daughter and me, and this helped me stick with the workouts and healthy diet. I gradually saw changes in my body, my attitude and my health.

During my adult life I've undergone 20 operations and have overcome many obstacles. Recovering from a sickness or surgery can put a damper on motivation. But I got back in the saddle, so to speak, as soon as possible.

Now more than three years have gone by; I'm 32 years old, weigh 123 pounds and wear a size 3. I look and feel great! For almost two years I've been modeling and acting, opportunities I never foresaw.

Healthy Meals, Not Happy Meals

Maintaining this healthy weight isn't always easy. Sometimes I'm tempted to grab a quick "happy meal" to save time, but I refrain and instead eat a healthy meal and drink plenty of water. I consume small portions of food during the day and I eat slowly, something I've trained myself to do.

My lifestyle changed while I was working out and growing healthy. Now that I'm where I want to be, it's great, but the transition was difficult. I still have some of my old friends, but my boyfriend changed and now I'm with a wonderful man who's also into a healthy lifestyle. Hiking and horseback riding is definitely more appealing than sitting in smoke-filled bars or in front of the TV. The new friends I've made have positive attitudes and are very supportive. So is my daughter. She knows I'm a much happier person.

To maintain my healthy weight I train at the gym three times per week, varying my workout each time. I usually warm up for a few minutes on the treadmill and then do some stretching. I work on my upper body first, doing exercises such as cable rows, upright rows, biceps curls, overhead presses and flyes. I do three sets of 12 reps each and then move on to weighted squats, pliés and lunges. I pyramid the weight to vary the intensity.

For my abdominal work I do crunches and make good use of the exercise ball. I can't forget to mention push-ups; nothing works the upper body like a few of those. Again, it varies day to day. I try to do 10-16 push-ups after my lower-

body work and again after my ab work. I finish with 5-15 minutes of stretching. I'm always focused on fitness: At home, I keep a pull-up bar in a doorway and whenever I pass through, I do five pull-ups.

If I were to offer advice, I'd say *stay motivated no matter what*. Write down your fitness goals and keep reviewing them. Read fitness magazines. Get a supportive friend. Everything takes time and work, but if you have the right mind-set, you can achieve anything. **M&F**

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Valerie made up her mind to get healthy, and she worked hard to get her bikini body.

