

For richer, for poorer ...

In weight gain or weight loss

Joanne Richard
Sun Media

May 22, 2006

TORONTO — Losing weight may be good for your health, but bad for your marriage.

Michael, 40, embarked on a major weight loss regime and lost 104 pounds — but nearly lost his marriage, too.

“It was causing too many problems in the marriage and I valued my relationship over my health, so I quit losing weight,” says the technology salesman, who packed every pound back on — and more.

His wife, who is also obese, made it abundantly clear she did not support his new lifestyle and healthful eating habits; she sabotaged his efforts by refusing to cook up healthier meals and keeping junk food in the house. Their day-to-day interactions became incredibly strained and sex dwindled to once every few months.



“We continued to grow further apart — I guess I could have gone elsewhere for sex and companionship, but I’m a committed and faithful guy,” says Michael, adding once he quit losing, he didn’t gain much at home.

Things got a “bit happier” on the homefront, but today the excess pounds continue to weigh him down emotionally and in career advancement.

Weight loss changes the dynamics of a relationship, say the experts.

“Losing weight generates happiness and improves relationships — in the majority of cases. Sadly, not so, in others. Changes can generate anxiety, anger, insecurities. Spouses can feel threatened and react negatively — the relationship can destabilize,” says Dr. Eileen Alexander, a Burlington, Ont., medical doctor.

Competition and jealousy may take root, says New York psychologist Dr. Debbie Magids, especially when it comes to the increased outside attention the other spouse experiences based on the weight loss.

“There is a safety when your spouse is not as attractive to other people. It can feel very threatening and insecurities may begin to surface.”

Spouses may actually resort to sabotaging their spouse’s weight loss efforts, says Toronto weight loss coach Harvey Brooker, who has personally endured the wrath of irate spouses calling him up and reaming him out for being a “homewrecker. Some of them detest me.

“The threat of a slim, trim mate to one who is still indulging and bulging, is in my observations not a minor problem,” says Brooker.

But even a thin partner can experience issues with a slimming spouse:

“When he loses weight and becomes more confident and frisky, this can also cause a rift because she’s accustomed to a non-existent sex life and all of a sudden things change,” he says.

Also, adds Magids: “If one of the spouses is used to being the one who gets the attention — or has thinness as their thing — when the other starts to get the attention, it can also cause a lot of jealousy and competition.”

Co-operation is essential — the entire household has to get on side. “The other person must change to the new good behaviours or there will be a price to pay in regards to their relationship,” says Brooker of The Harvey Brooker Weight Loss for Men in Toronto.

According to Marilyn Belleghem, a registered marriage and family therapist: “I have had clients who promise the kids pizza and pop when they know their spouse is trying to eat healthier. I have also had men as clients buy their dieting wife chocolates and then act hurt that she isn’t appreciative.”

THE COMFORT FACTOR

Familiarity breeds weight gain? A study by the University of Minnesota School of Public Health reports that spouses each gain an average of six to eight pounds after marriage.

For Toronto resident Sean, 31, it was a lot more — 70 lb. in fact. “There was a comfort factor and my portion size increased.”

Weight has burdened Sean for years: Before he married, he was grossly obese, weighing in at 400 lb. In 2001, he committed to losing weight and dropped 200 lb. in 18 months — he gained a big boost in self-esteem and self-assurance, both professionally and personally.

The Toronto marketing specialist went from being lonely, unhappy and “fatalistic” to getting a new job paying an extra \$50,000, and oodles of attention from interested females. “I was no longer invisible.”

Sean was slim and trim when he married three years ago, but soon started putting on weight, which burdened the connection between the two newlyweds. “My self-

confidence plummeted and so did her physical attraction to me. Our sex life was impacted.”

Sean says he rejoined The Harvey Brooker Weight Loss for Men clinic ([harvey brooker.com](http://harveybrooker.com)), and has already dropped 25 lb. He says he’s self-assured again and “our sex life increased almost immediately.” He plans a career change in the near future that will support his more active and healthy lifestyle.