

"I CAN FINALLY BE THE BELLE OF THE BALL"

Sarah Percey, 41, lost six stone on the Exante Diet. She is a freelance marketing consultant and lives in Buckinghamshire.

"Working in marketing for a large IT company completely dictated my lifestyle – and diet. I'd arrive at the office at 7am and not leave until 12 hours later. Every sale would be celebrated with buffet lunches and pizzas and my daily calorie intake was off the scale. I gorged on white bread and pâté, crisps and takeaways, never setting any time aside for a lunch break, but just eating constantly as I ran from meeting to meeting, with a flapjack in my hand. So my weight gradually crept up and up – and by January this year I weighed 17 stone. Seeing photos taken last Christmas Day, I almost burst into tears – I looked so huge and I knew that I needed to take drastic action.

When my friend Deborah dropped by for a post-Christmas catch-up, my jaw literally dropped. I'd not seen her for several months and she'd gone from a size 20 to a size 12 by following a meal replacement diet called Exante. She looked fantastic. After she left, I googled the diet on the internet and signed up. In that first week alone I lost 10lb and, after a month, I'd shed two stone. It was astonishing, I barely noticed that I was replacing my usual high-carb treats with a food powder. My motivation to stick to the diet came every Monday morning, via a web cam, when I logged on for an online weigh-in with two friends who were also dieting. We made sure there was always a round of applause, even if the scales didn't drop to that week's target.

If you'd told me last year that I'd lose six stone in six months, I'd have laughed out loud. My friends have seen a new,

energetic Sarah emerge and my family are so pleased that I'm no longer putting my health at risk. I used to dread parties – and when I did go, I'd drag out the same shapeless dress and spend the entire time feeling totally miserable. But, finally, at the age of 41, my increased body confidence means that I no longer have to fade into the background. I've also discovered the joy of going clothes shopping – I can pick up handfuls of size 14 dresses and know that they'll all fit me. My old clothes have gone to charity – save for one giant pair of trousers, just so I can watch people's faces when I show them how overweight I once was!

On Christmas Day, I'm going to eat whatever I want. The difference now is that I won't eat twice that, every day of every week. I've introduced small, healthy meals back into my diet, so I can even eat out – I just 'save up' my calories and don't overdo it.

As for relationships, I'm happy to be single at the moment and too busy with my job to devote time to a man. But now that I'm so happy that I've found the new real me, perhaps I could look for Mr Right."

• *Check out Sarah's diet plan at exanteinc.com.*