

body image

size 34 is it worth the agony?

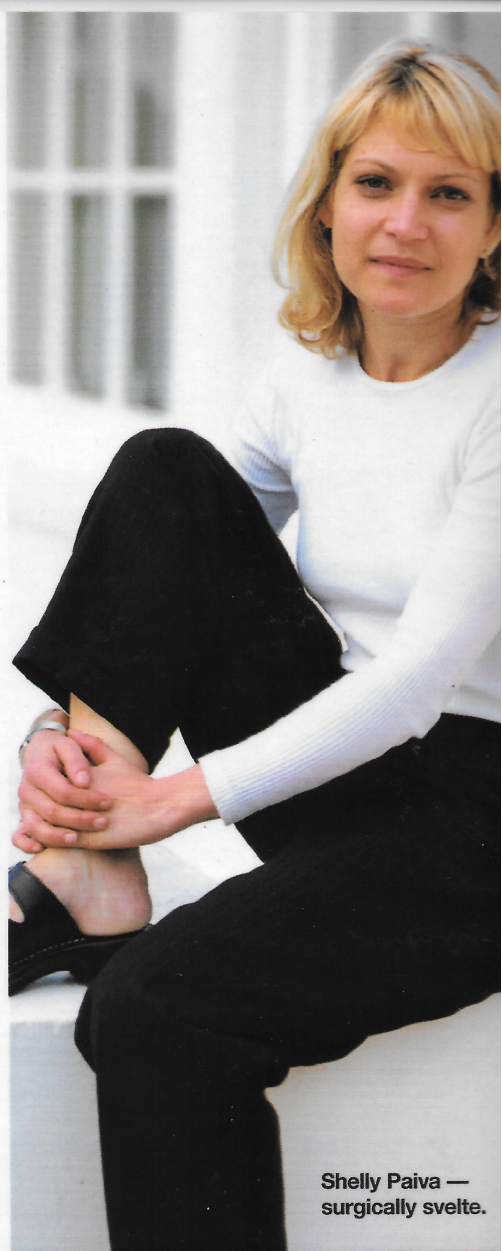
Maintaining the perfect size 34 is not an easy task for most of us. Four women share their slimming secrets. By Jo Lennox. Photographs: Kim Ludbrook.



naturally thin
An Wentzel,
**30, journalist/
presenter**

"I've been the same weight since I was 16, and have never found it difficult to stay in shape. I am lucky as I take after my father who has a naturally muscular build — you could say it is in my genes. My mother is the typical pear shape and my sister takes after her.

"I eat a lot throughout the day. I start with a big breakfast and about an hour later I snack on a sandwich or a doughnut. When eating out, my order usually consists of a big meal like pasta, chips and a small salad, with all the extras, like sauces on the side. To satisfy my sweet tooth, I always select something from the dessert menu and I have a weakness for anything with loads of cherries on top. Indonesian beef curry and Thai food are my favourites, not to mention my mother's chicken breyani. I have never followed a diet to lose weight.



**Shelly Paiva —
surgically svelte.**



**An Wentzel —
natural light.**



Maureen Green
gym trim.



body image



Michelle Grobler —
dedicated to diets.

body image

"I've tried eating nothing but fruit and vegetables for weeks on end, and have gone so far as using laxatives. I've even thought that it would be worth being bulimic or anorexic."

"At school, I was very athletic. I ran cross-country, and also swam every day for about two years, so I tried to eat a lot of meat. My dad is very physical, and he encouraged me to eat plenty of high-calorie meals in order to build up my stamina and energy. I guess that set the ball rolling.

"People are often surprised when they look at my full plate. When I was dating, my partners used to remark on my passion for food. My husband thinks I can really put it away, but I believe he enjoys watching me eat. I've read somewhere that eating is a sexual thing, and that a person's eating habits will reveal his or her manner in bed. So he's not complaining.

"My friends often jokingly refer to me as 'Miss Piggy' when I stack my second plate with food. Are they jealous? I don't think so, although I suppose they wouldn't mind being able to eat as much as I do and still remain thin. I certainly don't feel guilty or that I need to explain myself to others. There are enough other things in life to feel guilty about.

"In the work environment, I've learnt that people equate size with power, and I've found that I sometimes have to be verbally intimidating in order to be taken seriously. People who know me, however, know not to judge me by my size.

