

The First Hundred Pounds

What actually happens while the body changes faster than the identity can keep up.

I want to start this chapter by telling you the difference between losing weight and running a project. It is the difference that runs the whole rest of this book. Before this chapter, I had been losing weight. After this chapter, I had been running a project. I had been both the man inside his own science experiment and the scientist in the white coat. I had been keeping the lab notebook in a piece of paper that lived in my back pocket.

The shift did not happen on a particular morning. There was no thunderclap. There was no decision to be made in a parking lot. There was no overheard conversation in front of a granite-and-marble showroom. There was just a man getting up morning after morning, noticing that his watchband was sitting differently on his wrist, that his belt was fitting differently, that the scale in the spare bathroom was telling him something a little new every day. And the man, almost without deciding to, began to take that information more seriously.

I had been weighing myself only occasionally for years.

Never consistently. The bathroom scale had been a thing you stepped on when you needed to be reminded that you were a big guy, and then you got off it, and you went on with your life. Now, as I began to feel and see differences in my body, the scale became a priority. All of a sudden, it became a higher priority. It had never been a priority before.

And here is the truth about what changed in my head. I began to look at the number and ask a question I had not asked before in my life: What does that mean? I had gained two pounds overnight. Why? I had dropped a pound and a half. Why? The scale was no longer a yes-or-no instrument that told me I was a fat guy. It was a real measurement, and I wanted to understand what was driving it.

So I started to read. I had always been a man of personal experience. But now I wanted the science. I wanted to know what carbohydrates were and what they did. I wanted to know what protein was. I wanted to know what the different kinds of fats were. I had grown up hearing that fat is bad, sugar is bad, and salt is bad, and I had accepted it the way you accept the weather. Now I wanted to know why. Was the sugar in an apple the same as the sugar in a glass of iced tea? Spoiler: it is not. But I had to find that out for myself.

And so this chapter, the chapter where the first hundred pounds came off, is the chapter where the weight loss journey became a project. I want to walk you through it the way it happened to me. The chapter is long because the year was long, and a lot of small things added up over the course of it. I am going to give it to you in the order it arrived, because the order matters.

You can't control what you can't see. The moment I started measuring - the scale, the waist, the steps, the heart rate, the blood pressure, the food on the plate - was the moment this became a project I could actually steer.

The Daily Weigh-In Is Born

I want to back up and tell you the story of the scale itself, because the daily weigh-in is one of the most important habits I have built in my entire life, and it did not arrive all at once.

For years, the scale in the spare bathroom on the main floor of our house - a twenty-dollar bathroom scale from a home center, the kind you can buy anywhere - had sat in the corner under a chair and gathered dust. I would step on it maybe every few months. I'd register the number it would give me, I would shake my head, sometimes in disgust, and

then put my clothes back on, walk back across the house, and just move with my day. That is how I knew I was 310 pounds. I got on the scale one day, and it read 310. That number had stayed in my head, but the scale had gone right back into the spot under the chair.

When I started this project - when the tea had become unsweetened, when the Williamsburg walking had happened, when I had begun, almost without meaning to, to take this seriously - I started getting on the scale a little more often. Not every day. Once a month, maybe. And then once every couple of weeks. And then I read somewhere, in some piece of weight-loss writing I had stumbled across in my research, that you should weigh yourself only once a week. The argument went that if you weigh every day, you will become obsessed with the daily number, get discouraged when it goes the wrong way, and burn out. So, pick one day. Make it the same day. Every Wednesday morning, let's call it **WEIGH-IN-WEDNESDAY**, get on the scale. Write it down. That is all.

So, I tried that. Weigh-in Wednesdays. I will never forget weigh-in Wednesdays. I did it for about a month. Six o'clock every Wednesday morning, I would get up, walk across the house to the spare bathroom, take everything off, step on the scale, and look at the number. And for a couple of weeks, I didn't even write it down. That took me a few

weeks to figure out. If you don't write it down, you cannot remember it. The brain does not hold a number from one Wednesday to the next Wednesday with any fidelity. You think you remember, but you do not. You have to write it down.

So eventually I started writing it down. A piece of paper. A pen. The date and the weight. That was the entire first log I kept. The day, the date, my weight. Stop. That is what it was.

But the weigh-ins on Wednesdays did not last. They lasted maybe a month. And the reason they did not last is that I wanted to know more. Once a week was not enough for me. I am the kind of man who, once I have decided something is worth tracking, wants to track it as often as I reasonably can. The more you measure, the more you can see. And once a week, I was hiding from myself. Things were happening between Wednesdays that I was not seeing. The scale fluctuated throughout the week, and I was only catching a snapshot of that one moment. I wanted to watch the movie.

So, I went daily. After a month of Wednesdays, I just decided one morning that I was going to weigh myself the next day, too. And the next day. And the next day. And that became, that day, the habit that has now lasted me almost

ten years. From that day to this, every single morning, I get up at six o'clock, walk across the house to the spare bathroom, take everything off, step on the scale, look at the number, and write it down. On vacation. At home. Sick. Tired. Hungover. Doesn't matter. I weigh myself. Every day. Every single day.

