

"I'm Thinner Than I Was in High School"

A serious sweet tooth kept Candy Littrell's diet filled with junk food, and her weight reflected it. But a New Year's resolution soon kept her cravings in check -- now she's thinner than ever.

By Charlotte Latvala

"I Did It!"

These days, whenever Candy Littrell gets an urge to snack, she grabs an orange. "If I'm tempted to have a doughnut, I remind myself how good I'll feel later if I make a healthy choice now," says the 23-year-old college student. Candy didn't always have such self-restraint; for several years, calorie-laden junk food was a big part of her diet.

Candy was raised as a vegetarian. Though she always had a sweet tooth, eating whole grains and veggies at home kept her weight at around 140 pounds in high school.

Trying to stick with that eating style proved difficult for Candy when she went away to college in 1996. "I was constantly eating cheesy, fried foods and ice cream sundaes from the cafeteria," she says. That first year, she gained 45 pounds. "I was homesick and unhappy, and eating made me feel better." By the end of her sophomore year, she weighed 200 pounds.

In December 1998, Candy -- up to 220 pounds and a size 20 -- went to a post-Christmas get-together with high school friends. They were swapping old photos, and when Candy came across one of herself, she was stunned. "I couldn't believe how much better I looked back then. I wanted to be that person again," she says.

Candy made a New Year's resolution to lose weight and follow a healthy, meatless diet. She cut out fried foods, cheese and desserts and ate a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables. To her amazement, her cravings for fatty foods began to fade. Even when she had the urge to indulge, she'd try to make a healthy choice, ordering a veggie pizza, for instance, instead of one with extra cheese. "I tried not to eat late at night," she says. "If I needed a snack, I'd have a piece of fruit." She also began walking for a half hour, five times a week. "I started out slowly, but I was determined to stick with it," she remembers. As the weeks went by, Candy gradually upped her pace and her time. By the end of the first month, she had dropped 10 pounds. Soon Candy switched from walking to running, and by the summer she had lost an additional 65 pounds. Staying with this plan, Candy continued to lose weight. One year after she made her resolution, she weighed 135 and was "slimmer than I ever had been," she says. Losing 85 pounds changed more than Candy's appearance. "I'm a more positive, outgoing person," she says. "I have a whole new outlook now."

Candy's Weight Loss Plan

Age: 23

Height: 5'5"

Weight: 135

Pounds lost: 85

Months at current weight: 19

The Workout: Candy runs four miles four times a week, followed by sit-ups, push-ups and leg lifts.

The Diet: For breakfast, Candy has toast and jelly or a bagel with low-fat cream cheese and a glass of orange juice. Lunch is a bean burrito with lettuce, tomatoes and olives along with a piece of fruit or yogurt. Dinner is a veggie burger or spaghetti and vegetable soup. Once a week, she has a "cheat day" and lets herself eat dessert.

Stick-With-It tip: Reward small triumphs. "When I'd met a mini goal -- like dropping 10 pounds -- I'd treat myself to a new pair of shorts or a shirt in my new size. It was a huge incentive to keep on track."

Biggest Temptation: Doughnuts and pastries. "I substituted licorice and Gummi bears for my old high-fat choices, then eventually switched to fruit."

What She Couldn't Wait to Wear: A pair of tight-fitting jeans. "When I was heavy, I only wore baggy jeans. Now I wear pants that accentuate my shape."

Originally published in Fitness magazine.