

failure *dissatisfied* worried  
*shame* *scared*  
*frustrated* uncomfortable  
*hopeless* tired. **unhappy**  
**unconfident** *insecure*  
*fed up* anxious **invisible**  
disappointed **embarrassed**

# MIND your language

attractive *focused*  
inspired content. calm **fit** positive  
**happy** *determined* *stylish* healthy  
body positive **confident** proud  
**optimistic** *successful*  
*empowered* **motivated**

how self-talk impacts on our attitude and  
behaviour around weight and body image

*Slimming*<sup>®</sup>  
—WORLD—

touching hearts, changing lives

# key points

**60%** of British adults say they sometimes struggle with their weight or body image

Of those, **74%** have used self-deprecating (belittling) language in relation to weight or body image, and a third (33%) say that their family or partner/spouse negatively affects their self-esteem on a daily basis

## *More than one third (39%)*

of British adults say that they've seen something about 'fat-shaming' in the media in the past 6 months and 74% have come across the phrase

**72%** of Slimming World members say their group makes them feel that they are not alone

**89%** of members say that losing weight with Slimming World has helped them to feel more positive about themselves



# foreword

## *What are we saying to ourselves and why does it matter?*

Slimming World's research into the use of language around weight and body image looked at both the external environment, how language around weight and body image is used to bully and shame people, and how we use language internally to denigrate ourselves. Alarming, almost three quarters of those surveyed who sometimes struggle with their weight or body image use self-deprecating language (belittle themselves).

As well as speaking unkindly to ourselves and comparing ourselves to others, our self-esteem can be damaged by a number of external factors, including fat-shaming language used on social media and in the media, and comments from friends, family and work colleagues. This can lead to a cycle of continuous discontent, self-doubt and lack of confidence. Those people who struggle with their weight and poor body image are most susceptible to the impact of negative language.

For those who are overweight and want to lose weight, it is essential to break this cycle. Crucially, we need to change our attitude before we can change our behaviour, but how can we do that? A good starting point is to shift the negative self-talk by being kinder to ourselves and recognising that we are not in competition with anyone.

Slimming World has long recognised that to help members succeed in losing weight we must first help to lift any burden of guilt and shame. By creating a safe environment where there is no judgement or humiliation, Slimming World helps people to tackle both the psychological and physiological issues of weight and negative body image. We do this by addressing the issue of low self-esteem through a powerful combination of group support, genuine care and positive reinforcement, providing consistent nudges towards positivity and self-care. Confidence is further boosted through improved physical health, having a better relationship with food and making better choices as well as ongoing encouragement within a group setting.

For many of us who struggle with weight and body image our self-esteem is fragile so building resilience is crucial. Slimming World does this very effectively by creating a positive group dynamic, recognising achievement, having a structured programme where healthy changes are rewarded and successes celebrated. Groups are facilitated by trained Consultants, who have been overweight themselves. They help the group to identify triggers, danger zones and self-sabotage practices, and support individual members, along with fellow members as mentors, to create plans to overcome obstacles and challenges. This is underpinned by helping members to feel safe and accepted into a social network where they make new friends and share their experiences. By being part of a positive, friendly community, Slimming World members start to feel good about themselves and learn to turn negative self-talk into kinder, more caring sentiments.

before

failure *dissatisfied* worried  
 frustrated shame *scared*  
 hopeless *tired* **unhappy**  
**unconfident** insecure  
*fed up* anxious **invisible**  
 disappointed **embarrassed**

after

attractive *focused*  
 inspired content *calm* **fit** positive  
 happy *determined* *stylish* healthy  
 body positive **confident** proud  
**optimistic** *successful*  
 empowered **motivated**

How internal negative self-talk shifts to kinder language with the support of a positive group

# executive summary

In the research, Slimming World examined the impact of language and social attitudes on weight, body image and self-esteem. We investigated fat-shaming language used on social media and conducted research among the general public and Slimming World members. Our aim was to gain an understanding of how people speak about weight in relation to themselves and their body image, the feelings that this elicits, and how it impacts on motivation to change and if joining a Slimming World group affects this.

The research set out to explore how people use language around weight to denigrate and belittle others and how we speak to ourselves about our weight. We wanted to gain a better understanding of both external negative attitudes and language and their impact on self-esteem as well as our internal negative dialogue. Identifying the scale and impact of negative language around weight and body image helps us to understand how to change the conversation about weight and body image both externally and in our own heads, in a way that increases self-esteem and enables those who feel least confident, judged, ashamed or in poor health, to seek support and feel supported.

