

By Chris Steinbach
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TWIN FALLS – A picture told the story.

Many readers have stopped to offer encouragement or congratulations for the weight I've lost since I began meeting in May with Jill Sherman Skeem and writing columns for the *Times-News* about the experience. I've tried to thank everyone for their comments while downplaying their praise. After all, I know what I look like in the shower.

I wrote the previous sentence knowing Skeem didn't like it when I cracked a similar joke during our last meeting. Skeem, a certified macrobiotic health counselor in Twin Falls and graduate of the Strengthening Health Institute in Philadelphia, responded by grabbing her Polaroid camera and shooting a full-length photo. It made it easier for me to see my progress.

My goal in May was to follow her advice the best I could and write about it for the *Times-News*. The worst thing that could happen, I reasoned, would be failing at yet another attempt to lose some weight – something that has happened many times over the past 20 years -- and sharing the experience with all of you.

This time, however, I have lost weight – about 30 pounds. And that's not all that has happened. Other changes include:

- Wearing now-baggy jeans that I couldn't get into three or four months ago because they were too small.
- Fitting into old jackets, shirts and other work clothes I had stuck way back in the closet.
- Buying some new shirts that are two inches smaller around the neck than the last new shirts I bought.
- Having to punch new holes in my belts.
- Increasing the amount of time I exercise to at least nine to 10 hours per week.

And the pictures don't lie. I have lost weight and I feel better. To me, however, the results have not been as dramatic as those you might see on a reality TV show. And they have not been achieved as quickly as what you see happen on TV. But I am pleased with the results so far, and am optimistic about the future. I've learned you can lose weight by exercising a little more and paying more attention to what and how you eat, but that doesn't mean you have to work out eight hours per day or buy some kind of expensive "diet" food. Perhaps one of the best things to happen as a result of this series of columns, which is ending with this installment, is that it has given others reason to believe they can achieve the same results.

Much is different about my eating habits and lifestyle. I began to notice the changes a few weeks into this project while having lunch with Virginia Hutchins, the *Times-News* features editor and a VERY deliberate eater. In the past, when I joined Virginia for lunch, I would wait for what seemed like hours while she finished eating. On this particular day, however, she waited for me. At about the same time, I ate a cheeseburger, which I haven't done again because it made me sick. Just last week, on my way to a lunch meeting where I thought pizza would be served, I stopped at Subway and bought a Veggie Delite sandwich. And at some point during this experience, I realized I couldn't

remember the last time I had choked during a meal – something that happened often in the past because I ate so fast. My wife no longer tells me to eat slower.

Still, I'm not yet out of the woods. Earlier this year, when I last had blood drawn, my glucose level was well within the normal range and my cholesterol was low. But my high-density lipoprotein, or HDL, cholesterol was too low. And that's bad because a high level of HDL, known as the "good" cholesterol, is thought to protect against heart attack. And my blood pressure has also been a bit high.

I've been told the best thing I can do to increase my HDL and lower my blood pressure is to lose weight – and then maintain a healthy weight – and be physically active for at least 30 to 60 minutes a day on most or all days of the week . So today, and in the days to come, I will be at the gym or walking on one of the trails in Twin Falls, eating real food – including lots of vegetables and whole grains – and living healthier than I often have in the past. Maybe this project will have inspired some of you to do the same if you haven't already started.

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