

the best possible prize

A little friendly competition motivated this reader to adopt a healthier lifestyle—and helped her lose 30 pounds. BY ALICE OGLETHORPE



Before

Laura Leslie-Schuemann

Florida
Age 30
Height 5'8"
Pounds lost 30
At this weight
1 year

Laura's challenge

Active throughout college and law school, Laura could eat all the bacon double cheeseburgers she wanted and stay slim. But then she got a job at a tax firm, and the long hours kept her sedentary for the first time ever. Over the next two years, she gained 30 pounds—and went up four sizes.

says. But Laura's new company gave her the push she needed. "They announced they'd pay for everyone to meet with a weight-loss counselor as part of a wellness initiative," she says. "Everyone signed up, so I did too—I didn't want to be the only person on staff who didn't get fit."

Winning ways

At her first appointment, Laura learned just how unhealthy her breakfast was. "I'd have a granola bar and be so famished by lunch, I'd grab fast food," she says. "I thought I was doing well by barely eating until noon, but in reality, the high-calorie takeout was undoing my light morning meal—and then some!" She switched to high-fiber cereal with berries, which kept her full longer. Laura's new eating plan also included unlimited fruits and vegetables. "Snacking on apples and grapes all day kept me satisfied," she says. At the two-month mark, Laura had already lost 15 pounds.

She had also started walking and jogging, as she had when she was younger. Then her company upped the fitness ante by launching a contest: The first employee to log 570 miles (the distance between the firm's eight locations) would win a cash prize. "I'm competitive, so I started running five or six days a week to stay in the lead," she says. Laura finished first—and lost another 15 pounds in three months. "I got the money, but the real prize was how good I felt," she says.

Squeezing it all in

Now Laura feels like her priorities are back in line. "I discovered I don't have to sacrifice my health to do my job well," she says. "It takes effort to go running daily and plan out my meals, but it's worth it. I'm happier with myself, and that spills over into every other aspect of my life."

Corporate incentive

At 165 pounds, Laura wasn't that overweight, but she was tired a lot and just didn't feel like herself. Even so, she couldn't find the motivation to work out. "Although I got a new job that had more regular hours, I'd still come home, plop down on the sofa, and watch *Dexter* with my husband," she

3 stick-with-it secrets

- > **Stock up on guilt-free treats** "When my husband has buttered popcorn or ice cream, I have a lowfat version. That way I don't miss out on the snack or blow my diet."
- > **Save money and calories** "When I'm tempted to skip packing my lunch, I just think about how much cheaper it is than buying takeout. It works every time."
- > **Keep fitness in the family** "All week long I look forward to Saturday runs with my dad on the beach. We get to catch up, and we both feel relaxed afterward."

Weekly workout schedule

- > **Running** 45-90 minutes/4 days a week
- > **Strength training** 60 minutes/1 day a week

Do you have a success story? Share it with us at shape.com/model.



After

"I like having goals to work toward, so I trained for a half marathon!"