Slimming World explored this issue through an online research platform<sup>i</sup> which allowed participants, from both the general public and Slimming World groups, to reveal their own feelings towards weight and body image, how they speak about it in relation to themselves, and their perspective on how language is used by society when describing weight and body image.

Conducting the research showed that understanding our perception of ourselves with regard to weight and body image is complicated, because it's an extremely private topic that many people don't feel comfortable speaking about. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, envy or even self-loathing can make it difficult to honestly articulate.

Findings from the online research platform were reinforced by polling adults in Britain<sup>ii</sup>, and also Slimming World members<sup>iii</sup>, to gain further understanding of how language impacts those who struggle with their weight and body image.

The research found there are a number of reasons that we self-deprecate, from using humour to make light of a situation, to expressing frustration, to putting ourselves down negatively, to trying to motivate ourselves to change. Often, we're simply describing how we believe others see us.

The survey of the general public found that we are overwhelmingly a nation of self-loathers, with almost two thirds (63%) of respondents using negative words to describe themselves currently or in the past, rising to 81% of those who report sometimes struggling with their weight or body image.

- 74% of British adults who sometimes struggle with their weight or body image have used self-deprecating (belittling) language.
- 60% of British adults say there are times in their life where they struggle with their weight or body image and 51% say they frequently struggle.
- This is even higher in the younger generation; 72% of 18-24-year olds have struggled with their weight or body image and 62% report that they frequently struggle with their weight or body image.

When asked about the emotions that are associated with weight and body image, participants in the survey all reported strong negative associations. Both the general public and Slimming World members used words like 'pressure', 'self-conscious', 'depressed', 'dark tunnel', 'desperate' and 'worthless' to describe how they felt. British adults are also more likely to use negative words about themselves than positive – 63% versus 37%. Nearly half of the respondents, who sometimes struggle with their weight or body image (47%) report that they described themselves as 'fat'.

An analysis of social media<sup>v</sup> found that fat shaming, and the negative language around weight was extensive, with terms such as 'fat', 'ugly', and 'greedy' all used by people in relation to weight, and often about themselves.

The impact of this negative language leads to a decline in our self-esteem and we feel pressured to look a certain way, impacting our confidence and resilience to external factors and how others see us. Respondents to our survey of the general public reported that their self-esteem is affected on a daily basis by an amalgamation of factors including social media, the media, friends, work colleagues, family and spouse or partner.

Slimming World members surveyed reported that being part of a Slimming World group gives them a layer of resilience against negative self-esteem. For those who decide to make a change and join Slimming World for support to lose weight, 91% report that being a Slimming World member has made them feel more positive about themselves, and 89% say that losing weight as part of Slimming World has helped them to feel more positive.

- i. The online qualitative research platform was undertaken by Walnut Unlimited. It consisted of nine members of the general public and nine Slimming World members. The research was undertaken between 27th and 28th November 2019.
- ii. The general public survey was carried out online. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from Walnut Unlimited. Total sample size was 2029 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th November to 1st December 2019. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).
- iii. The Slimming World survey was undertaken online. Total sample size was 1202 Slimming World members (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 28th November to 5th December.
- iv. The analysis of social media was undertaken using an online dashboard built by Brandwatch. Slimming World monitored activity between 1st September to 30th September 2019.

# language and sentiment



*People have a tendency to use more negative words about themselves than positive. 63% report having used negative words to describe themselves versus only 37% who report having used positive words currently or in the past.*

Fat shaming is the action of expressing ridicule, derision or criticism about someone who is judged to be overweight or obese. Participants in the online research platform believe that as well as being prejudicial, it's a form of bullying that's not acceptable and has a negative impact on self-esteem, emotions and people's outlook.

**Rebecca, 20, Slimming World member**

*“I made the decision to join a beauty pageant, but as soon as I posted this online, I was called ‘fat and disgusting’ by grown men – some even photoshopped my head onto the body of a hippo. It was horrific and really knocked my confidence leaving me feeling very insecure.”*

More than one in three (39%) of the British population report having seen something about ‘fat shaming’ in the media in the last six months, and over half of Slimming World members (56%) have felt stigmatised because of their weight, which made them feel sad (76%), unattractive (67%), worthless (59%), a failure (51%) and isolated (44%).

