

Lose it for life!

Can you really change your entire outlook on life in just one month? Tania Ahsan goes on a weight loss program that changes not just your body but also your mind and spirit

My battle against being overweight has led me to do almost every diet program going from Atkins to the Zone diet; you name it, I've tried it. I had pretty much started despairing of ever losing my excess weight for good until I received word of a holistic programme, Positively Slim, run by nutritionist and yoga teacher Charlotte Watts and personal trainer and pilates instructor Charlene Hutsebaut with help from NLP therapist Dr Kerry Halliday.

My initial meeting with Charlotte and Charlene is in a cafe. I recognise them immediately as they conform to the stereotypes I have about what health freaks look like: toned, excellent posture, glowing skin and annoyingly smiley faces. Oh yes, I think, here they are with their tight buttocks insisting I eat this, don't eat that, do this and don't do that. My resistance is clearly high but I smile and we bed down for a thorough discussion about my health and fitness. I win brownie points for having already given up alcohol three weeks before (due to the mother of all hangovers necessitating a hiatus in alcohol consumption).

Surprisingly Charlotte remains silent about my sample diet answers: these consist of a typical day including seven mugs of coffee, a Kit-Kat, loads of meat, bread and cheese. Vegetables and fruit are like garlic to a vampire in my case. I know it's not healthy but I'm not keen on a lecture so it's nice that she just makes a note of the supplement I should have and then asks me to stand up. Along with

Charlene, she assesses from my body shape what my bio type is. Apparently I'm a gardener type and I get given my personal folder of information including progress sheets that tick off the things I should remember to do each day.

Week one

I'm relieved to see when I get the diet sheet that I won't have to give up my favourite goat's cheese. But sugar is the enemy. Even things that you'd think were healthy, like dates or grapes, get the thumbs down as they have a high glycaemic index score (the GI of a food indicates how quickly it turns to sugar in your bloodstream). We're encouraged to eat foods that release energy steadily like wheat-free muesli and green vegetables. I anticipate that I'm going to hate it but shockingly it's rather delicious. A typical day consists of goat's cheese and avocado or beetroot on rye crispbread for breakfast, a soup and salad for lunch and one of Charlotte's recipes for supper (my favourite being pesto-covered baked chicken breast with a baked sweet potato and broccoli). I can eat two pieces of fruit before 4pm and nothing after 7.30pm. Amazingly, I find that I am no longer obsessing about food.

For my first exercise class, I anticipate the sort of psycho workouts I've done in the past with personal trainers. But

there's no barked orders of "give me 50 press ups!" Charlene's gentle Canadian-accented voice encourages us constantly and no part of the workout feels strenuous. I feel faintly disappointed as I can't imagine that the little bit

of jogging and resistance training will make any difference. However, the next day I ache all over as though I've had a really tough workout. If I was hoping for pain, I got it the next day at Charlotte's yoga class. Although I'm not allowed to call it 'pain'. "It's not pain," insists Charlotte. "It's just a strong sensation. Your body can take it." I start thinking uncharitable thoughts about Charlotte but she appears to also be telepathic and calmly says: "Don't concentrate on how much you hate me, concentrate on your breathing". After the 'strong' yoga class, I am buzzing. My body has bent in ways I never thought it could do and I feel strong and upright. We also have a session with Kerry on what our weight loss goals are and we go through a

"One day, my trousers fall down before a date and I keep telling strangers my bra size"





guided meditation to 'see' what we'll look like once we've lost the weight.

Week two

I find myself home after a long journey and I am ravenous. There's nothing to eat but a chocolate chip muffin in the house. Don't look at me like that. There really is nothing anywhere that won't take an hour to make and I need to eat NOW! So I immediately start shoving this muffin in my mouth when I remember something Kerry said in her session. We can eat what we like if it comes to it but we have to do it sitting down. So even if it's over the kitchen sink, we have to take the time to pull up a chair to the sink and eat it when we're sitting down.

I have a laundry seat in the kitchen so I sit on it and proceed to eat the muffin. I start to become aware of what I'm eating. It tastes dry and of chemicals, a strange processed thing that is all texture but hardly tastes of anything and certainly not chocolate chip. I suddenly feel as though I've been shoving a petrol-infused sponge down my gullet and I chuck the rest out.

The exercise classes are toughening up. I'm starting to think Charlene is not quite the sweet, innocent, lovable, friendly Canadian she makes out to be. She still lets us stop before the pain gets too unbearable but this is no longer a walk in the park. She tells us that any exercise programme should change after six weeks as your body begins to get used to the movements.

What are biotypes?

Biotypes are based on the idea that our body shape and dominant gland or glands can give us clues on how we process food and what our metabolism is like. In this system the glands are also associated with physical, mental and emotional characteristics and so each biotype has an ideal diet to follow (for life) and certain traits that can be identified. The five biotypes are Pathfinder, Hunter/Gatherer, Pioneer, Farmer/Gardener and Dancer.

Week three

I have an embarrassing thing happen. My trousers almost fall down before a date. I am a size 18 and my trousers have been very loose of late. Then there's the little matter of my bras. None of them fit any more. I go to get measured and find my vital stats have radically altered. I start telling strangers my bra size until my sister alerts me to how inappropriate that is. I stop telling strangers my bra size. If I had permission to tell you, you'd be impressed: six inches lost from under the bust measurement!

Week four

I am now a size 14 – admittedly still a pretty tight size 14 – but from feeling constricted in size 18 clothes, this feels like quite an achievement. Strangely, the measurements no longer interest me. I'm not even that bothered about weight loss any more. I'm more interested in which fruits and vegetables are in season and if I'll be able to hike a few miles more at the weekend than I did last weekend. My attitude toward my body is now so positive that I really understand why they chose to call it 'Positively Slim'.

More info

A four-week Positively Slim course including all activities with 17 hours contact time, two individual consultations, email support and personal file costs £695. If you'd like to continue, the monthly rate is £595. An individual consultation only with nutritional therapist and personal trainer including email support and a personal file is £195. A remote conference call consultation only including email support and a personal file is £145. Visit positivelyslim.com.

