

No Shortcuts: A Journey From Fat to Fit

I first met Heidi Luong, 35, a year and a half ago, the night I spoke at her San Antonio church on the subject of faith-driven fitness. After my talk, she graciously asked, with her trademark smile, if I would autograph her copy of my book *Fit for Faith*.

She proceeded to express her growing love for a strength and conditioning program called CrossFit and that she was even considering becoming a certified CrossFit coach. I invited her to come try a class or two at my and my husband's box and thought to myself as she walked away, *I bet she'd make a great coach*.

A year and a half later, I am blessed to be able to train alongside Heidi and call her both a CrossFit coach and a sister in Christ. We've all heard of "Proverbs 31 Women," but I believe Heidi is a "1 Thessalonians 5:23 Woman" too—she desires for the minds of her CrossFit sisters and brothers to be as strong as their muscles and their prayer life as vibrant as their gym life, and she prays that they be "preserved complete" in spirit, soul and body. Heidi can be regularly found pushing her athletes to lift, press, carry and swing challenging weights and genuinely, effortlessly encourages them to give any heavy spiritual burden over to the Lord, all in the same one hour of class time.

Heidi's passion stems from her own past struggles. All of our athletes at CrossFit 925 are shocked when they hear about her former weight battle and aversion to exercise of any kind and often exclaim "Nuh-uh!" when she tells them she once weighed over 200 pounds. But Heidi's journey was entirely real, her transformation truly astounding, and her heart to help others 100 percent a product of her past and the illuminating lessons

she courageously claimed from within it.

I want to thank Heidi for agreeing to be featured in this article and do the following interview with me. Doing so required no small measure of bravery, humility and willingness to be completely vulnerable in hopes that something she shares will strike a chord within each of you reading and remind you of the promise that with God, nothing is impossible.

Diana: Heidi, when did you start to gain the weight, and what, if anything, triggered it?

Heidi: I started to gain weight around my mid-20s, right after I married. It was that “first-20-pounds-of-comfort newlywed weight.” We used dinner and a movie as our go-to activity together. Then two years in, I became pregnant and gained 20 “extra” pounds.

I had every intention of losing the weight right after I had my first child. But, surprise! While nursing, I got pregnant again! So I did what I did best to feel “good”: I ate ice cream every night.

Remaining inactive and using pregnancy as an excuse to not work out, I shoved getting healthy to the back burner of my priorities list and focused on other hobbies and staying at home with my two beautiful babies. And I gained even more. At my son’s first birthday I was at my heaviest and was completely depressed every time I looked in the mirror.

Diana: What was the catalyst that inspired you to start making changes to lose the weight?

Heidi: Hearing the doctor say I was not only overweight, but also obese and pre-diabetic. Shortly thereafter, we read a verse in one of my Bible study classes about how our bodies are temples for the Lord and we honor Him when we take care of ourselves. I thought about how tired I always felt and how I knew I wanted to serve Him and my family but never had any

energy.

I reached an emotional low and was desperate to lose weight. I remember having to choose between a gym membership or buying a treadmill. My husband had encouraged me to join a gym and reluctantly (because I didn't want anyone to see me), I found one to join that was close to home, offered childcare and was affordable. I asked my husband to take my "before" picture because I was *extremely* motivated and knew that I was going to get healthy again.

Diana: What did you change in your daily life?

Heidi: I exercised regularly. I spent the first couple of months doing my own workout, which consisted of walking on the treadmill and using the elliptical machine while watching TV. But I began to notice that all of the in-shape people had personal trainers. I knew I needed help knowing how to lose weight *the right way*, but I didn't have the money to get a trainer.

After sharing my dilemma, my in-laws bought me two months of training. I immediately started losing weight and realized the value in the information and help I was receiving. I was a sponge and actually took a night job to continue to afford two more months of training.

The trainer had me working out five days a week: two cardio-only days and three strength and cardio days. He kept bumping up my intensity as I started to handle more and more.

It was always a challenge and never comfortable. I learned firsthand about DOMS [delayed onset muscle soreness].

