



Trainer Sarah Laurie did a kettlebell workout with Michael Lucas, who credits a vegan diet and exercise for his 162-pound weight loss. *Crissy Pascual / Union-Tribune*

Making the weight

With a drastic change of diet and exercise, Michael Lucas has left his old body behind

For Michael Lucas, watching the documentary film "Super Size Me" was a bit like looking into a rearview mirror.

Only the guy on the screen, wolfing down 5,000 or so calories of fast food a day, was a virtual novice to big-time gluttony and girth. Lucas, on the other hand, was a recovering junk-food giant with a record of indulgence that put him on the food police's most wanted list.

"What he (Morgan Spurlock) did in 30 days, I had been doing for nine or 10 years," Lucas, 30, said.

His highest weight ever: 344 pounds and counting.

"That's as high as the doctor's scale would go," he said.

When Lucas saw the "Super Size Me" documentary's girlfriend prepare sumptuous vegan food during the movie, Lucas had an epiphany of sorts.

"The vegan meal she was cooking looked good," he said. "There was

a lot of food, and she was thin. So I bought a vegan cookbook."

He also began to rev up his exercise, partly out of fear. "The doctor told me I was a year or two away from being diabetic," he said. "When I went to my ophthalmologist's office, I noticed amputees with eye patches. That led me to believe they were diabetics, which is what set me off."

Dieting, as it turned out, came more easily than torturing his unwieldy body on a treadmill. Within two weeks on a vegan regimen, his animal protein cravings were gone. "I realize I didn't need meat," Lucas said. "I was feeling healthier and I was seeing the weight come off — 27 pounds the first month."

In 10 months, he had plateaued at 228 pounds. Not good enough to meet his goal of 180.

So to rejuvenate his resolve he entered a biggest loser contest sponsored in October by Iron Core, a

fitness center in La Jolla that features classes in kettlebell training (think cannonballs with handles). One of the perks was six weeks of free coaching.

Adhering to his 1,200-to-1,400-calories-a-day vegan diet and working out up to seven days a week, Lucas slimmed down to a sinewy 182 pounds. Moreover, he won the contest, earning a year of free personal training.

His total weight loss in less than two years: 162 pounds.

At his doctor's advice, he gained back eight pounds to 190, which he feels is optimal because of the increased muscle mass on his 6-foot frame.

"I keep seeing myself getting stronger with more definition," he said. "The kettlebell works all those muscles you don't get to use in a gym, where you focus on a single body part with each machine. Kettlebell is like a combination of Pilates, yoga, cardiovascular and weight training in one explosive workout."

DIETARY DETOUR: Before venturing into veganism, Lucas tried the high-protein, low-carb Atkins diet. "That's how I lost my first 37 pounds," he said. "But my cholesterol was too high (240)." All the more reason, he figured, for going vegan. His cholesterol today? 137.

MEATLESS MUNCHING: Vegetables, fruit and soy protein comprise the bulk of Lucas' nutritional regimen. He'll start the day with a 7 a.m. breakfast of a protein shake with banana and blueberries before reporting to his sales job in the construction industry. Throughout the day, he'll have five or six minimeals, including a veggie burger with soy cheese, mixed vegetables and fruit.

LETTING GO: "If I want a cocktail on the weekend with friends or a cheeseless veggie pizza, I indulge," he said. "I don't push my lifestyle on anyone else. When I go to a restaurant with friends, I can usually negotiate with the waiter or waitresses." His favorite vegan-friendly eateries? Sipz on Clairemont Mesa Boulevard and Rancho's at 30th and University.

CAN'T GET ENOUGH: Besides four or five, 45-minute kettlebell and/or abdominal training sessions a week at Iron Core, Lucas devotes two days a week to cardiovascular workouts. At a gym near his Clairemont home, he'll do 45 minutes on an elliptical machine with resistance set at level 16.

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