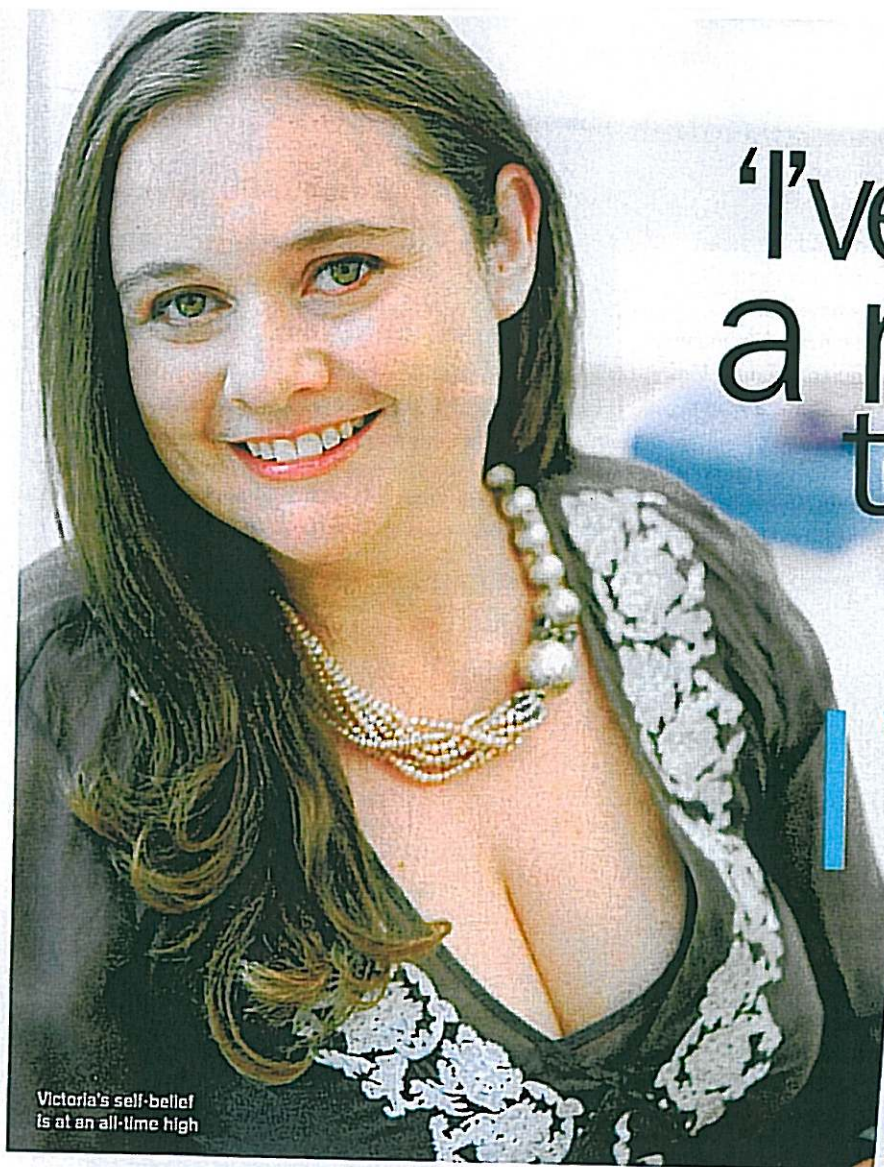


# 'I've started a new life to get the BODY I WANT'



Victoria's self-belief is at an all-time high

Can't lose weight, no matter what? Neither could Victoria Wills, 32, until she found a surprising answer

**L**osing weight should be the simplest thing on earth, right? Cut calories, exercise more and the weight drops off... But anyone who's ever been on a diet knows it's not that simple.

"You name it, I've tried it – everything from Atkins to Weight Watchers, to a faddy diet where I had to eat a tiny piece of food every six minutes. But all any of them did was make me miserable rather than thin. It wasn't until three years ago, after nearly two decades of trying, that I finally found the secret to getting the body I want.

"Losing weight has never been easy for me. From the moment I hit puberty at 11, the pounds piled on. As I grew up, my weight yo-yoed and, at 5ft 4in, I'd weigh anything from 12st to 16st. I'd diet hard and take the weight off, only for it to creep back on. It was frustrating and so unfair. I didn't have the healthiest diet, but didn't think I was eating enough to be so overweight.

"When I was 19, I was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), which I later found out can affect metabolism and

blood-sugar levels. All this made it even harder for me to shift the pounds. But there was an upside – I worked twice as hard to prove myself because I hated that a lot of people see fatness as a symptom of being lazy. After I graduated, I threw myself into my career, eventually becoming a management consultant; I had a great bunch of friends and bought a lovely flat in Pimlico, central London. But I still felt insecure underneath it all. I never went clothes shopping, as it was just too depressing, and I secretly

**'I FELT INSECURE UNDERNEATH IT ALL. MEN WANTED TO 'FIX' ME – MY CONFIDENCE AND BODY – BUT I KNEW ONLY I COULD DO THAT'**

worried that one day I'd get wedged into my seat on the tube. It also affected my relationships – part of me was always guarded, never opening up, and I refused to strip in front of boyfriends with the lights on. Men usually wanted to 'fix' me – my



confidence and my body – but even back then I knew only I could do that.

"Then, in another attempt to shed the pounds, I bought a Paul McKenna weight-loss CD. To me, it was just another thing to try and I had no expectations. So

I was amazed when I

fell into a state of hypnosis almost instantly. By then I'd hit 20st, so the thought that hypnosis might work was really exciting.

