

# MailOnline

## I dropped 8 dress sizes in 8 months... and it wasn't as hard as you might think!

By [Ursula Hirschhorn](#)

UPDATED: 09:35, 15 September 2011

The sight of the attractive, stylish, slim woman caught me by surprise and, for a few seconds, I stopped to stare.

Her tailored coat flattered her trim body and her slender legs were shown to their best advantage in a pair of killer heels. Oozing confidence, she was the type of woman I had once been envious of, but not any more. Why? Because I am that woman and, if I say so myself, I look a million dollars.

I know that sounds horribly arrogant, but perhaps you will forgive my moment of self-satisfaction if I reveal that just eight months ago that shopping trip would have filled me with horror and I'd have spent the whole time avoiding mirrors, rather than admiring myself in them.





**Before and after: Ursula at size 24 (left) and now a svelte size 10 (right)**

You see, since the start of the year I have dropped eight dress sizes and lost close to six stone. That coat I was wearing? It was a new, size ten designer one. In contrast, the coat I wore this time last year was a voluminous size 24.

I know for most women admiring themselves in new clothes is just one of life's little pleasures, but for the past decade it has been denied me. When you are fat, buying clothes is just another painful humiliation to be endured rather than enjoyed.

Perhaps things would have been easier had I always been fat and never known the rush of excitement that goes with zipping up a tiny dress. But I knew just how good thin felt because up until I was 20, I was a slender size eight.



**Catalysts: Ursula says that a passion for food and three pregnancies caused her weight to rocket up to 15 st 8 lb**

It was when I started university that I first began to put on weight. Having been an active teenager, always out horse riding or dancing with my friends, I hated being stuck in a library with a pile of books and began to comfort eat to compensate — something I continued to do into my mid- 20s until I hit a bloated size 18.

Then came a painful divorce twinned with a crazy starvation diet which saw me plummet to an emaciated size six by the time I was 29. Aged 30, I met the man who was to become my husband. Love blossomed and I ballooned.

It started with the meals out and indulgent takeaways we shared in the first flush of romance, and then it was the three pregnancies over five years — one with twins — that saw my weight rocket up to 15 st 8 lb. At just 5 ft 3 in it gave me a BMI of 38.4, putting me in the morbidly obese range.

At the time I claimed that I was fat and happy — after all chubby girls are meant to be jolly, aren't they? Of course, every overweight woman knows what a big, fat lie that is. Being fat is miserable, joyless and soul destroying and saps your confidence on a daily basis.

## WHO KNEW?

**Forty-eight per cent of the population who are not overweight think that they are, according to a survey**

It was only when I went for a blood test and was told that I was at risk from developing type two diabetes that I accepted that I urgently needed to put an end to the twisted relationship that had developed between me and food, and learn to nourish my body, instead of gorging.

No fad diet would do that for me so I decided that the only way forward was to do what we are constantly encouraged to do: eat less and move more.

It was tough at first as I cut out all those things I loved so much. Like anyone trying to lose weight I ditched all the obvious foods like cakes, biscuits and, particularly hard for me, crisps.

But I never followed a specific diet, counted a calorie, or cut out a whole food group. I just gave myself better food and less of it. A typical day would see me start with porridge, then a mid-morning snack of fruit. Lunch would be pitta with hummus followed by low-fat yoghurt, then I would have a mid-afternoon snack of a handful of nuts.





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**Myth: Like many overweight women, Ursula used to pretend she was fat and happy - but in reality she had low self-esteem and was at risk of diabetes**

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Dinner could be a vegetable curry with brown rice, or grilled fish with lentils and vegetables. I eat exactly the same now, but I do allow myself the odd day off to indulge in pizza and ice cream. I just don't do it every day.

I love a glass or two of wine with my dinner, and I saw no reason to give this up. The one pitfall is that wine does make chocolate seem much more appealing. I got around this by eating a square or two of 70 per cent cocoa chocolate, which sated my sweet tooth without doing too much damage.

It might seem hard to believe, but I never once fell off the wagon — watching the weight melt away kept me motivated. I lost about three stone in as many months and even after that the scales steadily fell downwards until I hit that elusive last half stone, which I will probably struggle with for the rest of my life.

I do credit exercise for my success as much as what I ate, though. I joined a gym the moment I decided to lose weight. I will never forget how intimidated I felt as I entered the gleaming lobby for my first session. I was terrified, but I knew I had to beat my fear of the gym if I was going to achieve my goal.



**Big mother: At first, Ursula's children wanted her to remain large so they could share her food and 'bounce on her belly'**

I went to the gym four times a week and, as the weather got better, I started running outside too. Now I can't imagine not working out for more than a day. I am scarily fit compared to how I used to be — I am hoping to run my first half-marathon next year — and I hope this is what will stop the weight from ever creeping back on again. None of this is complicated or mysterious — I didn't need to go to a class or read a book to learn these skills - I just needed to stop stuffing my face.