**Male, 29, non-member:**

*“Fat shaming can lead to a variety of mental health issues. I think it's appalling and all too common. Only made more acceptable by the media.”*

Though a broad term, respondents to the online research platform believe fat shaming has been experienced by everyone in some capacity.

**Male, 29, non-member:**

*“It always reminds me of a time that a dad of one of my friends told me that he pulled over to an overweight woman and said ‘Excuse me? Eat less pies.’ He expected me to find it funny and it just made me think about the impact that it would have had on that woman’s mental health.”*

A social media analysis looking at fat-shaming terms used across channels including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram over a period of one month, found the language used around weight is frequently disparaging and dismissive, with terms such as ‘fat’, ‘ugly’, and ‘greedy’ all used in relation to weight. This form of language was used to describe and insult others in relation to weight, as well as offensively, even when not in relation to weight. The language was also used by individuals to describe when they had been shamed by another person. Most surprisingly, these disparaging words were used by people in relation to themselves.

**Female, 40, non-member:**

*“I often say I have a fat ass as it’s big compared to the rest of my body. I say it as a joke to make light of it.”*

# why do we self-deprecate?

More than half (57%) of British adults, when talking about their own weight or body image, have used self-deprecating language.

There are a number of reasons why people self-deprecate.



The online research platform found one of the reasons we self-deprecate is as a tool to motivate change. However, self-deprecation can also become a perpetual vicious cycle and can be detrimental, actually doing the opposite; hindering our attempts to make change. By self-deprecating we can exaggerate a perceived flaw and exacerbate the issue – for example, “I’m overweight” becomes “I hate my body” leading to “I hate myself”.

Self-deprecation often stems from how we perceive society as seeing us, and importantly, it is the attitudes of those nearest to us that can be the most impactful and deeply felt. The survey of British adults found that of those who sometimes struggle with their weight or body image, one third (33%) of the population said that loved ones (family/spouse/partner) negatively affected their self-esteem on a daily basis, and almost one in five (18%) of those said comments from family or friends have led them to consider changing their lifestyle or eating habits.

**Female, 44, non-member**

“I make jokes and call myself fat and ugly before anyone else gets the chance.”

These attitudes have an impact on our perceptions of how society views us; a combination of negative comments, lack of support, reflections of past experiences including feelings of rejection, and the obligation of relationships can impact confidence levels and how we feel about ourselves.

**Female, 45, non-member**

“I would always say I was the fat person to make other people feel better about themselves, but I didn’t know any better, that was just me. It was like if I say it then it saves anyone else saying it.”

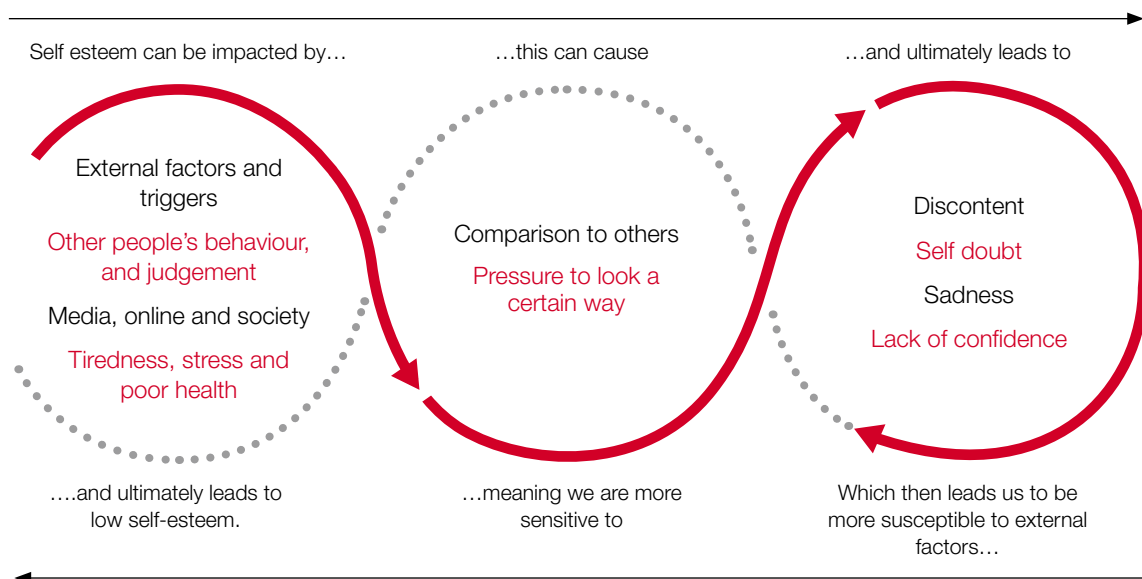
Slimming World members have regularly felt judged by society and those around them because of their weight. The online research groups found that members feel there is an ‘invisible standard’ for body image that they must live up to, but when asked what affected their self-esteem negatively on a daily basis some revealed it was themselves – they are their own harshest critic, but these feelings and negative perceptions have been compounded by how society has judged them either currently or in the past.

