

The only way is slimmer for Essex couple!

Eighteen months ago Simon and Tracy Bartlett made a weight-loss pact that changed their lives! They went on to lose 15½ stone and now they've won the title of Slimming World's Couple of the Year 2012.



After Tracy's diagnosis with a rare auto-immune disease in 2006 the couple, who live in Braintree in Essex with their 19-year-old son, saw their weight balloon and became increasingly reclusive. Tracy spent years in and out of hospital, while at home she regularly had to be hooked up to oxygen and sleep in a chair to prevent her lungs filling with fluid.

After six Christmases were blighted by her illness, support worker Tracy hit rock bottom: "On Christmas Day 2010 I was hooked up to oxygen again and felt completely exhausted. I told Simon: 'I can't do this anymore, if I have another year like this I'll give up.' I knew my weight was making my condition harder to deal with and I had to do something about it. A friend had been losing weight with Slimming World so I asked Simon to join with me. We both knew we had to change."

Comfort eating

Simon and Tracy had both struggled with their weight since they were teenagers, but their size crept up after Tracy, 42, was diagnosed with Churg-Strauss syndrome* which badly affected her lungs. Taking daily steroids to manage the condition increased Tracy's appetite: "I was constantly hungry and I'd reach for junk food. I suppose I was comfort eating. It had a knock-on effect on Simon because he'd be right there beside me comfort eating too."

Cable manufacturer Simon, 33, agrees: "It was a really stressful time. I was trying to be there for Tracy and keep things going at home for our son. We didn't have time to cook so we'd grab fish and chips or pizza, often on the way home from hospital. The worst moments for me were one day when

I had to call our son, who was 14 at the time, and tell him to come with his granddad to the hospital because we didn't know if Tracy would make it through the night."

'I hated the way I looked'

At their heaviest, Simon weighed 18½st and Tracy 18st. On top of Tracy's illness, they both suffered with high blood pressure and painful joints. They began avoiding social events and rarely left the house other than for work. Tracy says: "I used to love going to the cinema but the seats started to get really tight. We stopped doing everything we used to enjoy and I hated the way I looked."

The pair tried diet shakes and the cabbage soup diet but didn't lose weight and decided slimming just didn't work for them – until their change of heart at Christmas 2010. Then on January 5th 2011, Simon and Tracy joined their local Slimming World group in Braintree. Simon says: "As a man, I was very nervous because I thought slimming clubs were a 'woman's world'. We stood outside the door for ages and just as we were about to bolt, our Consultant Heidi popped her head out of the door and ushered us in. Instantly we felt like we were among friends – people chatted to us, told us about different recipes and made us feel really welcome. They've been so supportive all along and I don't think we could have done it without Heidi and the group. Now it's hard to believe we were so scared – and the best thing is I'm not the only bloke!"

A new lifestyle

Simon and Tracy replaced their diet of junk food and takeaways with healthy home-cooked meals, including grilled steak, Slimming World-style chips (cooked in the oven), mushrooms and peas and big grilled breakfasts, following Slimming World's Food Optimising healthy eating plan. The plan encourages members to satisfy their appetite freely on 'Free Foods' including fruit and veg, pasta, rice, potatoes and lean meat. Tracy says: "We were really sceptical at first. We couldn't believe we could eat foods like potatoes and pasta, have as much as we wanted and lose weight. But we stuck to the plan and whenever I felt hungry because of the steroids, I'd have Free Foods. I lost 7½lb in the first week and Simon lost 6lb. We knew then we'd found something that worked for us and now we don't even think about it. It's not a diet; it's a way of eating for the rest of our lives. We can even have biscuits, sweets and crisps in moderation – we literally can have our cake and eat it!"

More health benefits

As the weight came off they also started walking more and were soon enjoying weekends exploring the countryside. By Christmas 2011 Tracy had lost 8st 8½lb and Simon was 6st 12½lb lighter. While Tracy will always suffer with Churg-Strauss, losing weight has helped to manage the condition by making it easier to breathe, as her weight no longer puts extra pressure on her lungs and her fitness has improved. The couple's other health problems have disappeared.

