

THEY LOST
555 LBS.
TOTAL!

We Did It TOGETHER!

Meet 3 couples who shed pounds through dedication, willpower—and the buddy system

By STEPHANIE EMMA PFEFFER

Ronnie & Andrea Brower

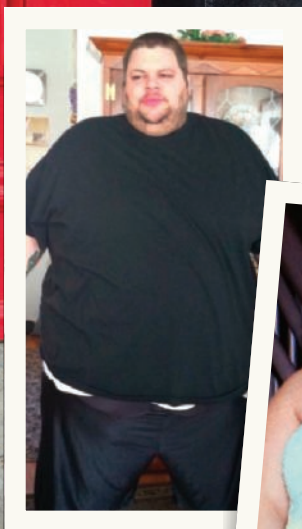
Ronnie Brower's weight struggles started in high school. "I had no direction in life and would just party and eat," says the 32-year-old truck driver from Syracuse. "When my friends went to college, I got more depressed and was just drinking, doing drugs and eating—I was out of control." He reached 675 lbs. by 2013, when his doctor said he would die before age 30. "I saw my mom cry, and that's when it really hit," he says. Ronnie started to work out and follow a ketogenic diet—high fat, moderate protein, low carbs—under the guidance of trainers

Nick and Jill Murphy of Mission Fitness in Syracuse. It was there that he met Andrea, who was in the middle of her own weight-loss journey. "I was an emotional eater," says the hairdresser, 25. "I had already lost a bunch of weight and was following Ronnie's story at the gym." Their first date was Valentine's Day 2015, when they both still had about 50 lbs. to lose. They continued to follow the ketogenic plan while strength training twice a week. Ronnie eventually had several surgeries to remove excess skin. The couple wed in May. "I never thought I would be the pretty, thin, fit bride," says Andrea. Ronnie has his own memories: "Seeing her walk down the aisle, becoming her husband, was like my prize for going through this journey."

'It's not just losing weight—it's working on ourselves from the inside out'

—ANDREA BROWER

WAS
675 LBS.
NOW
230 LBS.



WAS
250 LBS.
NOW
140 LBS.



THEY LOST
275 LBS.
TOTAL!

‘We wanted to improve our lives—and we wanted to do it together’
—MALEKA BEAL

Eric, 46. The next day he bought workout gear and started exercising in the garage. His wife, Maleka, a graphic designer who weighed 276 lbs., joined in the sweat session, followed by a 2.5-mile walk after they took their boys to school. They also began to research nutrition. “We decided to feed ourselves what the body needs, not just what the mind wants,” says Eric, who along with Maleka lost 100 lbs. in 10 months and became a health coach. “At the end of the day we were just making better choices,” says Maleka, 43. In 2011 they founded BetterChoices, a wellness company in New Orleans, and they have returned to school to become registered dietitians. “Now we empower other people to commit to the process,” says Maleka.

Eric & Maleka Beal

In 2006 Eric Beal was running a commercial collection agency and carrying so much weight—400 lbs.—that a scale couldn’t measure it. “At that time our kids were 5 and 3, and I wanted to be healthy enough to see them go to prom,” says



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395 LBS.
TOTAL!

‘We started being active—and slowly but surely the pounds came off’
—LEXI REED

tracking our calories and reading nutrition labels.” Now “we like to go hiking, and I look forward to the gym,” says 29-year-old Danny, a lab manager. They took a “bucket-list trip” last summer to do things they couldn’t do before, like canoeing and riding roller coasters. Says Lexi: “It wasn’t about the weight that we lost but the life we gained.”

Danny & Lexi Reed

After more than nine years together, the Terre Haute, Ind., couple realized their lifestyle was unhealthy. “We would spend most nights just sitting on the couch watching television and mindlessly eating junk food,” says Lexi, 27, a blogger who has 492,000 followers on her Instagram @fatgirlfedup. “We would order a whole pizza, bread sticks, wings and a liter of soda.” Soon her weight ballooned to 485 lbs. In January 2016 the couple made a New Year’s resolution to lose weight together. “A friend challenged us to 30 days of no eating out, cheat meals, soda or alcohol,” says Lexi. “We started cooking, meal prepping,



FROM LEFT: COURTESY MALEKA AND ERIC BEAL; COURTESY LEXI AND DANNY REED