



back

★ Attract your Ideal Weight: Zaheen Nanji's Story

by [Zaheen Nanji](#) (more info)

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One afternoon as I was getting dressed for a dinner party, something so disturbing happened that it changed my life. The house wasn't on fire, nobody was injured and I wasn't kidnapped. I simply tried to put on my black cocktail dress. The zipper made it halfway up and stopped. I sucked in my belly, held my breath and tried again. Nope. That zipper was not going up. I shook my head, put the dress back on the hanger and reached for my cream silk dress and jacket. The jacket fit as long as I didn't button it, but the zipper on the dress stopped at my hips.



Zaheen Nanji before and now

I was already running late, and I frantically tried on every dress in my closet. Within five minutes, the bedroom floor was littered with dresses that didn't fit. I was angry and frustrated and wished there were someone or something I could blame. But I knew that the forty pounds I'd gained in a short time after my marriage were nobody's fault but my own. My weight was out of control and I felt weak and worthless. The fact that I'd earned my Bachelor of Science degree in food science and nutrition just made me feel worse. How could I know so much about healthy eating and still be so fat? But this wasn't the first time.

Growing up in Kenya, East Africa all meals were home cooked, yet I struggled with my weight from the time my chest started budding at puberty and I found my hips growing wider. We ate unprocessed food, but we still devoured high fat and high carb foods. In Kenya, many held the belief that weight gain was a sign for prosperity and my father held that belief very well. I don't think it holds true anymore. My mother was diagnosed with diabetes in her forties and my father died from liver complications at the age of 60 - and he wasn't an alcoholic. The roller-coaster ride of dieting and/or starving really started when I decided to become a vegetarian at the age of 14; my exercise plan incorporated walking an hour a day until my mother forced me to eat meat because I was beginning to get pale and fatigued. Growing up in Kenya, we didn't eat out a lot, but you can imagine my delight when my sister, who was then 17, and I at 15 years old came to Canada, without my parents, and saw McDonald's!

Burgers and milkshakes were nirvana - what teenager likes to cook? As the first year passed, we gained a lot weight and we'd purchase used clothing just to keep up. I went up to a size 16 (US sizing) pant and I felt ashamed. This pain caused me to go on my next diet - The Scarsdale Diet. As usual I lost weight but gained it back after going back to my normal eating habits. While attending university, I took comfort in food because I had to face another challenge - my speech impediment. My stutter started at the age of 5 but I learned how to deal with it in Kenya and while I had family around me. In University, I was alone, I was scared to speak and I kept getting heavier. This pain again caused me to go on another diet - Herbal Life.

After marriage I decided I was going to take over my in-laws samosa business and make it a great manufacturing company, but after working 16 hour days and eating samosas all day, I did not gain any profit but what I did gain was weight! It was at this time that the cocktail dress did not fit.

I was tired of weight controlling me rather than me controlling it. I was tired of the incessant mind chatter about

About **Zaheen Nanji**

Zaheen Nanji is a resilience champion, speaker and owner of Shanti Wellness and Laser Centre in Alberta, Canada. Embracing change and fear is Zaheen's trademark because she overcame her speech impediment, her struggles with weight and learned to live in a new country, at the age of 15, without her parents. Her book on behaviour weight loss, *Attract Your Ideal Weight - 8 Secrets of People Who Lose Weight and Keep it Off*, won Bronze in the diet/nutrition category at Global E-book Awards. Visit her websites at

