

Mark Johnson lost weight and changed his life with hard work and support

By Wendy Boggs McGill

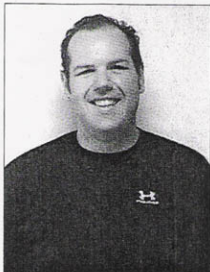


Photo courtesy of Healthy U

Through a combination of surgery, exercise and a change in his eating habits, Mark Johnson has lost 200 pounds.

is superior to other procedures for initial and long term weight loss.

Johnson said he remembers well the drastic change of eating such small portions after his surgery. Over time and through

So many of our members are exercising, eating healthy and feeling great!

This week let's put the spotlight on Mark Johnson: Driven by his desire to stay healthy for his children, Johnson decided in January of last year to make some major changes in his life. On a regular office visit, his doctor once again told him he needed to lose some weight. Mark said that he would really like to lose weight, but he seemed to keep encountering road blocks such as time constraints, work and kids.

At that weight, Mark knew that he was at significant risk for health related problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, sleep apnea and arthritis. These illnesses and others could affect his present and future health and could even shorten his lifespan. After doing some research, Mark understood the food he ate was only partly responsible for his weight. Other contributing factors could include genetic predisposition, personal

and environmental factors. He knew, for the most part, the only factor contributing to his weight he could control was his food intake. Mark had tried and failed to lose weight by conventional means, so he, like many others, looked at surgery as a more successful alternative for long-term weight loss. After consulting with Dr. Mike Sofronski of Delmarva Bariatric Center, Johnson met the criteria for, and elected to have, a surgical intervention known as gastric bypass.

Surgical treatments to promote weight loss have been around for many years. Many of the procedures involve making the stomach extremely small, and then limiting the stomach's ability to empty. Therefore, you feel full with less food. Even if you wanted to eat more, you can't.

The gastric bypass procedure has been around for several decades. It appears safe compared with other weight reduction procedures. In fact, many studies suggest it

behavior modification, he had to re-learn how to eat. Now he is eating new foods and understands when his body is full. In the course of a year, through a combination of diet and exercise in conjunction with his surgery, he has lost almost 200 pounds.

Johnson's diet now includes lots of protein and slow burning carbohydrates, such as brown rice and oatmeal. He also includes plenty of vegetables and at least two fruits a day.

In addition to healthier eating, his activity level has increased significantly. Weekly workouts include weight training twice a week as well as a cardio workout three times a week for 20 to 30 minutes. Generally, he uses an elliptical machine (a no-impact type of running) or spends time with his kids riding bikes or playing in the park.

For many on the weight loss journey, a breaking point can be easily recalled — a moment when it became clear they either needed to change their lives, or spiral into an unthinkable future.

Growing up, Johnson was an athlete. Towering 6 feet 3 inches, being big was an advantage on the sports field. Claiming to be "just a big guy," he ignored the weight gain once he was off the athletic field. Eventually he found the excess weight limited his ability to enjoy life.

The decision to change his life impacted him profoundly. He said he is now up for anything, from a bike ride with his children to a long walk with his wife.

"Make sure you find yourself a support system before embarking on a weight loss journey. Have someone to take the trip with you down the long road and pull you up when you get discouraged," he said. "Support in any endeavor is important, especially one as difficult as weight loss."

For Johnson, his support system is his family, wife and children, as well as Healthy U. Along with thousands of other participants, Healthy U has helped to motivate him and monitor his progress.

Knowing he had to return to Healthy U in a year to be re-weighed and measured, kept him on track and feeling responsible.

Johnson said it is important to remember there is no miracle pill, surgery or diet that is going to make you a super model overnight. Losing weight and changing your entire life requires hard work, diligence, will power, and a well-placed support network.

"It's not been easy, but I'm proof that if you set your mind to it, even through the everyday ups and downs of life, anyone can make positive changes in their health."