



Pair Up, Pare Down

When you want to get in shape, the buddy system is one secret to weight-loss success. **AS TOLD TO MALLORY CREVELING**

“It’s great to have people who want you to succeed and remind you that you’re not alone.”
—Rikki Lowe, who lost 120 pounds

RIKKI LOWE (RIGHT), 32, AND HER SISTER, BETH WOLFE, 40
ST. ALBANS, WV

Family Matters So many events center around food—weddings, holidays, birthdays. Losing weight can feel lonely if you think those occasions have been taken from you and you can’t indulge like others. My sister Beth used the app Lose It! a few months before

me to track her diet. After I downloaded it, she kept reminding me that nothing was off-limits. She also gave me pointers, like not getting so hungry that I eat a day’s worth of calories in one meal. She got me to run my first 5K too. My sister’s support is super important to me, but I also learned that you have to be happy with who you are on your own. A big-picture moment for me was realizing that I am enough, I’ve always

been enough and that has nothing to do with my weight—it comes from learning to love myself.

A Better Track This weight-loss experience was different from other times because I was at a crossroads. I couldn’t get through the day without a nap, and I thought I’d be on blood pressure drugs for life. Then my doctor suggested I record everything I ate with Lose It! I set a goal to drop 1.5 pounds per week and had a

“I’m so proud of Rikki for getting healthier so she can be there for her kids. She’s much more confident too—as a big sister, that’s really rewarding to see. It’s also great because now we can share clothes, which we were never able to do.” —Beth Wolfe, who lost 40 pounds

max of 2,500 calories a day. I had easily been consuming over 3,000 calories before. I learned to choose dishes that actually fill me up, and because I travel a lot for my

job, I found better choices on fast-food menus. One of them is McDonald’s Egg White Delight McMuffin, which has 250 calories and 17 grams of protein. Now I also have more

healthy snacks around the house for myself, my husband and our three kids, and we’ll often have lean meats and veggies for dinner. **Stepping Forward** I didn’t

even think about working out until I lost 50 pounds and finally had the energy. I went for walks and bought a recumbent bike for my house. I found kettlebells that came with a DVD at T.J. Maxx and I fell in love with those. My go-to exercise is the full swing, all the way over your head. It’s a “hear me roar” sort of move.

“When Robert and I first started getting healthy together it felt like we were dating again, and our relationship is so much stronger because of it.” —Shannon Mateo, who lost 83 pounds

SHANNON MATEO, 34, AND HER HUSBAND, ROBERT, 37, RENO, NV

Teammates for Life After my doctor wanted to put me on daily cholesterol meds, I decided to get healthy. Seeing the mood boost I get from exercising, Robert often encouraged me to go to the gym or take Saturday mornings for yoga or a run. Whenever he’s in a slump, I ask him to join me for a workout. He tells me a body part he wants to focus on, and I’ll Google some moves and create a plan for us.

Master Chef I used to buy diet soda and doughnuts on my way home from the gym, because I felt like I’d earned it. My family was living on packaged muffins and fried chicken—foods filled with empty calories and little nutrients. Then a friend told

me about Lisa Leake’s *100 Days of Real Food*. I bought a copy and started grocery shopping under the rule that if you can’t grow it, don’t eat it. I went fully vegan, though I make different foods for my family. My favorite dishes are homemade falafel and lentil stew.

Full Speed Ahead I always said no to doing a Tough Mudder, because I thought I was too heavy and it would be embarrassing. While hiking with Robert about a year ago, he said, “If you can run up and down this mountain, you can do a Tough Mudder.” I was out of excuses, so we signed up. I never thought I’d be able to do the monkey bars obstacle, but I made it to the end. I even gave Robert a piggyback ride when he cramped up. I felt so proud and accomplished after that event, like I could do anything if I just believed in myself.



“Shannon’s always asking me to go run, hike or work out, so these days I’m the one who has to say no sometimes, when I need a break. But the best part about our new healthy lifestyle is that we’re passing it down to our two kids. We’re leading by example and that’s so important.” —Robert Mateo

“Deidra and I stuck with race training together. We were out there two to three times a week and did a long run on the weekends.”
—Valencia Hike, who lost 70 pounds



VALENCIA HIKE (RIGHT), 35, AND HER FRIEND, DEIDRA STOCKTON, 39
BALTIMORE, MD

Power of Two While jogging with a few women from Black Girls Run! [BGR!], we all decided to sign up for 2013’s Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon in DC. The training fell during the winter months, so the numbers in our group dwindled to just Dee and me. We rarely missed a day, and finished the race within a few minutes of each other and hugged and cried. It’s so great to have someone there for support and motivation.

Work It Out I knew I had to start moving more, because I wanted to play sports with my three kids and I couldn’t do that without getting winded. That’s when I stopped making excuses for not exercising. At first, I ran

around the field two to three days a week while my kids played soccer. When I got comfortable enough, I downloaded the Couch-to-5K app and then found BGR! I met a few other moms there, including Deidra, and I began leading the 5 a.m. run twice a week by my house.

Pantry Makeover I started out by swapping whole milk for almond or soy. Instead of sugary snacks, we had fruit and veggies. Now bananas and bags of carrots are always available, and I do most of my cooking on Sundays, when I prep food for the week. Recently, five of us from BGR! started a weekly food swap. We each cook one meal that’s low carb, high protein and packed with veggies, and we make enough to serve five. Everyone’s favorite dish is my Moroccan chicken and chickpea stew.

“I was a runner when I was younger, but I was in an accident three years ago and couldn’t walk for a while. When I recovered from my second back surgery, I decided I needed to do something active and joined BGR! It’s wonderful to have somebody like Valencia who has the same goals and keeps me accountable.” —Deidra Stockton, mom of eight who lost 31 pounds

For tips on finding a pal to help you slim down, go to familycircle.com/workoutbuddy. Already have a friend who keeps you in shape? Post a picture of the two of you using #FitFamily and tag @FamilyCircleMag.