

# DISAPPEARING ACT

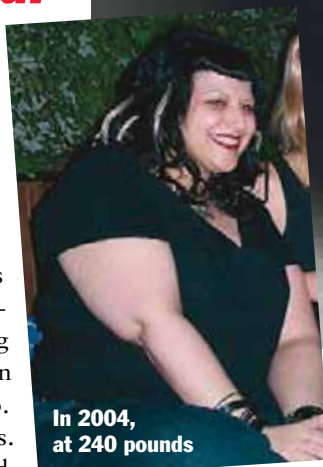
After tipping the scales at 252, an *Allure* contributor found the secret to lasting weight loss—and dropped more than 100 pounds. **By Meirav Devash**

I remember the exact moment I realized that I was fat. It was June 2003, and my husband, Eddie, and I were curled up on the couch watching a boxing match—Lennox Lewis versus Vitali Klitschko. Lewis lumbered into the ring at the heaviest weight of his career: 256.5 pounds. Klitschko's trainer said Lewis's size showed a lack of respect for his opponent. My weight at the time? Four pounds less than Lewis. He held on to his title that night; I lost my confidence.

***I had always been voluptuous. My D cups spilled over; my pencil skirts were skintight, but I didn't mind.***

Until then, I'd never thought of myself as one of those sad, frumpy fat people you see crying on television. I had always been voluptuous. My D cups spilled over; my pencil skirts were skintight, but I didn't mind. I always thought my cartoonish curves worked for me—I ate what I wanted, squeezed into formfitting animal prints, and cinched it all in at the waist. Voilà! Modern pinup.

I'd never had good eating habits. I was an emotional eater, a mindless eater, a binge eater who hid candy wrappers in tissue paper as a child so my mother wouldn't know I'd finished ten fun-size bars instead of two. (Later, I'd do the same thing when working late at the office, after raiding my coworker's candy jar.) But my weight truly began to escalate in 2001.



**In 2004, at 240 pounds**



**Devash now, at 145 pounds. Silk lace dress by Dolce & Gabbana. Patent-leather shoes by Christian Louboutin. Hair: Shintaro. Makeup: Brigitte Reiss-Andersen. Manicure: Tatyana Molot. Fashion editor: Paul Cavaco. Details, see Credits page.**

Eddie, then a police officer, reported for duty just after the towers crumbled. He worked 12- to 16-hour shifts on the recovery team, digging through an unstable mound of burning rubble for the next nine months—a dangerous task that was also emotionally and psychologically grueling. I dealt with my

At the time, I weighed around 180 pounds. On September 11,

anxiety about his safety with takeout. The number on the scale steadily rose over the next years.

I tried to lose weight after that first moment of realization in 2003, but the methods I used failed me. My MO was slashing my calorie intake, placing all sorts of random foods on a forbidden list (carbs, white foods, dairy, sweets), and refusing to hang out with my friends. (They had the nerve to eat and drink in my presence. Who could han-

dle that kind of temptation?) I'd work out like an Olympic hopeful, but eventually I'd falter, go on epic binges, and inevitably gain back most of the weight I'd lost.

In mid-2004, I weighed 243 pounds—and that was when I finally found a strategy that worked. As a life-long yo-yo-er, I'd slimmed down with Weight Watchers before. I rededicated myself to the program, especially the new online food-tracking tools. At the same time, I was the editor of *Allure's* Total Makeover feature, which profiled women on weight-loss quests over the course of a year. I lived and breathed the story—I talked the girls off ledges when they had slip-ups and celebrated their successes when they didn't. I slowly took in the lessons that the *Allure* experts shared, such as weight-loss guru Stephen Gullo's concept of being honest about your relationship with certain foods. I finally understood that it wasn't how many calories there are in a chocolate-chip cookie (130) that mattered; it was how many I was actually going to eat. I had never had one cookie in my life—if I had one, I had three. So in reality, cookies, for me, were 390 calories minimum.

