

"I Went From a Size 16 to a 4!"

I Like This! (18)

160-pound Erin Magee developed a passion for canoeing -- but realized she needed to tone up and slim down to be competitive.

By Camille Noe

"I Did It!"

When women say to Erin Magee "I wish I'd been born with a body like yours," the administrative assistant from Martindale, Texas, just laughs. "I wasn't born this way. People are shocked when I tell them that a few years ago, I weighed more than 160 pounds."

No one is more surprised at her transformation than Erin. "I used to think that being overweight was a fact of life," she says. "I'd been heavy since fifth grade and blamed it on my genes." But Erin's weight was really the result of inactivity and poor eating habits. "I never exercised. My family didn't play sports, and I thought that working out was a chore," she says. Her diet consisted of high-fat, processed foods like cupcakes and fast-food hamburgers. "I was an emotional eater. I had very little self-confidence and used food to try to make myself feel better." She lost weight several times over the years with fad diets and pills, but she always regained it.

Seven years ago, Erin unexpectedly stumbled on an activity that would help her revamp her body and her outlook -- canoeing. She was hooked the first time she tried it. Four years later, she was inspired to canoe solo competitively while watching a friend participate in a 260-mile race. "I knew that it would be impossible for me to get to that level unless I changed everything about my life -- what I ate, my attitude toward [exercise](#) and, just as important, how I viewed myself."

Erin began by taking the boat out every day and paddling for three or four miles. At the same time, she overhauled her diet, giving up sugary snacks like cookies and candy, and eating more lean protein (chicken, egg whites and pork), fruit, vegetables and whole grains. Within eight months, she had lost 20 pounds. She increased her canoeing distance -- working up to eight to 10 miles a day -- and started lifting weights three times a week to build the muscle she needed to hoist her canoe over her head. To develop aerobic endurance, she ran or rode a bike three times a week. (Erin has to [balance](#) her [workout](#) schedule with the rest of her life, so she exercises for an hour in the morning and then canoes on her lunch hour.) Her time and effort paid off: About a year after she began training, she'd lost a total of 40 pounds.

Today, the woman who once could barely squeeze into a size 16 is now a lean and muscular size 4. "Being strong and fit was, and still is, more important to me than being thin," says Erin, "but I love my shape and have a new appreciation for my body."

Erin's Weight Loss Plan

Age: 38

Height: 5'6"

Weight: 128

Pounds Lost: 40

Months at Current Weight: 30

The Diet: To fuel her workouts, Erin has OJ, a bagel, eggs and bacon at breakfast. Lunch is a salad with chicken or tuna. Dinner is pork chops or chicken with rice and broccoli.

The Workout: Erin canoes every day, covering five to 10 miles. She lifts weights three times a week and runs or bikes on three other days.

Stick-With-It tip: Compete only with yourself. "As soon as I focused on my goals, I got real results."

Biggest Temptation: Candy, especially when she's upset. "I tell myself that sugary foods provide empty calories and that they won't help me feel better physically or mentally."

Best Compliment Since Losing Weight: "After I won a canoe race last year, a fellow racer said, 'Your body is proof of how dedicated you are.' I felt so proud of how far I'd come as an athlete."

What She Couldn't Wait to Wear: A sports bra as a top. "I didn't know how much I loved my new figure until I took off my shirt during a competition and realized I no longer had anything to hide."

Originally published in Fitness magazine.