Diana: Can you talk a bit about your nutrition and what healthy swaps you made and any tips/tricks you incorporated to make losing a little easier?

Heidi: My trainer had me cut calories and limited what I was

eating to six clean, small meals a day. To my surprise, I never felt deprived or hungry. I lost about one to two pounds a week. It seemed like a slow progress, but I stuck with it and continued to make more progress and got stronger little by little.

My sister noticed my progress and was motivated to get back in shape after having her first baby. She told me she was going to start running and was going to sign up for a half marathon. I was so excited to be an inspiration to someone. In true older-sister style, she also informed me that I was going to be training with her. I thought she was crazy to try to run that far—and on purpose—and that I would agree to do it with her. But I did!

I asked my gym if they had a running group, but they didn't. So we started our own, and within a month, I truly fell in love with my running time. I soon started to run as many races as I could—5Ks, 10Ks, the half and even a full marathon. I started subbing and then teaching fitness classes, like step class, swim aerobics and boot camp classes.

Diana: What eventually led you to CrossFit?

Heidi: I was told by a spine specialist after my marathon that I wasn't allowed to run long distances on pavement because the repetitive impact was exacerbating a hereditary condition I have. I started searching for an alternate workout to maintain my new healthy attitude and lifestyle. I tried a few Zumba classes, Yoga, MMA, kickboxing, boxing, Krav Maga self-defense, and finally CrossFit, which I immediately fell in love with.

Diana: How long did it take you to drop the weight, and was it hard to keep it off? Were you tempted to slip into old habits again?

Heidi: It took me a year and a half to lose all the weight. I was tempted to start overeating again (old habits die hard),

but I had to learn not to turn to food to fill an emotional or spiritual void. I'm still tempted to cheat now and then, but I've learned to change my outlook on food. I allow myself the grace to know I will be eating tiramisu for my birthday and it will all be OK. All things in moderation.

I've also learned that if I go crazy and throw caution to the wind with greasy, fattening or super-sugary food these days, I feel horrible. I am more aware and in tune with what my body needs over what it seems to want. Taking a moment to analyze why and what I am about to eat is sometimes all it takes to make a better choice.

Diana: What were the benefits of losing weight? And what was the best part?

Heidi: Some benefits of losing weight have been an increase in energy. I feel great about the accomplishment of sticking with my goal. I feel great about how I look, my kids get to see discipline and hard work paying off, and I love inspiring others that knew me at my heaviest and being an example and encouragement that you really can do all things in Christ who gives you strength.

Diana: How has your past as being an overweight person bettered you as a health professional?

Heidi: I feel like I can empathize with those trying to reach their personal goals, and it motivates me to encourage them through their doubt.

Diana: What is your advice to anyone reading who thinks losing weight and keeping it off is nearly impossible for them? What do you think their first step should be?

Heidi: My advice is to take it one step at a time. Make very specific and small, doable goals. Don't get overwhelmed and defeated if you don't reach your goal in a short amount of time. It took time to gain that weight; it will take time to

lose it. Two months is not a long time when it comes to losing weight. Expect to lose only one to two pounds a week with healthy changes. But you'll notice it will stay off if you keep up your new healthy habits.

Don't be afraid of gaining lean muscle. Muscle burns fat faster.

Don't obsess over the scale. Muscle weighs more than fat. There will be weeks if you're working out that the scale will not budge. You know you made progress—believe in that.

My advice for what to do first is to make a list of your goals and then everything you think that is getting in the way of your goals. Then work on praying over those things and finding a way to overcome any negative thoughts and excuses. Also start with changing what you eat. Seventy percent of losing weight starts with what you put into your body regularly. Make it clean, mostly lean, natural and properly portioned out.

Lastly, know you are worth the time, money and investment it takes to reach your goal! God loves you and made you with an intent and purpose. Our days here are numbered. Let's give Him thanks for this gift of life and bless and honor Him with a healthy life full and ready for the adventure He sets before us.

Stay fit, stay faithful.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of *Creation House's Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman's Guide to Total Fitness* and her latest book, *Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness*. Her popular website can be found at [www.dianataylor.com](#), and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.

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