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THE BODY ISSUE

"MUM SENT ME TO FAT CAMP!"

Ebony, 14, hated shopping for clothes and had tried every diet around, but then her mum had an idea...

"What do you think?" asked one of my friends, giving me a twirl in front of the changing room. "You look great," I replied, as she modelled a skirt and top in New Look. "Come on, Ebony, try something on!" she said. But I just shook my head.

I was a size 14-16 and hated trying on clothes in shops. I had tried dieting but never enjoyed long-term success. Mum always fed me healthy food, but after dinner I'd raid the cupboard for crisps. I hated PE, especially cross-country, and although I was never teased about my weight, Mum knew how self-conscious I'd become. One day, after school, she sat me down.

Sent away

"I've been looking on the internet about weight-loss camps..." she said. Once Mum knew I was determined to not only lose weight but learn about nutrition, she enrolled me in the Wellspring UK course at Penrith in the Lake District.

After saying goodbye to my friends, I arrived at the camp in July. It was based in a college campus with tennis courts, special tents that fit four bunk beds, and classrooms. There were about 20 girls and boys there to lose weight, aged between 12 and 16, plus staff.

On our first day, a member of staff explained what we were going to achieve. "You're going to learn how to cook healthy versions of your favourite foods, like pitta bread pizzas and oven-baked potato wedges instead of chips," she said.

I couldn't believe how easy it was to make such tasty food. Most days, we stuck to a routine that involved sports like badminton or tennis, cookery classes and free time when we could watch DVDs or read. We all wrote diaries of what we'd eaten.

It works!

The staff at the camp also made sure we weren't skipping meals and that our weight loss was the result of healthy eating and exercise. As my clothes started getting looser, I realised the tough regime was working. Although I got homesick at first, I enjoyed everything about camp, apart from weekly hikes we took which involved camping overnight.

Finally, after four weeks, I went home nearly 13kg lighter. "You look great!" said my friends proudly. The next day, Dad gave me money to go shopping. I was amazed to discover I could fit into a size 12.

I'm still eating low-fat food and trying to stay on the eating plan, with the odd treat. Best of all, I enjoy exercise now and this year I came fifth in a cross-country race!

"I was amazed to discover that I could fit into a size 12"

Ebony was self-conscious of her weight...

Words As told to Richard Dunnett Photos Simon Duncan

EBONY'S STORY...

- Ebony worried about her size
- She had no luck with fad diets
- She was sent to 'fat camp' to lose weight

...but lost 13kg and threw away most of her old clothes!

My camp diary

7.30am Wake up and shower

8.30am Breakfast – bagels, porridge, pancakes or cereal

9am Basketball or team sports

10.30am Morning snack, like cereal bar, rice cakes or raisins, followed by more games or a class

12.20pm Lunch – turkey, salad, beans, sandwiches – followed by more team games

4.30pm Afternoon snack

6.30pm Tea, like healthy pizzas, rice or potato wedges, plus vegetables followed by a movie

10.30pm Lights out

Help & advice

One in 25 young people are now classed as obese. However, yo-yo diets and skipping meals don't work. If you're worried about your weight, log on to this CBBC website: http://tinyurl.com/2i2w6b

For more information on Wellspring UK, visit: www.wellspringcamp.co.uk