Simon says: "This year we had a lovely normal Christmas, just the three of us, no oxygen and no hospital trips – it was perfect. Our lives are so different now; we don't even recognise the people we used to be."

Tracy agrees: "We want to make up for lost time. We've booked camping trips for the summer and I'm dying to try weird and wacky things like zorbing and bungee jumping, things I'd never have

dreamed of doing before. Life is out there and you only get one shot, I just wish I'd found Slimming World and realised that years ago!"

FACT FILE

Name: Tracy Bartlett	Name: Simon Bartlett
Age: 42	Age: 33
Starting weight: 18st/252lb/115g	Starting weight: 18st 7½lb/259.5lb/118kg
Current weight: 9st 5½lb/131.5lb/60kg	Current weight: 11st 9lb/163lb/74kg
Weight loss: 8st 8½lb/120.5lb/55kg	Weight loss: 6st 12½lb/96.5lb/44kg
Dress size before 26/28	Waist before: 50in/127cm
Dress size now: 10/12	Waist now: 37in/94cm
Height: 5ft 3½in/1.61m	Height: 5ft 10in/1.78m

Joining date: 5/1/2011

Group: Braintree group run by Heidi Cripps at Marks Farm Community Centre, Braintree, Essex every Wednesday at 5.30pm and 7pm.

Diet before

Breakfast: none or high-sugar, low-fibre cereals

Mid-morning snack: biscuits and a cup of tea

Lunch: pre-packed sandwich from supermarket, crisps, chocolate or sweets and a fizzy drink

Dinner: takeaway pizza or microwave convenience meal

Evening: chocolate, crisps or biscuits

Diet now

Breakfast: full English breakfast with grilled lean bacon, tomatoes and mushrooms, eggs fried in low calorie cooking spray and baked beans or Weetabix with banana

Mid-morning: apple and a fat-free yogurt

Lunch: large jacket potato with tuna and sweetcorn and salad

Mid-afternoon: piece of fruit and a high-fibre cereal bar

Dinner: lean steak with Slimming World style chips (baked in the oven) with mushrooms, peas and grilled tomatoes.

Evening: fresh fruit salad topped with fat-free natural yogurt, homemade chilli dip with celery sticks, bunch of grapes, sugar-free jelly, two-finger Kit Kat or Curly Wurly, or packet of Quavers.

– Ends –

For further information please contact the Slimming World press office on 01773 546101 or call 07920 799106 or email: public.relations@slimming-world.com

Notes to Editors

- NB. The information within this press release is not for syndication. For more information on the winners and their story please contact the Slimming World press office as detailed above.
- *Churg-Strauss Syndrome is an auto-immune disease. In CSS white blood cells attack the body's healthy tissues and cause damage. The lungs become damaged in 70% of cases and other areas of the body that can be affected are the circulation, skin, nervous and digestive systems.
- Slimming World is the largest and most advanced slimming organisation in the UK. Margaret Miles-Bramwell (OBE, FRSA) founded the company in 1969 and there are now more than 8,500 groups held weekly nationwide via a network of more than 3,500 Slimming World trained Consultants.
- 450,000 members attend Slimming World every week and achieve outstanding success.
- Slimming World pioneered referral schemes in the UK and actively supports the building of partnerships with the NHS and local authorities to develop effective strategies to manage overweight and obesity in the community. Slimming World works with university researchers and specialists in an active research programme to further knowledge of the causes and treatment of obesity.
- Slimming World's healthy eating plan, Food Optimising, and the principles behind Slimming World's philosophy are based on a deep understanding of the challenges faced by overweight people. Slimming World integrates practical, up-to-date dietary advice with a highly developed support system.
- Slimming World Consultants receive specific training in dietary aspects and the role of physical activity in weight control. The highly developed training focuses on facilitating behaviour change in a group environment, acknowledged by experts as being the most effective way to support long-term weight management.
- To find out more about Slimming World visit www.slimmingworld.com or call 0844 897 8000.