By catastrophising the issue and using language about ourselves that we wouldn’t dream of using about a friend or family member we create a vicious cycle of self-criticism that is difficult to break.



# the impact on self-esteem

Self-deprecation combined with negative language used by society, i.e. fat shaming, can impact self-esteem dramatically, spiralling into a vicious cycle:



**Michael, 62, Slimming World member**

“The comments used to bounce off me, but after being called ‘fat’ in the street by young children, all these comments began to hit me, leaving me feeling really low.”

External factors, for example, comments made by loved ones, even if said in jest with no negative intention, can impact self-esteem. This then causes a person to become self-critical and begin to believe the self-deprecation and negative language they use to describe themselves, especially if referring to weight, concluding in a complete lack of confidence in not only their worth, but in their ability to make changes. In weight loss, this could be a lack of belief that they are able to make changes to their diet or physical activity. This then leads back to people being even more susceptible to external factors, including judgement by others.

**Rebecca, 20, Slimming World member**

“Things that affect my self-esteem are: when people stare at me, when people move away from me (e.g. on the bus), if people ask me questions that I don't know, when people talk and I think it's about me, when I'm working and I don't know if I'm good at my job, watching what I eat and how harsh I am on myself and people commenting on it.”

# breaking the cycle

Being part of and belonging to a group with a positive dynamic and getting social support not only helps us to change our behaviour, it helps with attitudinal change too. Before we can start to make changes around the way we eat or how active we are, we need to believe that it's possible. By being part of a group or network of like-minded people, seeing others' successes, and having a social network of friends and family who support us, we receive the positive reinforcement necessary to change. It not only shapes our behaviour; it motivates us to find solutions.

Those who struggle with their weight and low self-esteem need nurturing practical advice and common ground. Support can be found through family and friends, but as we have seen previously in the report, it can also be these groups which negatively affect self-esteem, so support needs to be within a group of like-minded people all experiencing similar challenges with a common goal – to lose weight.

**Lucie, 22, Slimming World member:**

*“...it hit me that being overweight had stolen my childhood and teenage years and I wasn't going to let it take my adulthood.”*

Self-esteem problems are also reduced through support from others where those who are self-deprecating are given the tools to reframe this language – self-affirmation and positive reinforcement is required. When shown how to manage external factors; by challenging the gravitas in a supportive, group environment, and highlighting that these factors are common in some form to all – they are not alone – the dialogue turns positive. Increasing self-belief means raised self-esteem becomes possible, and the cycle is broken.

**Dr Linda Papadopoulos, behavioural psychologist:**

*“There is definitely a nuance to what motivates people to change. A person needs to feel that they don't like something to change it, but there is a difference between 'I don't like this' to 'I am this and I'm not good enough'.*

*“People who struggle with their weight and have low self-esteem need to be given the tools to reframe negativity to positivity and feel empowered to make changes. Rather than talking negatively to themselves and being frustrated with themselves, learning to be kinder to themselves can help – 'I validate myself that I am doing the right thing'.*

*“Rather than motivating themselves through negativity, which we know ultimately doesn't work, they can motivate change through positivity, for example instead of comparing themselves to others, they begin comparing only with their self – 'yesterday was I kind to myself, did I do much self-care today?' Being mindful of what worked well, and what didn't – 'what can I do more of rather than less of' – will help them to succeed in making changes.”*



