

AN INSPIRATION TO ALL: Godfrey woman drops over 100 pounds during astounding weight loss journey

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GODFREY - The only way to truly see what Godfrey woman **Tara Hurst** has painstakingly accomplished in over the past year and a half is to put yourself into her shoes.

After decades of battling her weight, trying every fad diet and weight loss supplement possible, none of these things ever produced the lasting results that she had hoped for.



Beginning in 2014, Tara began her amazing journey at **236.6 pounds**. Numerous health problems, including fibromyalgia, arthritis, two knee surgeries, chronic fatigue syndrome, temporomandibular joint disorder in her jaw, restless leg syndrome and a degenerative disc disease plagued her daily life.

“The vicious cycle began,” she said. “I ate because I didn’t feel well and I didn’t feel well because I ate.”

Doctors only wished to give her medicine to pass her symptoms and treating her diagnoses was a costly process within itself, nearing \$175 a month in prescription costs. For five years, this was the norm for Hurst, but after realizing the medicine was not helping her conditions, she began the painstaking process of weaning.

“It was the worst month of my life,” she said.

All the while, Tara never let her problems get in the way of her busy lifestyle.

“I never allowed any of this to keep me from working, being a mom or socializing,” she said. “I became really good at hiding how I was feeling while around others.”

When she reached her top weight at 236.6 pounds, Tara said she felt “completely and utterly miserable.”

“I was wearing a size 18 and my knee was almost to the point of another surgery from the pain and tearing my meniscus for a third time. I was tired of being tired. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do to save myself, but I knew I had to dig deep to try.”

After making the decision to take charge of her health, Tara began simply by walking around her neighborhood. 10 to 15 minute walks turned into around 30 minutes walks.

On top of introducing physical activity, Tara began a food journal to write down “the good, bad and the ugly” of what she ate and drank day after day. She also kept a gallon of water marked with times to ensure that she drank the entire bottle before she headed home from work.

“The first week was crazy hard,” she said. “Fighting not only all of the temptations of life, but my internal battle of wanting to eat sugar, fast food and chocolate. I told myself that I was worth trying and wasn’t going to give up.”

After about two weeks, Tara started to feel a difference.



“I was learning to make healthy choices and my cravings decreased,” she said. “I started using an elliptical that had been collecting dust in my basement for years. I could only work out for about 10 minutes in the beginning.”

Tara also began to do some cardiovascular activities at least three times a week by walking or working on the elliptical.

“After about two months, I was able to exercise about 45 minutes at a time. I decided it was time to challenge myself. My friend and I set out to walk the bluffs around our house.”

Although the four-mile walks took about an hour and a half to accomplish since the ladies stopped to catch their breaths and take water breaks, Tara could feel herself beginning to change even more.

“Those hills were the hardest thing I had ever done in my life,” she said. “As the weeks passed, we kept walking and stopped less. The hills weren’t getting any easier, we were getting stronger.”

The first huge push in Tara's fitness journey began when one of her friends put together a Biggest Loser-style support group where a group of women could support each other and post inspirational sayings. They also recognized each others’ shortcomings on their journey and acted as a support group to help each other grow.

“This is where I really started to believe in myself,” she said. “I had all of these ladies I didn’t know cheering me on.”

Tara began venturing out of her comfort zone and took cardio classes.

“It was a love-hate relationship,” she admitted.

After 12 weeks, Tara had won her first Biggest Loser contest by losing the highest percentage of body weight. After the win, she decided to introduce weights into her fitness regimen.

“That’s where my weight loss really took off,” she said. “I started doing boot camps and weight training classes along with my cardio and clean eating.”

Tara's family has been her largest support system throughout the entire process.

“My husband and parents helped with kids getting to practices and such so I could meet friends to work out. My daughter and niece even went with me to class so I wouldn’t be alone on my first night.”

Tara's husband Billy has been “a rock star” during her journey, helping with the house and kids and even joining in on the lifestyle change himself.

“The only battle I was facing was constantly convincing myself that I was worth the fight,” she admitted. “I was constantly tempted to eat, drink or not to exercise. I remained focused and set a goal of reaching 145 pounds.”



Tara stressed the importance of celebrating every 10 pounds lost in positive ways due to how much time and effort she had put into it.

“Temptations were everywhere and so were excuses” she said. “I just had to make a decision to become stronger and be a better version of me.”

The decision to take charge of her physical health made the difference in all of her daily activities. Before her weight loss, Tara would sit on the couch every chance she got. Her weekends were spent slowly cleaning and doing laundry since she could do it at her own pace.

“Now, I barely sit down!” she said. “I exercise five times a week, either walking, running, even though I still have a torn meniscus, kickboxing, weight training, circuit training, power stretching, Insanity, boot camp, yoga...”

Tara's children still occasionally join her during workouts and she is excited to say she rarely watches TV.

“If I even sit on the couch, I am constantly getting up to do one thing or another because I actually feel like doing it.”

Although Tara still has most of her health problems, she has control of them instead of them controlling her. She takes natural supplements like turmeric and flaxseed for inflammation and has eliminated gluten from her diet. Sugar is also a rare treat.

“It used to be a normal day for me to eat fast food, donuts, candy bars, or to skip breakfast and eat crazy at 10 p.m. before bed,” she said. “Now, these things are a rare thing. I actually feel kind of ‘hangover’ when I eat poorly and don’t drink enough water.”

Most of her symptoms have decreased enough to let Tara become a healthy and active person who loves life and experiencing new things.

“Those hills around my house that just a year ago I could barely walk up without dying I am now able to run,” she said. “Am I out of breath at the top? Hell yes, but I am able to do it.”

Due to her torn meniscus, Tara is only able to run in short bursts and knows her body’s limits and always is keen on preventing further injury to her body.

“I take a lot of hot baths with epsom salt because of my muscles and joints at times, but it’s a good pain,” she said. “It is a remind of how far I’ve come and what I have accomplished in the past year and a half.”



On Christmas Eve, Tara Hurst weighed in and has lost 101 pounds. Now coming in at a healthy and fit **135.6** pounds, she is now the best version of herself that she always knew she could become.

“I fully believe that it is 85 percent of what you eat and 15 percent exercise that got me through this journey. I got stronger not only physically but mentally and emotionally. For the first time in forever, I was beginning to feel comfortable in my own skin.”

Tara has the best piece of advice to those who have been struggling with their health and weight.

“Nothing is impossible and you are never too far gone to take your life back,” she advises. “Planning is key and having healthy foods available at all times is important.”

Although the new year is a popular time for people to start dieting and exercising, Tara advises that now is the right time to take charge of your life.

“Do not wait,” she exclaimed. “Every day that you get further into taking back your life you are stronger and closer to your goal. Set small, obtainable goals in the beginning. Celebrate baby steps and victories and challenge yourself. Journal your food until you are able to gauge your calories yourself. “

Tara also advises to measure yourself along the course of your journey.

“You may not lose weight, but rather inches. You will see your body changing and your quality of life improve. You will feel stronger and more confident. Don’t ever feel like you are not good enough or worth this fight. You are totally worth it and deserve to feel better. You are never too far gone to embrace a fitness journey!”