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My Comfort Food Diet

Shira Miller shed 50 lbs. — and has kept them off for 14 years — just by tweaking her favorite meals



Joel Silverman Photography

When Shira Miller was growing up, comfort food was the family business. "My dad owned a deli, so our lives revolved around food," says the single, 41-year-old Atlanta public relations executive.

"A few times during the week, when Mom was too tired to cook, Dad would come home laden with goodies — fried eggplant, Italian cookies, cheesecake, sandwiches smothered in melted Muenster — and my brothers and I would feast happily."

By the time she was in high school, Shira found the high-calorie picks had caught up with her; once trim, she was now packing 140 lbs. onto her 5-foot-4 frame. Post-high school, she kept gaining.

"I realized that Domino's delivered to my dorm in college, and there was another 20 lbs.," she says. But despite feeling uneasy about her looks, Shira couldn't imagine giving up the foods she loved.

A Moment of Truth

Shira's love affair with fattening foods continued as she started her career. Stressed by the demands of her public relations job, she spent hours hanging out by the vending machines, munching on treats. Her weight topped out at 175 lbs. "I was an emotional eater — every time I was bored or anxious, I'd reach for something sweet," she says.

But one morning in early 1992, she had a revelation. When she tried to squeeze into a size 16 black skirt she had worn many times, "the skirt wouldn't button. I had to put a safety pin across the top to close it," she recalls. "At that moment, I knew I had to change. I remember crying, thinking, 'This isn't me.' I felt disgusted with myself."

Step by Step

Around the same time, Shira's best friend invited her to an aerobics class. "The timing was right," she admits. "I was the heaviest person there, but I was surprised by how good exercise made me feel."

Her three-times-a-week workouts helped her become more toned. Still, she knew exercise could only do so much. To truly change her shape, she would have to tackle her diet, so Shira read books on nutrition and began a food journal. "Seeing my diet on paper was a reality check," she says. "I quickly realized I had a huge problem with comfort foods."

But rather than battle her impulse to nosh, Shira began making healthy swaps when cravings hit — opting for ice pops, baked apples with cinnamon or small spoonfuls of peanut butter instead of cookies and candy. Still, the transition wasn't easy.

"I was always fighting temptation. Every time I saw something I wished I could have, I'd feel myself waver. But I stayed motivated by visualizing things — like a little black dress in a single-digit size." Within 18 months, Shira dropped 50 lbs.

A New World

Fourteen years later, Shira still weighs 125 lbs. and is a svelte size 4. "I've learned weight loss doesn't have to be about giving things up completely," she says. Becoming a healthier person totally changed her life. Her confidence skyrocketed, and she got up the nerve to strike out on her own, starting a public relations firm.

Today, she maintains an active social life and travels extensively. "I just vacationed in Florence, Italy, by myself," she says. "It was an amazing trip and something I never would have done when I was heavy. My world was a lot smaller then."