

The confidence to change

Tamar Peterken shares her story of gaining improved health and confidence...

I'm a 42 year old woman, who has spent over a decade as a shut-in because I had social phobias. I was diagnosed bipolar and was put on mood stabilizers and antidepressants. My diet consisted of processed food, lot of processed meat and carbs like bread and potatoes. I didn't eat fruit and vegetables at all. I didn't do any exercise at all and at my worst I would get puffed just walking to the mailbox. I had high cholesterol, low blood pressure and was borderline diabetic. I was seriously obese, with 66 per cent body fat.

I started walking with my brother every weekday. This helped my cardio fitness a bit but I still didn't even know where to start on improving my diet. Then, through Pathways, I was referred to their Help 4 U programme.

As part of the programme, Marie, the Pathways healthy lifestyles co-ordinator, helped me with support to go to the YMCA gym. This was something that I found I really enjoyed once I got confident. I started independently going to the YMCA three days a week. I also carried on walking with my brother.

The first change I made to my diet was just cutting out sugar in my coffee. Once I saw I could do that, I made further changes to my diet. I started using the '10 10 6' rule. That means food should have less than 10 grams of fat, 10 grams of sugar but more than six grams of fibre per 100 grams. I also started eating fruit and making stir fries and soups. I started eating breakfast, which I had never done before. I cut down on all empty calories and cut down on carbohydrates. I allowed myself one day a week where I could have a treat.

By the end of the Help 4 U programme I was confident on how to make good food choices and I became a member of a gym. I would not have even attempted either of these things without this programme. Because I started seeing results like weight loss and increased energy, I was encouraged to keep on trying to self-improve. Since the programme ended I have started going to the gym five days a week because it is too cold to carry on walking. Because I have seen results I am able to self-motivate and keep doing what I learned to do in the programme. I have continued to try and eat a healthy diet – I still eat breakfast, I eat mostly fruit and vegetables and I eat healthier carbohydrates like Weetbix and wholegrain bread.

In a lot of ways this programme has saved my life. I think if I had done another decade with my old lifestyle and diet I would have, at best, become type 2 diabetic. At worst I might have had a stroke or heart attack at a very young age. My cardio fitness is good now. My blood pressure is now normal; so is my cholesterol and blood sugar. I have lost 20 kilograms. I have dropped from 66 per cent body fat to 54 per cent body fat. While there is still room to improve, I'm on the right track and am confident I can carry on the changes I have made, using the knowledge I have gained on the Help 4 U programme.