I began rediscovering foods that I'd forgotten I liked because I'd been so busy eating processed junk engineered to overwhelm my palate with fat and salt. When Eddie, now retired from the police force, enrolled in the chef's training program at the healthy-foods-focused Natural Gourmet Institute, trying out new produce together became fun: lotus root, dandelion greens, and sea vegetables. (I still hate the latter, but I tried them eagerly.)

**W**ithin a year, I broke the 200-pound barrier—I weighed 197 pounds and was so proud I could burst. That's also around the time when, fortuitously, my friend Ammo O'Day became a personal trainer. I signed on as her

first client. Talk about motivation—O'Day was my well-muscled, heavily tattooed fairy godmother. She kicked my ass twice a week, and I supplemented those sessions with cardio-sculpt and yoga classes. I didn't motivate myself with a 10k or a half-marathon (those races were too scary!), but I stepped on that elliptical machine every few days no matter how little I wanted to be there.

I never knew I could push myself so hard and be so physical. I learned to enjoy a postworkout flush and the feeling of satisfying exhaustion. I worked with O'Day for over a year, until I felt comfortable heading into the gym solo.

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Eventually, I didn't feel right if I had skipped a workout. My body actually craved the exercise. Similarly, I didn't know that I would love walking home from the office as the sun was setting until I started doing it. I'd had no idea that spending vacation days strolling on the beach was so relaxing because previously, I'd been determined to spend all my time lounging by the pool sipping piña coladas (I'm on vacation! It's a special occasion!). I had to try new things to realize that I could take pleasure in them.

I was doing it—I was steadily losing weight, and this time I really believed I could one day reach a healthy size. I even signed up for belly-dancing classes. (And yes, I bared my belly.) I wanted to share that feeling of motivation with everyone I cared about, so I started the Devash Family Challenge.

My dad, the very man who had instilled in me terrible eating habits when I was a child, was also my biggest inspiration—he himself had lost more



Martin, with her husband, at 140 pounds in 2010

## Sweet Success

In 2003, when Judy Matz Martin appeared in *Allure* as part of the very first Total Makeover, she declared, "I hate my body." During the yearlong boot camp with a nutritionist and personal trainer, the five-foot-three Martin went from 189 pounds to 135. Eight years later, she's still down 50 pounds from that original weight. Though Martin took her diet and workout as seriously as a full-time job during the makeover, she made her own rules—like throwing out her scale. "I prefer to use my clothes as a gauge, since that's more about how I feel and less about getting fixated on a specific number," she says.

After meeting her future husband, Ryan Martin, she gained 15 to 20 pounds in just a few months. To get her back on track, they signed up for weekly classes—krav maga and yoga—and took active vacations. "We went to an ashram in Brazil, surf camp in Costa Rica, and diving in the Maldives," Martin says. "When we went to Mexico, we still had margaritas—but it was after a 14-mile hike through Mayan ruins. That way I could take vacations without gaining weight."

She is also vigilant about her eating habits. "I'm never going to go to a restaurant and order boiled chicken," she says. But Martin orders an appetizer as her entrée and prepares organic vegetables and lean meat at home four nights a week. "It's a battle," she says. "But you'd never hear me say I hate my body now."

—SARAH Z. WEXLER



Martin at 174 pounds and 138 pounds, during her 2003 *Allure* makeover

than 120 pounds. When I was in high school, he weighed nearly 400 pounds and had type 2 diabetes. Even after his phenomenal loss, he still had another 60 pounds to drop. My brother, sister, and husband were also grappling with their weight.

They had all seen my results and were instantly on board. I instructed them to send me their numbers weekly. When someone wanted to quit, I harangued them until they divulged their weight for the week. At year's end, the person who lost the largest percentage of weight got a prize (a massage; a new pair of jeans in a smaller size). But the real prize was having a group of people in my corner who shared in my successes and harassed me into compliance when I wanted to give up.

**D**uring this time, I realized that the days would go by whether I was making changes that worked toward my goals or against them. One year from any given day, I could step on the scale 35 pounds lighter—or heavier. Every day I made dozens of choices that affected the outcome. With this new mind-set and my friends and family involved, I shrank down to 145 pounds, a healthy weight

for a still-curvy woman of five feet five—and gained the perspective to look back on how it happened.

