



## Why I am 100 pounds lighter today – and why it does not matter at all

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I am a professional dieter.

I have lost and gained more weight than I could ever remember or calculate. I recently turned 45, and in my lifetime, I have run thousands of miles, skipped some really great desserts, and tried nearly every diet rolled out into the public-mindset, in both my teen and adult eras.

I rarely skip workouts. I am often on a cardio-machine, running, doing the hard-kinda yoga, or seeking out new ways to move. I have done this, nearly every day, since I was 14 years old. My heredity and my personality profile disallow much in the way of inactivity: I can look sideways at a cupcake and gain a pound, and depression rears its ugly head if I don't beat it into submission with my daily workout. My body and I are in a constant contest. The other task I have rarely skipped is a New Year's Resolution to lose weight. My most impressive weight-loss feat occurred right after the picture that adorns this blog-post. That is me, holding my newborn son. The day before I held him in my arms, the numbers on the scale read 100 pounds more than they do today.

Yet, I see that picture as my most glamorous moment. I won't post the standard "after" photo. I want to give you a pep talk for motivation, rather than a picture of heavy-me, light-me. Because I want to share my bigger goal: to maintain a constant re-focus on health, and to *lose the urge to focus on weight-loss*. That little guy in my arms, in that picture, is now bigger than me. He is taller, and a little bit heavier. He is also brilliant, kind, and amazing. Just before he turned 2, his sister was born, and she is more than me as well. More creative. More open-hearted, and far more bold.

Recently, dieting has become a breeze for me -- food allergies have taken away most of the decadent foods, and cleaned up my eating options. My super-effective allergic-to-most-things diet had made me not just thin, but thin without much effort. Hmmm, you're jealous now. I'll fix that: imagine a life without cheese. I'm un-yogically jealous, right back atcha. Now that my dietary choices are made for me, I can reflect without frustration on what weight-loss *is*. It's usually work and struggle, every single day, to lose or maintain weight -- all in a culture that is seated, travel-heavy, overworked, and riddled with processed foods.

It is a motivator to look in the mirror, and see "thin," to look at the scale and see a lower number than before. But the numbers that matter in health-and-fitness are the ones we rarely talk about -- the ones measured by inflating arm-bands in the doctor's office, and a sign next to it that spells out why those numbers matter. One I read recently said this: "Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States. Your numbers are your only warning."

Most of us are far more likely to step onto a scale than to check our blood pressure. Other numbers matter more too -- cholesterol, resting heart rate. Yet, the number we are so often focused on, as the calendar turns from one year to the next, suggests a priority: digits on a scale, or on a tag. The priority is the one we can see.

When I was in the photo at the top of this blog-post, I gazed down at a number that was more -- much more. But when I look back at that time, I don't remember a different "me." I am not *smarter*, now that I am thin again. I am not *nicer* than I was when I was heavy. I'm not *more* successful, or *more* enlightened, or *more* anything. I'm the same person. The only difference between heavy-me and light-me is that it's easier to move now, and thin-me has more energy.

The first month of the year has come to a close. As you ponder your progress on your New Year's Resolution for 2016, just keep in mind that weight loss is a process, and that scale-digit is never as big a deal as we make it. It's just numbers. The people who care about your health will be more concerned about the invisible ones. So, if you can't focus on health-related numbers for yourself, do it for your people -- the more -amazing, more- creative, more-everything people. Daily movement will impact your health in a multitude of ways. Studies show daily exercise can improve your heart-health, reduce your risk of

chronic illnesses, improve your cognitive function, reduce stress, and improve the quality of your sleep. Obesity is a pro-inflammatory condition, and pain-conditions are supposed to improve when weight drops. The benefits of exercise are well-proven and plentiful, and reduced weight is only one of them. If weight-loss is your only motivator, you run the risk of exercising just for that goal alone: a frustrating, mentally loaded, culturally overstated goal. So, don't focus on that. I think too many people get sidelined by numbers, then end up deflated. They quit moving as a daily practice, because the focus is misplaced. Leaner bodies are associated with better health, but the longer-term plan matters more.

Take it from a professional dieter -- this isn't over once you make it to your weight-goal. I just haven't figured out how to creatively gain weight around my allergies yet.

### **Here are some exercises to help you refocus:**

**Let it go:** Take your numbers -- your weight and your pants-size -- write them down on a piece of paper, and stand in front of the mirror. Now, crumple up that paper, and throw it at the mirror where your forehead is and say, "Who cares?" Then resolve to move more, every day, no matter what those numbers say *on that day*, or weeks from that day.

**Eat whole-foods and do it mindfully:** Make a fantastic meal out of whole foods, and eat it slowly, with your favorite people. Mindful eating is a proven way to improve health and wellness, and it tends to lead to weight loss. But stop thinking about weight-loss so much. It's stressful. Stress provokes release of cortisol. Cortisol can lead to weight-gain. Whew – viscous cycle.

**Move like you're a toddler, or a 10-year-old:** Kids love to move. No one has yet employed them at a desk-job and asked them to commute an hour daily, then collapse in front of the TV in a pile of mental exhaustion. As a result, they don't feel lazy or selfish for taking an hour for themselves. They go outside and run *because it feels great!* Find movement you love to do, and find people to bring along -- walk, run, do yoga or Pilates, hike. Find *your* movement, and schedule time to do it.

**Be happy:** If you can't be happy, then exercise more. It's proven to relieve the symptoms of depression and anxiety. If that is not enough, go see a naturopathic doctor -- they're brilliant at dealing with depression. Then keep moving -- exercise doesn't have to be your only depression-treatment. It can be one of them.

Health is a gift with a to-do list attached to it. Find ways to set aside your guilt-and-pressure about fitting into a specific size, or a pre-determined weight, and make your health regimen into an everyday lifestyle. Lose weight if you need to: quickly, slowly, or not at all. But, remember, at the end of the day and at the end of the year, you're still *you*.

*Jana Hill is a yoga instructor. She has a New Year's Resolution to enjoy her family, and live fully in the moment. She teaches at [Stanwood Swim & Fitness](#) and at other locations in the Stanwood-Camano area and beyond.*