

IT'S MAY, which means summer is looming like a dark shadow over those whose New Year's resolution to lose weight and get in shape was left at the Valentine's Day desert buffet. It's an old story: with all of the worries and busyness of life, it's easy to lose sight of worthy goals, especially those aimed at better health.

This is for those who may need a bit of inspiration to get back on track. It's the story of Brenda Willis of Frisco. To look at her now you'd never know she was once plagued with poor health, due in large part to her weight. But she was. In fact, her story is so dramatic she's been featured on NBC's Today Show, in a WFAA news segment and in fitness magazines.

Brenda began to struggle with her weight as a young adult. She would often eat for comfort or out of boredom. Sometimes she would buy cakes and cookies at the store, and eat them in her car before she even got home.

Many times Brenda used diet pills or liquid diets looking for that quick fix. But it became the classic yo-yo dieting cycle of losing weight and then quickly re-gaining what she had lost, and then some, as soon as she stopped using the diet aids. The pounds affected Brenda not only physically, but also emotionally and socially.

"I remember crying myself to sleep some nights because I didn't know how to lose the weight that I desperately wanted to lose," she says. "For me, being overweight was very lonely. I was sad and embarrassed. I wouldn't look people in the eye. And I kept thinking that here I am, taking these pills and things, but it wasn't working."



Brenda Willis said goodbye to these jeans after losing 145 pounds

photo by Chris Fritchie

Walking into a New Life

By Jennifer Nelson

By December 2001, 5'2" Brenda, who was then in her 40s, had reached a weight of 248 pounds and wore a size 26. Her doctor had been warning her to lose weight because she was pre-diabetic and had very high blood pressure. One day, while shopping for something to wear to her nephew's wedding, Brenda broke down.

"I tried on a multitude of outfits but nothing looked right. I was just so frustrated. I literally collapsed on the floor and started crying," says Brenda. "I knew I needed to change my life."

So on January 2, 2002, Brenda began to make some changes. She purchased a pedometer and began walking every eve-

ning. The first night, she could only walk five minutes. That was all she could physically do. But each night she added a minute or two to her time. Eventually, she could walk a full hour.

Brenda also changed her diet. "I started eating five smaller meals a day and I never ate after 6 p.m. I limited my consumption of fat to 27 grams each day – which is still a good amount of food. And I watched my sugar and sodium intake."

There were weeks when Brenda didn't lose as much as she had hoped, but after 15 months she had lost more than 140 pounds. Now, six years later, she has kept the weight off.

"I feel better now at age 51 than I did at 31," she says. "I'm just eating healthier and enjoying my life. My daughter is 27 and I have so much energy. So we just have a lot of fun together, especially with my granddaughters."

Along the way, Brenda did have some people say she was just too old to make that kind of change. Unfortunately, she had believed that herself for quite a while. But she also has a log of support, including her husband Bob who

bought her a treadmill. Now he is motivated to lose weight, too.

In addition to feeling good about herself, Brenda says helping others is one of the most important benefits of her new life. She was recently nominated as coordinator for a wellness program at Perot Systems where she works. She also plans to become a certified personal trainer.

So what does Brenda plan to do for herself with her newfound energy and zest for life? She and her husband are renewing their wedding vows for their 30th anniversary this month. Not a bad way to celebrate a new lease on life.

Jennifer Nelson is a writer in Frisco.

Brenda's Tips for a Healthier You:

1. Believe in yourself: "I know what it's like, and it's hard – especially the older you get. But just remember it's never too late to make a change."
2. Do it for yourself: "It's important to lose weight for yourself – not for anyone else. I didn't do it for my husband – I did it for me because I didn't want to be like my mother, who's had a kidney transplant because of her Type II Diabetes."
3. One day at a time, one step at a time: "Don't think, 'Oh my gosh, I have to lose 100 pounds!' Just take it one day at a time. If you mess up one day, don't wait until the next day to fix it. Start over right then and there."
4. Portion control and moderation, not deprivation: "Don't let yourself feel deprived. I think that's why I didn't succeed all those other times. I kept thinking that I'd never be able to eat a slice of cake, a piece of chocolate or fried foods again. When you say that, your body immediately craves those foods. Knowing you can splurge a little every now and then helps defeat the cravings."



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