"Now that I've reached 30, I can feel my mind, rather than my body, starting to change. I've realised that I need to be more health-conscious, and have stopped smoking and am trying to drink more water. Last month I joined a gym, because I plan to have a baby soon and I want to be in perfect health.

"People who go to extremes trying to become or stay thin are usually unhappy with who they are. Society and the media are also at fault; they often paint an unrealistic picture of the perfect body.

"I think it's easier for some people to control their bodies than to deal with their real fears. It might be easy for me to say, but I believe that as long as you're healthy and have learnt to love yourself, you will be fine. It is also important to set realistic goals, and to realise that very few people have the perfect body."



mad dieter
Michelle
Grobler, 31,
sales executive

"I became conscious of my figure at the age of about 16, when friends and family pointed out that I was gaining weight and suggested that I go on a diet. I started watching my figure, and my parents praised me whenever I lost weight. Being quite insecure, I needed their affection. When I look back now, I realise what a significant role the comments of loved ones can play in shaping a child's self-perception; I go out of my way to make sure that my kids don't become as obsessed with their weight as I did.

"Over the years, I've tried everything to shed my unwanted kilograms: diet pills, milkshakes, starvation, injections, appetite suppressants — literally anything promising weight loss and the perfect body. I've tried eating nothing but fruit and vegetables for weeks on end, and have gone so far as using laxatives, and taking vitamins as a food replacement. But I never stick to a particular method for very long. I'm always on the lookout for new ways to lose weight and I read extensively on the subject — I once imported a diet book, and am among the first to buy any magazine featuring an article on weight loss. I've even thought that it would be worth being bulimic or anorexic, just to be thin.

"I always start a new diet on a Monday and, prior to commencing, spend a few days preparing myself mentally and physically for the process. My level of willpower varies; it usually starts out strong and then weakens, often lasting no more than two days, by which time I've usually cheated a couple of times. I try to avoid one of my biggest enemies, the scale; instead, I regularly put on a particular evening dress to check whether I've gained weight. Being a perfectionist, I've come to realise that I will be on a diet for the rest of my life. My cupboards and fridge are

always stocked with diet food, fruit and water.

"My weight used to fluctuate considerably and I'd jump from being one size to another, but for the last four years it's been fairly constant, give or take a few kilograms. However, about 80 percent of the time I don't eat properly. I have a stressful job and sometimes go through a whole day without eating anything, but then I'll binge when I get home. I don't think my dieting has had any serious effects on my health, although I do feel tired when I'm not eating properly. I would like to quit smoking, but I'm worried that I'll pick up weight and I also believe smoking speeds up my metabolism — I'd rather die young and thin than old and fat. I hate exercise, but try to force myself to go to the gym when I have time.

"My obsession controls my life. I'm constantly thinking about my appearance and I feel insecure when I'm not dieting. When I do eat a lot I beat myself up about it. It's exhausting. I'm also very conscious of people looking at me and often feel that I'm surrounded by thin people. I've received treatment for depression and, yes, my mood does depend on my weight. Some days I feel huge and will refuse to go anywhere. I have an ideal picture in my head of how I need to look and I will always strive for a better figure. I'm determined to undergo plastic surgery as soon as I can save enough money. Maybe then I'll finally be happy with the way I look."



exercise
junkie
Maureen
Green, 45,
gym instructor

"I was a chubby child — partly due to the fact that I wasn't interested in sport and was fairly inactive. I tried ballet when I was about 13-years-old, but because of my plump figure I felt embarrassed, so I quit. I finally developed an interest in exercise at about the same time that aerobics and Jane Fonda mania hit South Africa. I've never looked back.

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"I had my upper thighs, inner thighs and knees done a while ago and, with the fat, I got rid of my insecurities about my body."

"Exercise not only benefits my body, it is essential for my peace of mind. Whenever I feel sluggish and depressed I exercise, because I know that I'll feel a lot better afterwards.

"I've found that exercise has evolved over the years and there have been a number of passing trends. But the same techniques I practised 18 years ago are making a comeback; although the techniques are a bit more refined. Today, I give body toning and stretching classes five days a week at a gym, and I also instruct clients privately at home. I've been doing this for 18 years. Running for 40 to 50 minutes is also part of my weekly routine and I cycle from time to time. In addition, I do stretching and weight-bearing exercises to prevent osteoporosis. I would like to improve my posture, and am currently studying an exercise technique which improves alignment. A perfect posture goes a long way in disguising an imperfect body.

