

A New Confidence

With 178 pounds on her small 5'3" frame, Heidi Axelrod, desperate to establish healthier habits, took a 40-day lifestyle challenge. Now 50 pounds lighter, she's gained a whole new outlook on life. BY LAURA AGADONI



Heidi Axelrod shines after a life-changing transformation.

When Heidi Axelrod's husband gifted her with a backstage pass for her 40th birthday to see her teenage heartthrob, Rick Springfield, Heidi was overjoyed – until she saw the pictures from that night. “If I don't do something now,” she thought to herself, “I'm never going to know what it's like to be a thin person.” Heidi had been overweight her entire life. It suddenly hit her that if she did not lose weight soon, she would always be the biggest person in the room.

Boot camp challenge

So Heidi, who had been practicing yoga for four years, enrolled in a yoga teacher-training course. Each participant was to take a 40-day lifestyle challenge; Heidi's was to get healthy. Her intent was to enroll in a boot camp for 40 days and be done with it. But when she started seeing quick results, she got serious.

Exercise came first. Heidi was weight training, performing squats and lunges and even pulling sleds – exercises she had never done before. Clean eating followed soon after and was likely the most integral part of her journey. Never much of a breakfast eater, Heidi would be so hungry around noon that she'd load up with a huge lunch, which usually included greasy potato chips. She was just as hungry at dinner and would fill her plate with simple carbs (noodles were a favorite). Not snacking between meals or drinking soda, Heidi wondered why she was putting on weight. But she soon learned that it was the volume and types of foods she was eating that were at the root of the problem.

A new way to eat

Soon the idea of consuming a serving of protein at each meal (a *Clean Eating* mantra) was instilled in Heidi. She learned to eat five mini-meals a day, each containing a lean protein to help stave off hunger.

Initially, when the concept of consuming five meals a day was proposed, Heidi was skeptical. She felt like she was constantly eating and wondered how she could possibly maintain such a frequent feeding schedule.

She eventually learned the secret of all clean eaters: Planning is critical. What Heidi does now is plan for an entire week of eating five meals a day. “This also helps with grocery shopping and planning for the family,” she says. Heidi limits herself to two clean treats a week, such as frozen yogurt with berries or a bowl of popcorn. Indulging just twice a week allows her to go out to dinner with her husband and sons every Friday. The other nights, she prepares meals mostly from her favorite magazine, *Clean Eating*. “You don't have to be a great cook to follow the recipes,” she says. “It's not as labor intensive as you might think.”

Endless possibilities

Yoga played a big part in Heidi's reinvention. She started practicing because she thought it would help her shed some pounds. “Yoga did help me lose weight but not from the physical practice,” she says. “It brought me a better awareness of my body – how I was treating it and what I was putting into it.” Before her 40-day lifestyle challenge, Heidi had never run a day in her life. Now, she does half-marathons and 5K runs, which she proudly completes with her sons, Adam and Noah, ages eight and 14. “I never would have thought two or three years ago that I would be the co-owner of a gym.” ☺

Before



Heidi Axelrod

HOME: Flower Mound, Texas

AGE: 42

HEIGHT: 5'3"

BEGINNING WEIGHT: 178

CURRENT WEIGHT: 128

OCCUPATION: Yoga instructor and certified personal trainer