

“I was determined not to be fat and 40!”

Jo Sullivan, 40, from Nottingham, lost an impressive five-and-a-half stone through running and a healthy diet

Until 2014, I was a total non-runner. I hadn't run a step since doing cross-country at school, and even then I hated it and would stop off for a cuppa at home on the way round! I was always on the heavier side and, at 6ft tall, just thought of myself as a 'big girl'. I danced through my teens but did no traditional sport at all.

“After starting work, the eating and drinking meant that my weight slowly crept up. I married my husband, Ian, in 1997, and we had two lovely boys – George, 15, and William, 11.

“Two years ago, Ian started going to our local parkrun (free, weekly, timed 5K runs that happen nationwide) in Colwick and the boys started going too. Ian kept encouraging me to come along, but I had no interest and preferred a lie-in. I wasn't a runner and that was that.

“But in October 2013, I had the wake-up call of my 40th birthday being too close for comfort! I was a size 18 and weighed in at 17st 9lb, and decided it was time to take my health and fitness in hand – I was determined not to be fat and 40. I started going to parkrun and walked at the back with our dog for the first few weeks.

PARKRUN PROGRESS

“In January 2014, I joined Weight Watchers and realised that I needed to do some proper exercise in conjunction with it, so my friend Rachel and I started going to parkrun together and would intersperse walking with very short bursts of gentle jogging. Even that puffed me out but over the following weeks, we found that we could run for longer stretches and I began to think that maybe I could one day be a runner.

“As my running improved, I bought myself better kit. I had a 38G chest, which was another reason I thought I couldn't run, but I got myself an excellent sports bra (Shock Absorber all the way) and it meant I could run comfortably.

“Between January and September, when I turned 40, we got our time down from 47 minutes to just over 30 minutes and we were finally able to run the whole 5K without stopping. We'd go to parkrun at 9am on a Saturday, followed by Weight Watchers at 10am for a weigh-in. It was so gratifying



Running helped Jo to lose an incredible five-and-a-half stone!

to see both my time and weight going down each week.

“The changes I made to my diet were subtle, but made a big difference. For a start, I became a meal planner. Each weekend, my husband I would sit down with magazines and cookbooks and plan what healthy meals we were going to eat each night that coming week, and buy all the ingredients online. We'd always eaten a nutritious diet, but I started to cook using less fat – dry frying or grilling, and using less cream and butter. We'd eat as a family and the boys really embraced this new way of eating.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

“By September, the month of my 40th birthday, I'd got down to 12st 4lb, which is right in the middle of the range of the healthy BMI for my height. I walked into Ted Baker – a shop I would never have previously dreamed of walking into as they'd have nothing in my size – and bought a beautiful, blue, figure-hugging dress in a size 12 for my birthday party. I felt fantastic!

“My family and I are now committed parkrun fans and we run or volunteer every single week, rain or shine. I love the fact that we all go together. My youngest, having never been particularly interested in sport, now loves running so much that he's also joined an athletics club. We've met loads of lovely people through doing it, too, and we all go for a coffee afterwards.

“In January 2015, I started Jantastic (Macmillan Cancer Support's fitness challenge) and I run twice a week and swim once. I've also joined an improver's course with Notts Women Runners, with the ultimate aim of running a 10K. I love running with friends and we have a good gossip on the way round (I'm so proud that I can actually run and talk at the same time).

“I now fully consider myself to be a runner. It's not just my body that's changed, but my mindset. I always thought I was just a non-sporty person and that I could never run. But I've proved myself wrong and I'd say to people who are considering taking up running that anyone can do it. You just have to start slowly and patiently build it up. The feeling when you finally change how you think about yourself and how others view you is amazing!”

For more info on parkrun, visit parkrun.org.uk