



'WEIGHT TRAINING CHANGED

MY LIFE'

After years of yo-yo dieting, Jennie Finlay, 41, found hitting the gym changed her shape and life, for the better



Celebrating at my friend's wedding, I realised it was the first time I'd worn a dress since my own big day 20 years ago - for years I'd been hiding behind baggy clothes. It was the bride, Lorraine, who a year earlier, had lifted me from rock bottom. I'd lost my long-term partner to a heart attack and was overweight myself. Lorraine insisted I join her at the gym, knowing it would make me feel better. Without her, I never would have transformed my life.

I'd always been 'the big girl' at school. I was a chubby child, despite playing hockey, and as a teenager I was chunkier than my friends. At 16, I was 'the bubbly one', low in confidence but making jokes to cover it up.

I was a yo-yo dieter. When I was 21 I slimmed down to 12st, a size 16. I had a goal - I was marrying my fiancé Greg and wanted to fit into my wedding dress. At 22, I was expecting my first child and I ballooned back up to 16st - heavy for my 5ft 3in frame. Another child three years later meant I piled weight on again. Our marriage didn't work out and, when I was 30, we separated. I lost about 1st 7lb through the upset and, single again, I wanted to overhaul my life. I started swimming but the weight never stayed off.

A new man made me gain more weight. The following year, in 2006, I met my partner Colin. Soon we were enjoying cosy weekends together, meals out, drinks, takeaways. He was a big man

and had a very unhealthy diet - his doctor said he had high cholesterol and he was put on statins, but he just wasn't interested in healthy eating or working out.

Colin lived in Scotland but my children were young and in school, so I stayed in Belfast. For eight years we only saw each other every fortnight and we enjoyed our big blowout weekends.

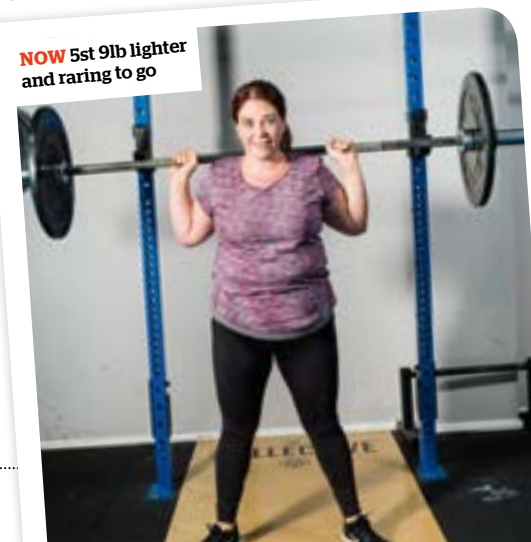
The phone call that changed everything.

In September 2014, Colin's sister phoned to say he'd died of a massive heart attack. He was 47. I was distraught. At first I couldn't face a meal for weeks, but then the grief pulled me under and I began comfort eating. I just sat at home and ate. Eight months later I'd reached 18st 7lb. I'd hit an all-time low and my GP warned I was morbidly obese. So, in July 2015, when Lorraine suggested I buddy up with her in the gym, I knew I had to start taking control of my health.

Having a personal trainer kept me focused. I couldn't believe I was putting myself on show at the gym, in front of all those fit people, but on the second day a personal trainer came over and offered to help me. He explained that to slim down and tone up, I needed to start using weights.

We began with gentle exercises on the standard gym equipment. Then, as my fitness improved, I moved on to squats, dead lifts, bench presses, dips and chin-ups. I started working out four times a week, for 90 minutes a session.

Weight training was my turning point. It was tough at first because my stamina was low. To help with squats, I used an exercise ball up against a wall for support. Working my



HOW I DID IT

JENNIE'S WEIGHT LOSS

Before	After	Loss
Weight		
18st 7lb	12st 12lb	5st 9lb
Dress size		
22	14	4 sizes

abs felt impossible, too. My tummy was so big, it was hard to get off the floor. I got very out of breath and could only manage 30 seconds of high intensity training, so we took lots of breaks and gradually built it up. My new cardio regime was also hard. I started walking on the treadmill, then walking uphill, then added in jogging.

The weight came off fast - 4st in six months. At the start of 2016, it dropped more slowly - I just lost 1st 7lb, but I didn't worry about plateauing and it soon picked up again. My target is 10st. I tend to lose about 1lb every two weeks now.

My children spur me on. Every time I lose a stone Amy, 19, makes a fuss of me. When Michael, 15, says, 'You look great today, Mum', it's all the motivation I need.

No more takeaways. I used to survive on ready meals and takeaways. Now I eat a high-protein, low-carb diet, with chicken, eggs and spinach for breakfast, a chicken stir-fry (no noodles!) for lunch, and fish with veg for dinner.

I've found love. I heard a friend, Gary, was opening a gym, The Collective in Belfast, last year. I started working out with him and told him about my transformation. We got on well and on my birthday last year, he took me on a date. We've been together ever since.

Colin's death was the hardest thing, but he'd be so happy if he saw me now. I can finally look in the mirror with confidence. I feel healthy inside and out.

HAVE A GO...

Ask advice from a PT at your gym for how to get started. Or try a class, such as Les Mills BodyPump.