We've heard it a million times—losing weight for good can only come from changing your lifestyle. But when I was fat, I loved my lifestyle. I never had to ruin my blown-out hair

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at the gym, and I got to eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted...just because I wanted to. Doesn't that sound wonderful?

What I didn't consider was how many moments in my day were not wonderful at all: the half-hour in the morning when I'd try on everything in the closet, looking for something to hide my bulges. Being too afraid to squeeze into a seat on the subway because of the look in other commuters' eyes ("Please don't sit next to me!").

Getting embarrassingly winded climbing the stairs. Don't even bring up lights-on sex with the husband.

By living the way a normal person lives—not an obese person, not an obsessed dieter—I've reached so many milestones over the seven years it took for me to lose 107 pounds (though a dramatic setback on the scale after quitting cigarettes meant most of my weight loss—85 pounds—happened in three years). Sprinting up steps without being out of breath. The emergence of my collarbones and, later, my hip bones. Turning around my hypertension and lowering my cholesterol count by 90 points. Comfortably crossing my legs. Scooting into the middle seat on the subway without someone giving me the stink eye. Fitting into a single-digit clothing size. Sitting comfortably in coach (well, as comfortably as one can sit in coach). Wearing skinny jeans—and then tucking those jeans into tall boots.

I also remember the exact moment I realized that I was no longer fat. It was July 2010, and I was by the pool at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. I was wearing a retro Malia Mills two-piece, and as I walked to my lounge chair, I noticed there were male eyes on me. But it wasn't those incredulous stares reserved for overweight people in inappropriate swimwear. They were just watching a pretty girl go by. ♦

## Slim Tactics

Devash has lost weight during weeks she didn't exercise, but never when she overate. Here are her best dieting tricks.

• **CLEAR YOUR KITCHEN OF PACKAGED SNACKS.** "It's too easy to rip open a bag of pretzels. When you actually have to prepare your food or peel fruit, you have a moment to decide just how hungry you really are. If a ripe pear doesn't seem appealing, you can't be that famished."

• **DON'T DRINK CALORIES.** "I drink water and iced tea, with two exceptions: a milk-spiked coffee in the morning and vodka and Diet Coke when I go out for cocktails—I'm not a saint."

• **STICK TO ONE HIGH-CALORIE ITEM PER MEAL.** "If you make a sandwich on whole-grain bread, you can have aioli, cheese,

or avocado—but not all three. You'll have just enough indulgence with each meal to keep you from feeling deprived."

• **PICK UP STICKS.** "At home, I eat almost all my meals with chopsticks. I'm not as dexterous with them as I am with a knife and fork, and that forces me to slow down and enjoy each hard-won bite."

• **SPA-IFY YOUR DRESSING.** "The ratio of oil to vinegar in a traditional vinaigrette salad dressing is about three to one. A one-to-one ratio cuts about 100 calories per serving, and, trust me, you won't miss the extra oil. Multiply that by five lunches per week, and you've saved 500 calories without noticing."

• **DEGLAMORIZE FOOD.** "Unless it's a special occasion, food is fuel you need several times a day—it's not an excuse to taste every novelty flavor the world

has to offer. Limiting your choices most of the time—a fat-free Greek yogurt and fruit for breakfast; a salad for lunch; whole grains and vegetables for dinner—means you won't open yourself up to new cravings."

• **TAKE TIME TO DECIDE.** "When I see something exceptionally tempting, I ask myself whether I'll see that food again in the near future. It's not so difficult to resist a cupcake if it doesn't seem scarce or special. But I only encounter my mom's pecan pie once a year, on Thanksgiving. And I'll be damned if I miss out on that."

• **DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP.** "So you ate some pecan pie. That's no reason to eat anything and everything you've been craving. Simply start eating healthfully again—not next Monday, not the next morning, but at the next meal."