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# THE CrossFit LIFE

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## Breaking the Cycle

Lauren Lesinski wins her gym's body challenge contest and breaks a lifelong cycle of yo-yo dieting. Hilary Achauer reports.

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By Hilary Achauer

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Courtesy of Lauren Lesinski

Lauren Lesinski admits she is not the best loser. As she puts it, "I don't even like losing baking contests at work. Which, by the way, is what helped get me in this mess to begin with."

"This mess" refers to the state of Lesinski's health in March 2008. The 31-year-old office manager weighed 230 lb. Her lifestyle and food choices were harmful, and she was unhappy and lost. She was scared to do anything about it because she didn't want to fail at one more thing. Lesinski had previously lost 50 lb. in high school and then 60 lb. after a break-up. But the weight came back every time.

This time around she was determined it would be different. She started by slowly changing the way she thought about food. Then she changed her actions toward food and began going to the gym.



**Lauren Lesinski in 2008.**



**Lesinski in 2011.**

She knew she had at least 55 lb. to lose, and those were 55 lb. she had lost twice before—and gained back. Over the next year and a half, Lesinski worked hard and got down to 196 lb. She focused on eating fresh fruits and vegetables and less processed foods, and she mostly cooked for her herself and ate at home.

Lesinski had put together a circuit-training routine for herself at the gym that included weights, body-weight exercises and time on the elliptical or treadmill. After watching her do squats and jump rope, one of the guys at her gym asked if she had ever heard of a nearby gym that offered kettlebell classes and incorporated some CrossFit elements.

“He said they were doing some new things over there,” Lesinski said, “and they had small classes for \$15 that I could go and check out and decide if I wanted to learn more about it. Plus, they were working with kettlebells, which I heard little about up to that point. I was very intrigued because I thought I already knew everything.”

It was October 2009. Lesinski called the gym that day and made an appointment. Her life would never be the same.

“I was excited immediately because these people were magnetic, and I wanted the light I saw in them to radiate from me, too! I even paid for personal kettlebell instruction so that I would be up to speed and not excluded from certain movements and classes.” At the time, the gym only dedicated some of its space to CrossFit, but in January 2010 the owner, Juan Bacca, decided to make it a CrossFit-only gym. Their first official member? Lauren Lesinski.

“The thing I love about Crossfit ATP is that even walking through the doors weighing almost 200 lb., I never felt judged, pitied or neglected. I had already begun the inside transformation, and all I felt was true encouragement and love from the start from every single person.”

By June of 2011 Lesinski had gotten her weight down to about 186 lb., for a total loss of 44 lb. Her weight loss stalled because she would work out incredibly hard and go home and eat too much of the wrong kind of food. So on July 5, 2011, she went sugar-free for 30 days. She lost 13 lb. and had more energy. At that point, she weighed 173 lb. and was wearing size-10-to-12 pants.



Brooke Cruz

***The new Lauren!***

In August 2011, Bacca announced a body challenge contest open to anyone in the gym. The winner would receive a free one-year membership.

"That was all I needed to get to work," Lesinski said.

She told herself she was going to win. Lesinski started going to the gym six times a week—four CrossFit workouts and two kettlebell classes. She gave each workout her all and attempted to lift the heaviest weight she could handle without compromising form and safety.

"I never competed against others in the WOD—only myself," she said. She followed a mostly sugar-free diet with an emphasis on fruit, vegetables, high-quality proteins, nuts and other "good fats." Throughout the experience, Lesinski maintained a blog featuring pictures of everything she ate as well as her workouts.

When sugar cravings hit, Lesinski indulged with low-sugar frozen yogurt, but she removed all the sugar from her house to cut down on temptation.

"I put in all the hard work, ran my house, kicked my ass, won the contest and realized a new personal best: 159 lb."

That brought Lesinski's total weight loss to 71 lb. Even after the challenge was over, Lesinski kept on going, losing 4 lb. in October.

"Seventy-five pounds gone—but not forgotten. Seventy-five," Lesinski marvels. "It's all still very new and takes a bit of getting used to. Sometimes just catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror surprises me because it is almost a stranger looking back at me. I can say this, though: I have never believed in myself more, sat up straighter, stood up taller, smiled bigger, laughed louder or hugged harder. I have never felt sexier, stronger or more beautiful than I do right this very minute."

After reaching her weight-loss goals, Lesinski has some new targets on the horizon. She's up to 50 unbroken double-unders, and she'd like to get to 100. She wants to run a sub-8-minute mile, get a muscle-up and do a strict pull-up.

"I have found a community of friends that love and support me in my personal goals. I have made lifelong friends and I see people coming into the gym getting leaner and stronger and more confident every day," Lesinski said.

