

LAURA HUGHES

loses weight the old-fashioned way BY KAREN CUMMING



BEFORE

CHEST	40"
WAIST	38"
HIPS	40"



AFTER

CHEST	36"
WAIST	27"
HIPS	36"

Laura Hughes, 25, isn't the woman she used to be. In fact, she's half the woman she used to be, and that's exactly the way she likes it. Take a look at her photographs. They're astounding. Three years ago, Laura started on a journey that would see her drop 100 pounds from her five-foot-four-inch frame. One hundred pounds. It's almost unimaginable. Close your eyes and picture 100 sticks of butter or 10 bags of potatoes. All that excess weight – just gone.

Even more amazing is that Laura didn't do it at a gym, she did it at home. No personal trainer, no fancy equip-

ment. Just a set of free weights in the basement, a whole lot of willpower and every Billy Blanks TaeBo tape ever made. Laura is one trim, transformed Texan. And she wants you to know that if she can do it, anyone can.

After years of struggling with the bathroom scale, Laura can still remember the moment when everything changed – the day she finally felt thin. It happened at the Gap when she was trying on a pair of jeans. "I was screaming in the dressing room: 'Ahh! I'm a size eight! I'm a size eight!'" Looking back, she dissolves into gales of laughter. It's a memory she says she will cherish forever. But make no mis-

take, it was a long, hard road from there to here.

A self-described "emotional eater," not only did Laura struggle with her weight, she struggled with herself too. "I ate if I was happy. I ate if I was sad. I ate if I was lonely. I ate instead of dealing with life," she says. Trips to Wendy's at 3:00 a.m. became part of her daily routine. Milkshakes, hamburgers, cookies and ice cream – she loved them all. Her idea of a "vegetable," she admits, was a baked potato smothered in sour cream and bacon. At her peak, Laura weighed 235 pounds. Her dress size, 22.

The turning point came three years ago. Laura was living on the outskirts of Dallas with her then-boyfriend. She had a full-time job, but he was unemployed. Making ends meet was hard – much harder than Laura had imagined it would be. She couldn't afford to pay the rent, much less pay for a gym membership. Things went from bad to worse when her car was repossessed. But years later, she sees it as a blessing in disguise. With no wheels, she had no choice but to walk five miles to the local bus stop every morning, and five miles home again at night. To her amazement, the pounds began to peel off. She felt healthier than ever before. She quit smoking and quit looking at the world in a negative light. "I got really determined," she says. "I decided I could do anything. I just had to ask myself what I was going to do to get there."

Step one? Research. Laura threw herself into it with all the enthusiasm she could muster. She pored over magazines like *Oxygen*, learning all she could about nutrition and fitness. When

it came to developing a workout routine, the articles on free weights caught her attention right away. "I said to myself, 'I can do these things too. I'm going to try them.'" Next, she incorporated kickboxing into her schedule. Even though she'd never taken a class in her life, Laura was secretly fascinated with martial arts. She borrowed her first TaeBo tape from a friend, and the rest is history.

past now. Supportive friends have given her a steady supply of encouragement, and just about everyone who knows her, marvels at her stunning achievement. "People say, 'I can't believe that was you!' I used to show them my driver's license – the one with the old picture on it – and they would say 'No! No! That's a totally different person!' I got so much flak over it that I



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Not surprisingly, Laura decided to take her transformation to a whole new level. A few months later, she became a vegetarian. Now a huge fan of soy products, she preaches the gospel of good health to anyone who will listen. "I dove into this, and I haven't looked back," she says. "Nutrition is my passion." But that passion has come with a price. Many of Laura's friends – overweight themselves – turned their backs on her once she became thin. "I guess when you find your own willpower, people get angry because they can't find theirs. It really upset me. It was really hard." Fortunately, she says, all that is in the

finally got a new picture!"

While her friends focus on her new figure, Laura is focusing on the future. Now that she's achieved this goal, there are plenty of others waiting in the wings. She might head back to school to get a degree in nutrition and she's toying with the idea of becoming a dermatologist. She has so many goals right now, but they all have one thing in common: Whatever she does, Laura wants to help other people. ❧

Has your body undergone a dramatic transformation? Send us your photos and story at mystory@oxygenmag.com, or by mail to Work in Progress c/o Oxygen, 5775 McLaughlin Rd., Mississauga, ON, L5R 3P7.

HOW LAURA STAYS FIT

WORKOUT

Laura works out 5 days on, 2 days off, alternating weights and cardio.

DAY 1: Back, biceps

DAY 2: 1 hour TaeBo

DAY 3: Chest, triceps, delts

DAY 4: 1 hour TaeBo

DAY 5: Legs, abs

DIET

BREAKFAST: 1 cup yogurt, 1 banana, 2 tbsp flax

SNACK: 1 oz raw mixed nuts, grapes

LUNCH: 1 Ezekiel pita, ¼ cup hummus, ¼ cup tabouli

SNACK: 1 cup strawberries

DINNER: 3 oz salmon, salad

*Laura also drinks 1 gallon of water each day.