

Promises pay off

When Megan and Matt Harden swore to one another to lose weight and get healthy, they meant it.

birthdays frequently conjure up uncomfortable feelings. Whether it's the realization you didn't achieve a goal or just the gloom of getting older, another trip around the sun can be depressing. Such was the case for Megan Harden and her husband, Matt, when in 2016, they celebrated their 40th birthdays together. They blew out the candles, cut the cake, cleaned up the confetti and made a promise to one another: to get their health on track.

Inside the Box

Step one was joining a gym, something Harden had never done in her life. She and her husband chose a local CrossFit box on a whim, mostly because of its proximity to their home. On Harden's first visit, she was taken aback by the atmosphere and the physiques of the other members. "I had never seen bodies that looked like theirs," she says. "All the women were so strong yet so feminine."

In Harden's first WOD (Workout of the Day), she caught her reflection in a window and com-

pared her silhouette with those of the other CrossFitters. She couldn't help but wonder, *What in the world have I gotten myself into?* But before long, Harden found that she loved the supportive coaches and camaraderie of the members who motivated her to be better every day. And despite her lack of athleticism, Harden was a quick study. "I got all the powerlifting movements down rather quickly," she says.

Demystifying Macros

Because almost everything Harden was attempting was a "first" — she had never hung from a bar or climbed a rope — she was often extremely sore. In an effort to speed her recovery and maximize her results, she took a magnifying glass to her diet and discovered that she was eating mostly carbs and fat and very little protein and that she was hooked on sugar. "I would go out every day and get myself a treat," she says. "But then I'd feel awful about myself and would promise to eat better tomorrow."

Harden turned to her coaches for nutritional guidance. "If I wanted to look like them, I needed to eat like them," she reasoned. After picking all their brains, she decided she was most interested in counting macros. "I knew I needed a specific amount of protein, carbs and fat each day to [change] my body," she says. "Once I figured out what I needed, I kept track and made daily goals."

Harden upped her protein, adding almost 100 grams more to her daily diet than she was eating previously, and she split her daily macros into six meals and snacks. Little by little and month by month, her body began changing.

The Harden Class

Four years later, Harden is down almost 30 pounds and 10 clothing sizes. Hubby, too, had a transformation, trimming away most of his body fat and adding 20 pounds of lean muscle. They both still train at their same CrossFit box and attend the 9 a.m. class like clockwork. In fact, they are so regular that box members have renamed it "The Harden Class." Together with their kids, the Hardens are looking forward to their next several orbits around the sun.



Megan Before

stats

Megan Harden/
Chesapeake, Virginia

age: 44

height: 5'6"

weight before/after: 167/140

occupation: Nutrition coach/
office administrator

Easy Asian Slaw

► "We love this healthy Asian slaw recipe," Harden says. "I think my family could eat it every night of the week!"

MAKES 4 Servings

INGREDIENTS

- 3 scallions, thinly sliced
- 1 bag coleslaw mix
- ½ small red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- juice of 1 lemon
- 1 tbsp canola oil
- 1 tbsp grated fresh ginger
- 1 tbsp white vinegar
- 1 tbsp dark brown sugar
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- ½ tsp salt
- 1-2 tbsp powdered peanut butter

DIRECTIONS

Put everything in a bowl and mix well. Eat immediately.

Nutrition Facts (per serving):
carbs 11 g, fat 5 g, protein 5 g



The incredible shrinking woman

Christina Bryant went from sickly to strong with consistent training, healthy eating and a promise about a bikini.



Christina Bryant grew up in the South with a single parent, and in her world, unhealthy food was normalized and fresh fruits and vegetables were financially unavailable. Food became a sign of comfort for her, an issue that persisted into adulthood. But one day when she was 28 years old, Bryant went for a yearly checkup and life as she knew it imploded. Tests revealed that she had high blood pressure, was morbidly obese and was borderline diabetic. “I was given two options — work out and save my life or become another female African-American statistic,” she says.

The Road Back

Bryant decided not to resort to medication (her doctor’s suggestion) and wanted to get healthy the natural way. She was afraid to go to a gym, so she started to walk on a nearby trail every day for 30 minutes. After six months, Bryant had shed 50 pounds and set her next goal: to “comfortably fit” into a bikini.

Bryant’s friends encouraged her to give weight training a try, so she took a leap of faith and joined a local gym. She enlisted the help of a

personal trainer and nutritionist and got to work. “The first exercise I learned to do was a pull-up,” she says. Twice a week, Bryant would begin and end her training session with assisted band pull-ups. “I struggled at first, but I practiced as much as I could until I was able to do 10 without assistance.”

Changing her eating habits was the next hurdle, and her nutritionist provided a step-by-step plan that took the guesswork out of healthy eating. “I stopped looking for comfort from food and instead found comfort in knowing that if I did eat something outside of my meal plan, it was OK and sometimes necessary for mental balance,” she says.

Bikini-Bound

In 2016, almost three years after her unspeakable doctor’s visit, Bryant and her friends went on a girl’s trip to a beach resort. She was officially down 100 pounds from the day she started, and as soon as she got to the beach, she had the breakthrough moment she had been waiting for. “My confidence came out of nowhere,” she says. “I slid my coverup off and strutted my stuff in a bikini as soon as my feet hit the boardwalk.

Once home, Bryant was training one day when she saw a video playing at the gym of iconic bodybuilder Lenda Murray doing a posing routine. “I had never seen a woman so electrifying and unapologetically confident,” she says. “I told myself if she could do it, so could I.”

Just like that, Bryant began preparing for a competition. She lost her remaining 40 pounds to reach her goal weight of 130, and in October 2020, she took to the stage at the Chicago Pro, making her debut as a women’s physique competitor. She placed third and earned an invitation to the prestigious Arnold Classic in 2021.

Fundraising and Family

Today, Bryant is a personal trainer and motivational speaker and is passionate about helping others reach their weight-loss goals, including those in her community. Every year, she spearheads a back-to-school fundraiser focused on gathering school supplies and providing healthy food for local children and their families.

Bryant credits her mentors, friends and family for her success, including her father, who now refers to her as “the shrinking woman.” She believes the people you hold close are not only there to celebrate your wins but also to hold you accountable and help you succeed.

stats

Christina Bryant/
Warner Robins, Georgia

age: 35

height: 5’2”

weight before/after:

270/126

occupation: Personal trainer, motivational speaker and philanthropist

Christina’s Favorites

► **My favorite bodyparts to train are ...** hamstrings and glutes.

► **My favorite exercises are ...** dumbbell deadlifts and hyperextensions.

“WHEN I COME FACE TO FACE WITH MY OLD VICES ... I FIND WAYS TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY AND ACTIVE.”

Christina Before