And the scale itself - that same little scale I bought at the home center for twenty bucks - has not moved in twenty-eight years. It is still in the same spot in the same bathroom that we assigned it when we moved into the house. We have better scales now, fancier ones with body-composition readouts and Bluetooth, but the original spot for the scale is still Step on that bathroom scale. The original spot is still there. The protocol is sacred. Simple bathroom scale. Same place. Same time of day. Every morning. Non-negotiable, no exceptions, every morning, period.

The reason the protocol matters - and I am going to come back to this later in the chapter, because the scale's dark side is one of the longest sections of this chapter - is that the protocol is the only thing that lets the number mean anything. A scale that you step on once a month, at a different time, in different clothes, in a different room, on a different scale, is lying to you with every reading. It cannot help itself. The variables are too big. But a scale you step

on the same way, at the same time, in the same room, every morning, is a scale whose readings can be compared to one another, and the comparison is where the truth lives. The single morning's number is meaningless. The comparison across days is everything.

The scale is not a judgment. It is a reporting tool. It is not telling you that you are a loser. It is not telling you that you have failed. It is just reporting the data. What you do with that data is the entire project.

The Standard American Diet I Was Eating Away From

Before I can tell you what I changed about the food, I have to tell you, in honest detail, what the food had been. I am going to walk you through a typical day for the old Joe, the Joe of 310 pounds, the Joe in the blue hoodie on the boat. I want you to see it the way I saw it, because if you are reading this book on the standard American diet right now, you are probably eating something not very different from what I am about to describe, and you may not have noticed it.

My day started at Dunkin' Donuts. Every single morning. There was nowhere else I went for breakfast. The order was always the same. Extra-large coffee, sometimes iced,

sometimes hot, decaf because I drank coffee all day and didn't want the caffeine. Two cream, two sugar. A bagel, egg, and cheese, or a bagel with cream cheese. If I were really feeling it that morning - and I was feeling it about twice a week - I would add an order of donut holes.

Munchkins. Twenty-five of them. A whole box. I would eat the whole box in the car on the way to work.

I would get to the dealership and go into my office. I would have a couple of cigarettes - I was a smoker in those days too, for the record - and I would do my morning work.

Calls. Paperwork. Whatever a salesperson does at his desk in the morning. And then, around ten or ten-thirty, the horn would blow.

The horn was the mobile snack truck. We called it the roach coach. The guy who drove it was on a route through the industrial park where the dealership sat, and his arrival was the signal for everybody in the showroom and the shop to drop what they were doing and run out to the parking lot like lemmings. I will use that word because it is the right word. We were a herd. The horn would blow, and twenty grown men would all stop what they were doing and walk out to the parking lot and stand around the back of a truck and buy donuts and pastries and sandwiches and coffee and chocolate bars. I was looking for sugar. I did not even want the coffee at that point in the morning. I just wanted sugar.

I would grab whatever looked sweet, eat it standing in the parking lot, chat for a few minutes with the guys, and walk back inside.

Lunch was something I would grab near my office and eat at my desk while I worked. Whatever it was, it was usually meat-heavy and bread-heavy and not particularly healthy or nutritious. I'd just grab a sandwich. A wrap. Something from the deli down the street. I did not pay attention to what was in it; I was usually looking for carbs to fill me up for a while.

Afternoon break, the roach coach was back. I was back at the back of the truck, getting another little sugar lift. Anything to give me a pickup? Sometimes I would get a chocolate bar. Sometimes another donut. Whatever.

And then there were the wings nights. Two or three nights a week, sometimes more, I would go to a sports bar with my friend Jimmy. The two of us had a standing arrangement with Tommy, the bartender. The arrangement was simple. We would drink beer until the wings ran out. We would eat wings until the beer ran out. Two dozen wings between the two of us. Always buffalo hot wings - the deal was this, if we couldn't finish the wings, we'd pay for the beer. If we could finish the wings, he'd buy the beer. WE NEVER paid for the beer; we ALWAYS finished the wings. No matter if

we needed an extra pitcher of beer, we had to drink as much beer as we could to keep the wings from being too hot. That was the logic. That is the kind of logic you use when you are a man eating two dozen wings and drinking a dozen beers on a Tuesday night. I would drive home, eat my dinner, and by ten o'clock, I would pass out on the couch.

That was several nights a week, pretty much every week. That was the cycle. The other night or two each week, I might be home with the family, and I would still eat too much, just in different clothes.

And all day long, every single day, on top of all of that, I had a gallon of Arizona iced tea, full sugar, that I would drink from morning to night. I had it in the fridge. I had it in my office. I had it in my car. I was a man drinking liquid candy by the gallon.

I want to do the math for you, the way I eventually did for myself, because it's unbelievable. One gallon of Arizona full-sugar iced tea contains between 1,440 and 1,600 calories. Just from the sugar. I drank a gallon a day. Some days more. And 3,500 calories is roughly the energy equivalent of a pound of fat. Which means every two days, I drink enough sugar to make a pound. A pound of pure liquid candy. Every two days. For decades.

PREVIEW ENDS HERE

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