# that Slimming World feeling

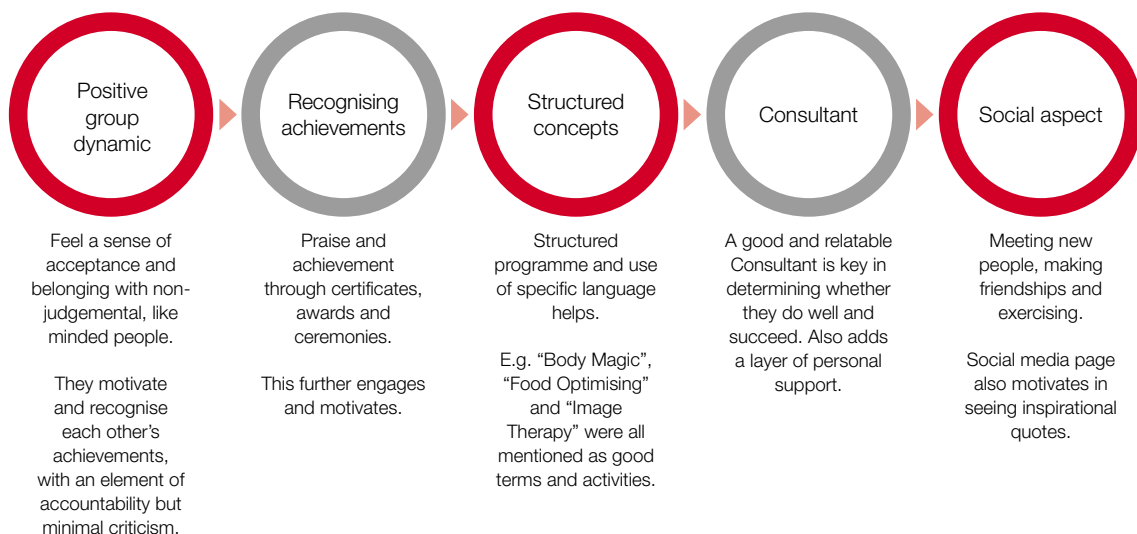


Slimming World gives members an additional layer of resilience against both external and internal negative criticism on weight and body image. Members are not only given the opportunity to spend time focusing on themselves and what they want to achieve, they are able to share solutions with others experiencing similar challenges.

**Trevor, 33, Slimming World member:**

“ Slimming World changed my life and views on food. It has shown me that you can enjoy yourself and still lose weight at the same time. It’s also shown me other people have the same troubles as me and I’m not alone. That’s what I love about going to group; the support and the inspiration you get from others.”

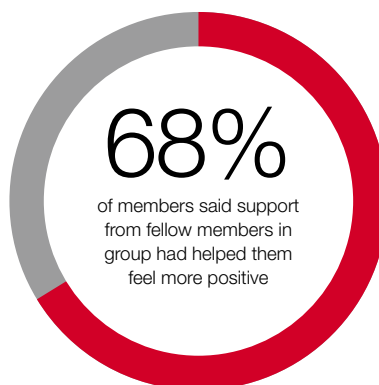
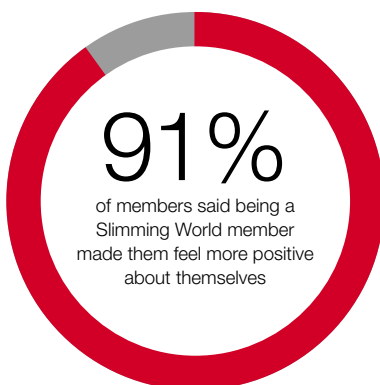
From the online research platform, as well as our survey of Slimming World members, we know that members acknowledge that their emphasis on the negative has significantly lessened as a result of moving through their Slimming World journey. The trigger to join a weight-loss programme was to overcome mental and physical dissatisfaction and ultimately, boost confidence and happiness.



However, just because people lose weight, and change their outward persona, it doesn't automatically improve their confidence and self-esteem levels. Slimming World offers a layer of support where people may have been lacking in it; for example group Consultants act as mentors, guiding and advising members while empowering them to take responsibility, helping them to identify their personal triggers and danger zones and planning how to overcome them, while giving them the confidence to make long-term lifestyle changes which will help them to lose weight, and maintain that loss. The social aspect gives members the opportunity to share issues and help others at the same time, acting as mentors. The positive emotions members feel due to the behavioural changes made are a by-product of the weight loss that they have achieved, which is all a result of the structure of the programme itself.