Strangely, though, when I first began to cut back my sons were upset by the idea of mummy losing weight. They would say: 'But Mummy, we want to bounce on your big, wobbly belly!' and tried to feed me their crisps or sweets.

It was hellishly hard to say no to their beseeching little eyes, but I am glad I did because I know my eldest son, seven-year-old Jacob, loves nothing more than to jog alongside me as I warm up or cool down after a run. How much more fun is that than sharing a tube of Pringles?

My husband was equally ambivalent about the slim new me, and while friends would congratulate me with every stone shed, he was strangely quiet. Post weight loss, in the run up to our wedding anniversary, I was excitedly discussing the new outfit I was planning, when he snapped at me that I didn't need a new dress.



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**Happier and healthier: Ursula has never felt better and her family couldn't agree more**

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Well for once I really did, as by then all of my old dresses hung off me. I asked him what was wrong and he admitted he was missing the old, fat me. I think it was our old life together that he missed the most — the one based on big, boozy meals and relaxing on the sofa.

Instead, he had a wife who insisted that we ate vegetables with every meal and was never happier than when running around the local park. It was a sea change that he found hard to adapt to. He loved the way I looked but hated what it took to achieve it.

But slowly, over the months, he saw how my happiness grew with every pound I lost and he started to accept his newly slender wife. Just the other day he said, with true wonder in his voice, that he loved that I now have a waist and ribcage he can feel.

But perhaps my proudest moment was completing a 10K run in aid of The Stroke Association last month. There I was — a woman fast approaching 40, who just eight months ago got out of breath walking up a single flight of stairs, and I ran the whole race, sprinting to the finish in under an hour, my children and husband cheering me on. I couldn't tell the sweat from the tears as they all flung their arms around me.

You see, that is the problem with fat. It imprisons you and it stops you from fulfilling your potential as a human



being. It halts you in your tracks and, rather than making you happy, it ensures you will stay sad and that you will always be left out because you simply can't keep up or fit in. Being fat is tough. Eating all the time isn't fun — I never savoured food as much as I do now that I understand what a treat is.

Everyone tells me that losing weight makes me look ten years younger and, with my 40th birthday party later this month, this can only be good news. As I slip on my slinky size ten dress, all thoughts of the sack I wore on my 39th birthday will be banished.

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Fantastic :D It's so true too, you don't need to go on any crazy diets, or join weight loss programmes, I've lost about 4 stone by changing what I eat and I did it all on my own.....I do need to hit the gym tho...I'm such a lazy cow :/ eurgh

- [Emma](#) , Kent, 16/9/2011 01:19

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Proportionally (insert anchor) large waist. and stomach.

- [NLP for dummies](#) , Injustice breeds evil, 16/9/2011 01:19

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8 Stone in 8 months by sewing up my gob - colin, huddersfield, 15/9/2011 12:23 -----And you've done us all a favour.

- [Jen](#) , London, England, 15/9/2011 22:53

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So impressive, and such a wonderfully healthy attitude. I'm going to be 40 soon, and am losing weight also - and my boyfriend acted just like her husband at first... her story inspired me. Go Ursula!

- [alexandra](#) , new york ny, 15/9/2011 22:29

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I dropped 6 dress sizes in 6 months as well what a ... I mean trousers sizes not dresse sizes silly me. why would I want to wear a dress don't be silly..... It's not illegal martin to wear a dress you know...

- [Martin..](#) , Swindon.. England., 15/9/2011 21:58

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Size 8 my ar&e!- Phixer, B'mth, Phixer, The lady in the article did not say she is a size 8, she says that she dropped 8 dress sizes in 8 months and the coat she tried on that fitted, was a 10. It is possible she is a 10 in one shop and a 12 in another.

- [Clare](#) , Here, 15/9/2011 20:23

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Good on her, she must be feeling amazing!!

- [Gemma](#) , Saltburn, England, 15/9/2011 19:59

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I think this lady did brilliantly. She is very right with her comment that 'fat imprisons you'. My mother died recently and i did not attend the funeral. I didn't attend the funeral because i was always the skinny one in the family and i've put on so much weight i didn't want to be seen by anyone - so i didn't go. Can you imagine anyone not going to their own mothers funeral because they are fat? Well, thats what i did - i shocked myself and the whole family with that move! No one is speaking to me now - so its led to a family feud! I think my father has cut me out of his will (not joking either). ALL because i was too cowardly and disgusted with myself to be seen in public - fat!

- [kit](#) , york, 15/9/2011 19:59

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Congratulations. What an achievement and you did it without the aid of surgery. Shows old fashioned methods of eating less and exercising more work wonders. Brilliant inspiring role model unlike these self absorbed shallow z listers who aspire to absolutely nothing.

- [Kim](#) , Yorkshire, 15/9/2011 19:27

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Great job. You should be proud of yourself.

- [Brenda](#) , Ontario, Canada, 15/9/2011 18:59

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