www.attractyouridealweight.com and www.zaheennanji.com

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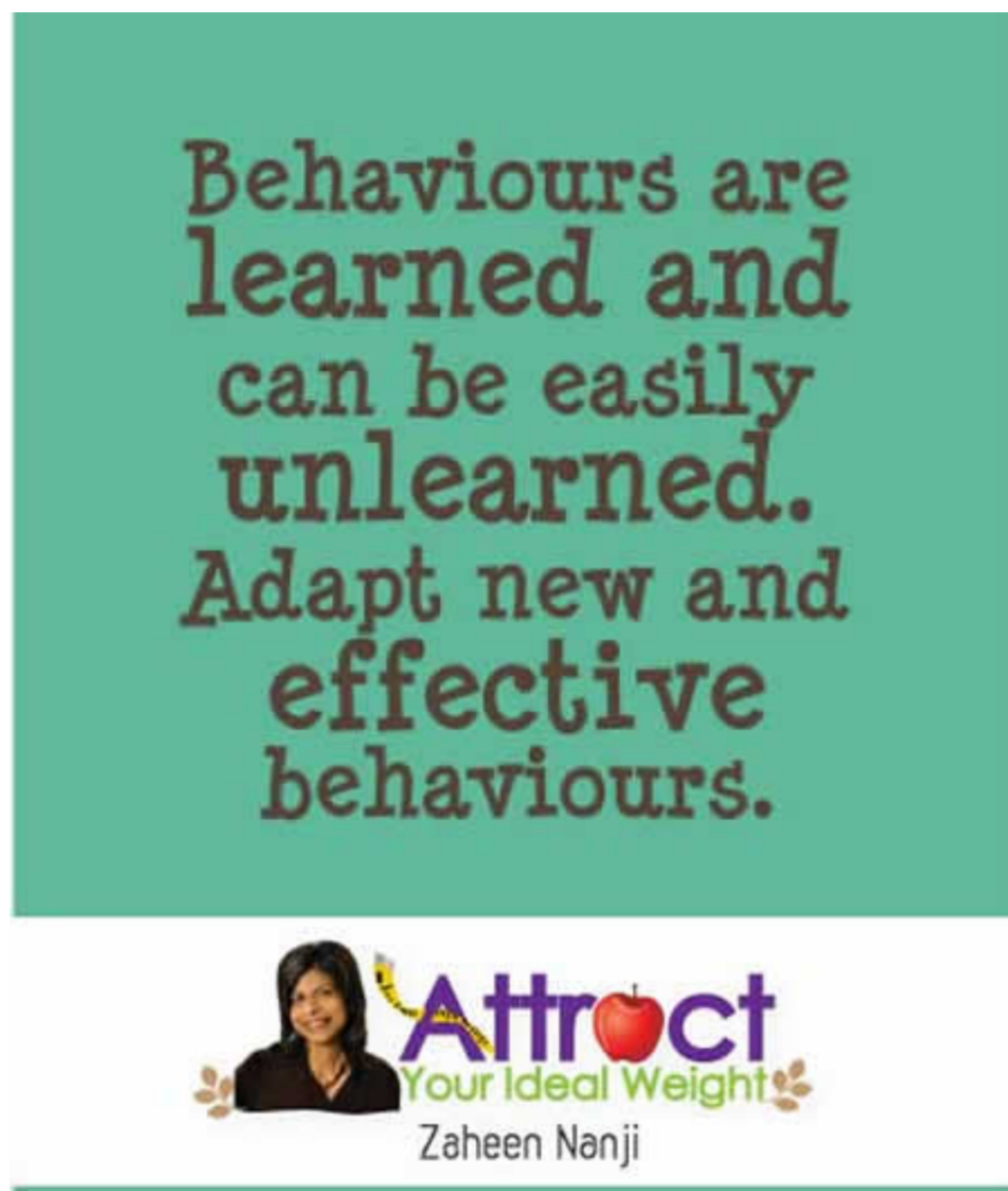
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how I looked when I sit or walk. I was tired of feeling like a failure when it came to my own body. But we all have excuses right? I didn't want to give up my favourite foods, I couldn't say no to my relatives or in-laws when they offered me food because I didn't want to hurt their feelings. I didn't have time to prepare healthy foods because I was too exhausted by the time I came home. Sound familiar?



This is very similar to what my clients say to me:

- I'm too old and weight loss is hard;
- I've tried everything and nothing works;
- I just can't find the time to exercise;
- It's hard when people around us are eating what they want.