"I've always been the type of person to make a decision and go for it – why sit around thinking about doing something when you could be doing it? So I made a decision. I wanted to take control of my health and confidence, and was prepared to take time out from my career – I quit my job and used my savings to enrol on a four-

week weight-loss course in Canada (there weren't any boot camps in the UK then), followed by a two-month holistic-therapy course in Hawaii, which included hypnosis. The courses were amazing and my self-esteem

went right up. Through self-hypnotherapy – putting myself into a deep state of relaxation – I felt happier in my own skin, and in just three months, my attitude to food had completely changed. Although I knew dieting would always be difficult, >



I no longer saw food as a comfort to turn to. The combination of boot-camp discipline in Canada and a psychological approach really worked. By the time I got back home, I was 2st lighter. I searched for something similar so I could keep losing weight, but there wasn't anything like it. That's when the idea hit me – maybe I could start a retreat myself? And what better way to keep on track than to actually live on a boot camp?

"While I was busy plotting my next move, I met Frank Russell, 33, who ran a club in London. We met on a night out and clicked, so we started dating. I'd been guarded in past relationships, but it felt natural to tell him about my dreams. He loved the boot-camp idea and offered to help me find a place to set it up in. Within three months, we'd found a perfect 11-bedroom mansion in Ilfracombe, Devon. I soon found investors to help me afford the rent.

"After that I didn't look back, despite the risks I was taking. Yes, I was leaving my old life and a successful career to move halfway across the country, but this was my dream

and I had to go for it. Although Frank and I had only been together for six months, he agreed to come too.

"Over the next eight months, we overhauled the mansion, making the rooms as comfy as possible – this wasn't to be one of those hardcore wilderness camps. I recruited fitness instructors and weight-loss experts, and prepared to teach the hypnotherapy classes myself. Then, on 4 January, my 'boutique boot camp', NuBeginnings, opened.

"Since then, I've immersed myself in the lifestyle: I eat what the guests eat and do the exercises with them. Some people are surprised to see someone of my size talking about weight loss, but I just say, 'Who better?' I've been through it all myself.

"Over the past seven months I've lost 6st. I'm now 14st and expect to reach my target of 10st 6lbs in six months. I'm losing a steady 2lbs a week, so I should make it. Frank and I are already planning a



shopping trip to New York to celebrate. And even though I haven't yet reached my goal, I feel more confident than ever.

"Everyone who comes through our doors has a story of their own. Like me, they're willing to make sacrifices to be the best they can be, and I'm proud to be able to help. We have a huge hill outside the retreat and guests often say the last thing they feel like doing is climbing it. I understand that, but I'm here to tell them it doesn't matter if they don't want to do it – as long as they eventually make it to the top."

## DOES THE BOOT CAMP WORK?

**Cosmo's Elle Iannaccone tests a three-day 'boutique boot camp'...**

**The problem:** "My hectic life! Trying to juggle work, friends, family and copious amounts of unsuitable dates has left me exhausted! I need a detox and some serious me-time – and if I can lose a few pounds too, that's a bonus."  
**The programme:** "I was warmly greeted by Victoria and a fitness instructor, who said I'd be given an assessment and weigh-in to work out my body fat. It sounded horrific, but I found it strangely motivating – even though the daily routine [right] seemed daunting. On the plus side, the mansion house that was to be my home was stunning!

"One of the hardest things at first was the food – as you'd expect from a boot camp, it was perfectly calorie counted and worked out to provide exactly the right amount of nutrition, but the portions were much smaller than I was used to. When you've been on a long hike and find yourself staring at a snack of prawns and lentils, it can be quite



depressing – even though the food at the mansion was beautifully presented and looked like something you'd find in Gordon Ramsay's kitchen! But after the third day, my body got used to the smaller portions, and I felt more energetic

and positive. I soon realised that was actually all my body needed.

"The hypnotherapy was an eye-opener. Victoria put me in a trance – I felt half-asleep while I was answering her questions – and took me back to some of my past experiences. She made me understand a few things about my childhood, and how it had affected my views on food, men and my behaviour towards them (see earlier reference to unsuitable dates!). I felt I'd always known this at the back of my mind, but hypnotherapy spelt it out.

"As I came to the end of my stay, I felt an amazing sense of energy, motivation and achievement. Victoria was a total inspiration and I was very sad to leave."  
**The verdict:** "I'd love to spend two weeks there – especially when I felt this good after three days! Go with an open

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A BOOT CAMPER

- 8am: Yoga
- 9am: Breakfast (a vegetable frittata)
- 9.30am: Gym session with fitness instructor
- 11.00: Snack (an apple)
- 11.15: Talk on 'mindful eating' and acupressure
- 1pm: Lunch: (salade Niçoise with fresh organic tuna steak)
- 2pm: Hiking with Shetland ponies and llamas (leading an animal takes your mind off the fact you're exercising)
- 4pm: Snack food (vegetable sticks and houmous)
- 4.30pm: Hot-stone massage or hypnotherapy
- 6.30pm: Dinner (curried monkfish, cockles and mussels with spinach and crushed new potatoes)
- 8.30pm: Pilates
- 10pm: Sinking into bed exhausted!

mind and you'll get positive results. It's expensive [a one-week stay starts at £1,695], but I felt I'd made an investment in myself – and lost 4lbs. What more could you want from a boot-camp break?"  
• For more information, visit [www.nubeginnings.co.uk](http://www.nubeginnings.co.uk) ©