"If I'm forced to slow down or stop my daily routine for a while, I've found that I don't pick up weight, but I do lose tone and firmness and I know I need to get out there and exercise again. I consider myself lucky that I've never sustained any serious injuries, and have therefore never had to stop exercising for an extended period. This has a lot to do with the fact that I know my limitations and don't push my body unnecessarily. I also believe in a good warm-up and in stretching exercises after a workout.

"I don't really have to watch what I eat because I don't have a big appetite — I suppose my strict exercise routine has something to do with this. Since developing an interest in exercise I have been very health-conscious. Although I still enjoy eating sweets and chocolates, I don't eat fast foods and I try to include a lot of fruits and salad in my diet and cut out fat. Although I encourage people to drink lots of water, I'm ashamed to admit that I don't drink a lot myself.

"I don't always enjoy doing exercise, but I'm very disciplined and I push myself through stages of laziness. I know that, even if I don't enjoy it at the time, I'll feel great afterwards. A lot of people enjoy the control that exercise gives you over your body. For me, exercise is a way of relaxing both body and mind. It relieves a lot of tension.

"The best way to get into exercising is to

find something that you enjoy. Exercise will then become a part of your life and your daily routine. If you use the excuse that you don't have time for exercise, you haven't found something that you truly enjoy and that fits in with your lifestyle, rather than controlling it. There are so many options available and people should do something that feels good to them, rather than slotting into a particular exercise trend.

"At my age I don't feel insecure about my body any more. I'm extremely satisfied with the effect that my healthy lifestyle has had on my overall fitness and appearance. I feel great. I want to avoid the stiffness that accompanies getting older, and exercise helps to keep my body flexible. I will never give up my exercise routine and I highly recommend this route to a fit and healthy body."



cosmetic surgery
Shelly Paiva,
31, hairdresser

"I had my upper thighs, inner thighs and knees done a while ago and, with the fat, I got rid of my insecurities about my body.

"I was never a slim child, and my round bottom was often a source of great embarrassment to me. I have three sisters and we were all constantly on diet, but I was the only one with thunder thighs. I tried everything to get rid of them, but dieting and exercise only highlighted my problem — I have a slim upper body, and when I lost weight I looked anorexic from the waist up, but my thighs just wouldn't disappear. Exercise made my body firmer, but it also made me appear bigger, making me even more unhappy. People weren't always aware of my problem because I disguised it well, but when they saw me on the beach they'd ask if I'd put on weight, which only made matters worse.

"I was about to go on holiday to Greece when I realised that I'd be walking around in a costume and sarong most of the time. I'd saved up a bit of money for the trip and it

occurred to me that the money would be far better spent on plastic surgery — Greece would always be there, but my youth was fading quickly.

"Once my mind was made up, it couldn't have been easier. As a hairdresser, I see people every day who talk about their new and surgically improved looks, so it wasn't difficult to get references — we have some of the best surgeons in the world, who are up to date on modern methods and constantly developing their skills in the field. I decided on a surgeon and made a booking. The procedure itself was unbelievably quick. I was given a local anaesthetic, and I experienced no pain during, or even after, the operation. The whole thing took about one and a half hours, after which I walked out with tiny plasters on my thighs. I had taken a week off work, thinking that it would take a while to recover, but I didn't need it. I felt fine.

"At first I thought that the doctor hadn't taken enough off, and I was devastated. But I realised that it takes a bit of time for the swelling to go down, and about six months for the body to adjust. I have a few scars on my legs, but they don't bother me. I don't wear shorts, and I just wanted to be nicely shaped and to look good in jeans. When the results became apparent, I felt far more confident about my looks — perhaps a bit too confident, because I started to gain weight shortly after the procedure. Now I take better care of my body and I watch what I eat to stay in shape.

"I still don't parade around on the beach, but for the first time in my life I don't wear a jersey around my waist and my self-confidence has improved a lot. I would recommend plastic surgery to anyone who feels unhappy with his or her body. If I could afford it on a hairdresser's salary, while raising a son, anyone who really wants to can have it done. All in all, it cost me about R4 500, and the surgeon gave me two months to pay, while I could pay off the hospital bill on my credit card.

"I come into contact with many people who have had cosmetic surgery, and in most cases it has changed their lives. They seem more energetic and inspired, and it gives them a whole new outlook on life. I haven't regretted it for a moment, and, yes, I would like to go back and have other things done."