

I lost it my way

There's more to shedding the pounds - and keeping them off - than calorie-counting, as these four women prove. Anna Magee discovers the secrets of long-term weight loss

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH WILL SCAMMELL

'Hypnotherapy helped me change my bad habits'

Naomi Simcox, 38, is a university administrator. She's single and lives in Peckham, south-east London.

I've always been curvy but when I gave up smoking in my mid-twenties, I put on three stone in three months. By the time I was 36 I was a size 22. I tried a slimming club but couldn't stick to the strict diet as I was managing a pub at the time and it didn't fit in with the lifestyle. I tried cutting back on calories, as well as following high-protein and low-carb diets, but I would lose weight, plateau, lose hope and then gain all the

weight back, and more. I felt alone and realised I needed some expert help. I'd heard of the hypnotherapist Ursula James, as she taught at my university. She made me a self-hypnosis CD especially for weight loss. According to Ursula, it takes three weeks to form a habit, so I started listening to it before bed. Nothing happened immediately, but it was relaxing and intriguing enough to prompt me to buy Ursula's book, which came with a self-hypnosis CD. I found it instantly soothing as it took away all blame - people who struggle with their weight have a lot of self-loathing to deal with and, for me, this often led to bouts of comfort-eating.

Lost 2½ st

NAOMI'S VITAL STATS

What worked Listening to a hypnotherapy CD and reading Ursula James' self-hypnosis book, *You Can Think Yourself Thin* (Century, £9.99).

Results Naomi lost 2½ stone in 18 months and dropped from a size 22 to a size 16.

Permanent weight-loss advice 'Don't give up hope - something as simple as self-hypnosis can work, even if you're sceptical, like I was. It may not be an overnight fix, but if you really engage with it, it will make the journey much easier.'

Getting started Ursula James' book comes with a self-hypnosis CD. A single hypnotherapy session for weight loss with Ursula James costs £220. For more details, visit www.ursulajames.com. Find a hypnotherapist near you at www.hypnotherapists.org.uk.



Naomi before



'I treated myself to a pair of designer shoes after losing more than two stone'

Rather than focusing on calories, the exercises were about reconnecting with yourself. One of Ursula's tasks was to look at your shoes and describe them. I realised mine were all dull, flat and practical. Deep down, that is how I saw myself. I didn't have a single pair of feminine shoes that I simply loved wearing.

It wasn't conscious, but while working through the book and continuing to listen to the CD every night I suddenly felt that I wanted to make changes. I started swimming before work - getting up early had been unheard of previously.

I began reading about healthy eating and, the more I found out, the more I ate the right foods. Yet none of it felt like hard work. I started seeing a personal trainer twice a week - which is a habit I still have.

After two months, I noticed the weight creeping off. I wasn't weighing myself as I didn't like how it made me feel, but one day I was shopping and I realised I was a dress size smaller. A month later I went shopping again and noticed I'd dropped another dress size, and within a year I was down four dress sizes to my present size 16.

I used to reward myself with food, but not any more - Ursula's hypnotherapy focuses on non-food rewards. After losing more than two stone, I treated myself to a pair of red patent Kurt Geiger shoes. They were expensive and impractical but utterly gorgeous. They're proof of how my self-esteem has soared. I'm convinced that having more self-respect has played the biggest part in me keeping the weight off.

So why did this work when everything else had failed? Hypnotherapy helped me to think about what I was eating and question why I turned to food when I felt emotionally vulnerable. I still listen to Ursula's CD now if I have a challenging day and feel like reaching for the biscuit tin. I believe the self-hypnosis has programmed my mind to do the things naturally that I'd been trying to do for years. I suppose you could say I'm living proof that it works. >