**Dr Jacquie Lavin, Head of Nutrition and Research at Slimming World:**

*“The peer support available in Slimming World groups is what sets us apart. Our members are part of a community, a group of people who genuinely care about them and their success, which helps them to realise, and feel, that they are not alone in any challenges they face. They are able to take pride in being part of a group that helps each other – it’s this pride and sense of belonging, where they learn to quieten their inner critic, and any negative thoughts they’ve had about themselves, and their appearance and weight. As they make changes and lose weight, members’ belief in themselves increases. As they develop new habits in the way they shop, cook and eat, becoming gradually more active, they become more confident and then play a vital role in sharing that experience and creating a positive trusting environment for fellow members also seeking to lose weight.”*



## Olivia Gibbs

**Starting weight:** 15st 6lbs  
**Weight now:** 10st 5lbs  
**Height:** 5ft 6ins

**Olivia, 24, an office manager from Macclesfield, Cheshire**



Olivia before

At 19, I was offered an exciting job working in the spa of a cruise ship. On the cruise, I was surrounded by guests happily walking around in their swimwear, and I felt so out of place. One day my cabin mate spotted some old photos of a much slimmer me. ‘Wow, was that you?’ she said, amazed. Then she looked me up and down, and added: ‘What happened?’ I’m sure she didn’t mean to be cruel, but I felt crushed and humiliated. Six weeks in, I quit the job. When Dad offered me a job in the family business, I seized the opportunity, happier with the thought of being in an office.

It wasn’t until I saw photographs of myself on holiday with my Dad at the age of 21 that I really realised how heavy I was. I didn’t even recognise myself, and even thought that Dad must have been ashamed to have me as a daughter – which of course wasn’t true.

After that holiday I resolved to lose weight and start feeling like myself again. I joined Slimming World with my friend Luke, and my family and boyfriend, Sam, really got behind my weight loss plans and supported me along the way. They were all rooting for me to get back to being happy in my own skin.

As I got closer to target, I convinced myself I didn’t need group any more, and stopped going. Without the new meal

ideas from the other members and the members’ website, and without the weekly commitment and support, I got stuck in a food rut and I soon realised I was slipping back into my old habits. Careful not to undo everything I’d achieved, I rejoined group. I started trying new food ideas again as well as sharing ideas and listening to fellow members, and a few months later, I got down to my 10st 6lb target.

Spending time with the other members at group each week kept me focused and gave me confidence – not just in knowing I could maintain a healthy lifestyle, but in other aspects of my life, too.

We laugh and cry, overcome hurdles and celebrate achievements together. Being part of a group really makes you believe in yourself and each other. Now I’ve taken on more responsibility in the office and I know that, if I keep working hard, one day I’ll be in line to take over the running of the family business. And far from thinking that Dad could ever be ashamed of me, I know how much that will make him, and my whole family, proud. I wanted the old Olivia back and now she’s here, ready to take on the world!

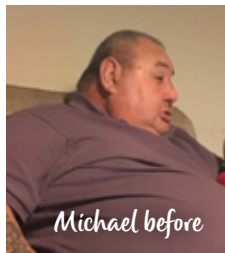


Olivia back and now she’s here, ready to take on the world!

## Michael Harry

**Starting weight:** 29st 8lbs  
**Weight now:** 18st 8lbs

**Michael, 62, is a grandfather-of-four from Swindon**



Michael before

As a shire horse showman, people would banter with me when I was in the ring comparing me to the large horses. The comments used to bounce off me, but after being called ‘fat’ in the street by children - the comments began to hit home, leaving me feeling really low.

After school I signed up to join the Royal Air Force. I spent 23 years in the forces, living an extremely active lifestyle and training most days. I played rugby for the RAF and ran a marathon and numerous half marathons. On leaving the service 20 years ago though I stopped training. I told myself I was taking a break from it, but I never went back and slowly, over the years, the weight crept on.

I began to show shire horses, visiting around 18 shows during the summer. It’s a passion of mine and I’ve won national awards but being called names in the showring because of my weight meant I couldn’t enjoy my accomplishments. I felt hurt and upset because of my size.

I had heard of Slimming World through a family member and lost 12.5lbs in the first week without ever feeling deprived.

I’ve totally embraced the eating plan, Food Optimising, and have even introduced more exercise into my life – I have two springer spaniels, Barley and Bailey which keep me active. Before, I couldn’t walk for five minutes. Now, I’m walking between five and 10 miles with the dogs.

My physical health has improved greatly since losing weight, I take part in far more routines with the horses and take my dogs for walks regularly, but I would say my mental health has also seen a positive change; I feel a lot happier in myself, and I believe my Slimming World group is the reason for this. It’s about being part of a community where we support each other through ups and downs.