After not being successful at the samosa thing, I went back to school to take on an after degree program and landed a great government job. Most of my co-workers were male and at that time I wore a size 16 pant and large/x-large blouses. I didn't have too many clothes and I noticed my male co-workers wearing black jeans.

"Maybe I can get away with it," I said to myself one day. So I started wearing blue jeans with bulky sweaters.

One morning, my manager called me into his office and bluntly said, "You should wear something more appropriate and dress better." I felt I had been punched in the stomach. I couldn't breathe. "I'm going home for the rest of the day. I'm not feeling good," I told our administrative assistant and during the hour-long drive home, I cried.

At first I was so upset at my manager and I couldn't face to go back to work the next day. However, I realized I was blaming him for what was really my issue. I wanted to wear blue jeans and a bulky sweater so that I could hide my big butt and stomach roll. I didn't want to take the effort to feel good enough about myself so I blamed him. I liked playing the victim role because I didn't have time to prepare meals and I was tired at the end of the day - so I blamed him and my job.

That is when I decided that I was tired of playing the victim role to my thoughts, my food and to my disempowering behaviours.

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Here are four principles I lived by to change my relationship with food forever and these can work in any area of your life:

1. **Plan ahead** - Fit your life to what you want rather than what you don't want. My default behaviour would be to go to a fast food drive thru for breakfast so I could eat it while driving. I changed that behaviour and decided to wake up 15 minutes early so I could prepare a protein smoothie and take that with me while I drove to work. I prepared meals in advance by using the slow cooker or cooking in batches and freezing for later use;
2. **Outcome focused** - avoid instant gratification and take some time to feel the consequences of your action. As I changed my eating habits and started eating healthier, others around me still ate the same. Visiting family was the most difficult where I found it a struggle to say, "No, thank you," to amazing East Indian food and treats. But I did; I ate the healthiest food on the table and left out the unhealthy because it was important to me not to fall victim to food and give my power away. Note, it wasn't about deprivation at all but how I looked at food. Being outcome focused can also be used for exercise. I'd be too tired to exercise, but then I'd get myself motivated by **imagining** myself exercising and feeling really good after. That feeling alone propelled me to go to the gym. It is important to pick an activity, sport or exercise you like doing;
3. **Mastering obstacles** - make it a habit to look ahead and take note of any obstacles or barriers that may interfere with your goals and find a way to embrace them rather than complain about them. At staff meetings or conferences, most of the snacks that were available comprised of coffee, donuts and muffins. I'd make sure that I was prepared with a healthy snack and a bottle of water. In fact, there were times where I brought boiled eggs and fruit for everyone else in the meeting. Influence others rather than being influenced by others;
4. **Find support and ask for help** - we are social beings and we excel when we have a network of support. When I decided to change my behaviours, eat smart and take up exercise, I had no clue where to start. With some help from my male co-workers, I learned about protein smoothies, protein bars and preparing tasty salads and meals. I was intimidated by going to the gym, but I sought help from one of the trainers who showed me how to use gym equipment and referred a book that showed an exercise plan.



What if I didn't take the effort to change my relationship with food? What if I hadn't asked for support? What if I had continued to play the victim role and blame others rather than taking responsibility? What if you continue to lie to yourself and say this is the year that I'll lose weight, but then you go back to your old behaviours? What if you continue down the road to illness and swallow medications to keep you alive? What if you continue to sabotage your efforts and play the victim throughout your life?

But, what if you decide that: "Today, I stop playing the victim! Today, I claim my right to my health and my body! Today, I treat my body like a temple instead of a trash can! Today, I begin to love myself."

Attract Your Ideal Weight

8 SECRETS OF PEOPLE WHO LOSE WEIGHT AND KEEP IT OFF



Zaheen Nanji, BSc, CCP


You are resilient because you have gone through other experiences that have made you stronger. If you struggle with your weight, use the learnings from your adversities to help make your struggle a victory. Forget about quick fixes and instead focus on lifestyle and behaviour changes. Take baby steps to get to your goal, and yes, it may take longer but every moment during this journey takes you closer to mastering yourself.

To your success!

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