The care and commitment I received from members and my Consultant really spurred me on. They have inspired me so much that I’ve recently become a Consultant myself to help give support back – I feel I’ve got a whole new lease of life.

## Ben Muscroft

**Starting weight:** 27st 8½lbs  
**Weight now:** 12st  
**Height:** 5ft 8ins

**Ben, 42, lives with his fiancé Karen in Sheffield**



Before I lost weight, life was just hard, and I had no get-up-and-go. As well as impacting my physical health, I was a worrier, which affected my happiness. I have so many regrets for the things I couldn't do or enjoy.

My size had made the trip to see my brother in China a real struggle. The 20-hour flight had been unbearably uncomfortable: from cringing and feeling ashamed as I asked for a seatbelt extension, to only just squeezing into my seat (and spilling over into my dad's seat), and eating my meals at an angle because the tray table wouldn't lay flat over my stomach.

I wasn't able to join my dad and brother climbing the Great Wall, and as I stood at the temple's base waiting for them, a crowd of locals gathered to take pictures of me and asked for my autograph – they rarely saw anyone my size. I don't think they meant to cause offense, but their judgement left me feeling mortified and extremely vulnerable.

My dad and sister had been going to a Slimming World group for years and had asked me to join them loads of times. Eventually I gave in and said I'd go, secretly thinking I'd show them it wasn't that easy for me to lose weight. I was stunned however to find, despite eating loads and never feeling hungry that, I'd lost 10½lbs in my first week. I was hooked!

As the weight began to come off, I slowly introduced exercise into my routine, and now it's a huge part of my life as well. Since losing weight, my blood pressure has gone down, my BMI has dropped and my sleep apnoea has disappeared. I took indigestion medication for 15 years and now I don't need it. I feel so much healthier, happier and more positive.

Because of my lack of confidence due to my weight, I'd never really had a girlfriend and thought I'd become 'undateable'. As I began to lose weight and started to feel happier about myself, I plucked up the courage to chat to a lovely lady from my group, called Karen – she's now my fiancé!

When I joined Slimming World, I was amazed to be surrounded by like-minded people who were all on the same journey. Going to a Slimming World group is definitely one of the best decisions I've ever made – the only thing I regret now is that I didn't do it 20 years earlier. Joining a group isn't just about losing weight, it's about freeing yourself from all the things that used to hold you back.



## Lucie Hadley

**Starting weight:** 19st 3lbs  
**Weight now:** 9st 3lbs  
**Height:** 5ft 6ins

**Lucie, 22, Peterborough, has lost half her bodyweight**



School life was very upsetting for me as I was badly bullied. I lost count of the amount of times I would go home early pretending to be ill because of the cruel things people used to say about my weight – and it wasn't just insults that were thrown at me, sometimes they'd even throw food at me too.

I continued hiding from the world through my teenage years. I was convinced that I was an embarrassment to my friends, my parents and even my boyfriend, Sam. Saying no to all the things that teenagers should be doing seemed easier than dealing with my own feelings of shame and humiliation. Girly shopping trips always ended in tears. And, if I did go out, I'd spend the night trying to hide behind my massive handbag, feeling like I didn't fit in with the group. It was less stressful just to stay at home. My confidence at that time was rock bottom and I missed out on so much because I felt insecure about my size.

My turning point came just before my 20th birthday. When Sam and my family asked what I wanted to do to celebrate, I gave my stock reply: 'Nothing special, staying in will be fine.' It was at that moment that it finally sunk in. I'd lost all my teenage years – years that are meant to be full of fun and excitement – because I wasn't happy with my weight.

On attending my first Slimming World group I worried that everyone would judge me for being overweight at such a young age. I felt so ashamed but within minutes I realised that everyone was in that room for the same reason and rather than judging, we were all there to support each other. It wasn't a diet. This was about getting the support to make lifelong changes through choice. It was about learning to cook and eat healthy, satisfying, delicious food. And about sharing experiences and ideas and learning from each other. From starting my weight-loss journey, week by week my confidence just grew and grew.

I've come a long way from the girl who used to hide in the changing rooms to try to get out of PE. People say that your school years are the best years of your life, but mine were miserable. Feeling self-conscious about my weight sucked the fun out of everything. Now I'm literally half the person I used to be, and I feel like my life has finally begun. There's no more hiding away for me! When I look at the person in the mirror now, I feel full of pride for what I've achieved – I've created a healthier and happier future for myself and most importantly, I haven't let the bullies win.

