

TOO FAT for life

Weighing 185kg, Rodney had given himself a death sentence

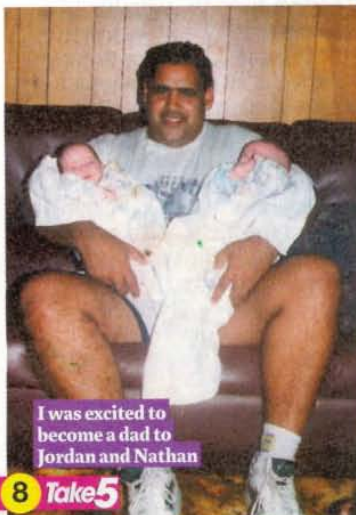
Piling Weetbix into a bowl, I poured over the milk and tucked in.

I was about to set off for the building site where I worked as a rigger.

My job was gruelling, so I knew I'd burn my big breakfast off. I'd always been big. At 1.9m tall, I weighed 145kg and played footy for my home club, La Perouse United F.C., in Sydney so that kept me fit.

It was August 1994, I was 23 and lived with my girlfriend. Just as I was about to leave for work that day she announced she was pregnant.

"I can't believe it!" I said, grinning. On March 3, 1995, we were thrilled when our twins, a son Nathan and daughter Jordan, were born. But when the twins were a few months old, we split.



I was excited to become a dad to Jordan and Nathan

I was devastated and relations were so strained with my ex, I was rarely able to see the twins.

I became depressed and turned to food for comfort. Soon, I didn't feel full unless I was wolfing a loaf of bread for brekkie, hamburgers and chips for lunch, and a few pizzas for dinner.

Most evenings, I'd head to the pub with my mates.

I could easily down 25 beers a night.

I tried every diet going.

Sometimes, I'd lose 20kg, but then I couldn't resist the lure of booze or junk food. I'd pile the kilos back on.

By the time I turned 30 I weighed 170kg. All my clothes came from specialist shops and I was forcing my bulk into 7XL size T-shirts.

Then I started getting agonising headaches and felt constantly thirsty and exhausted.

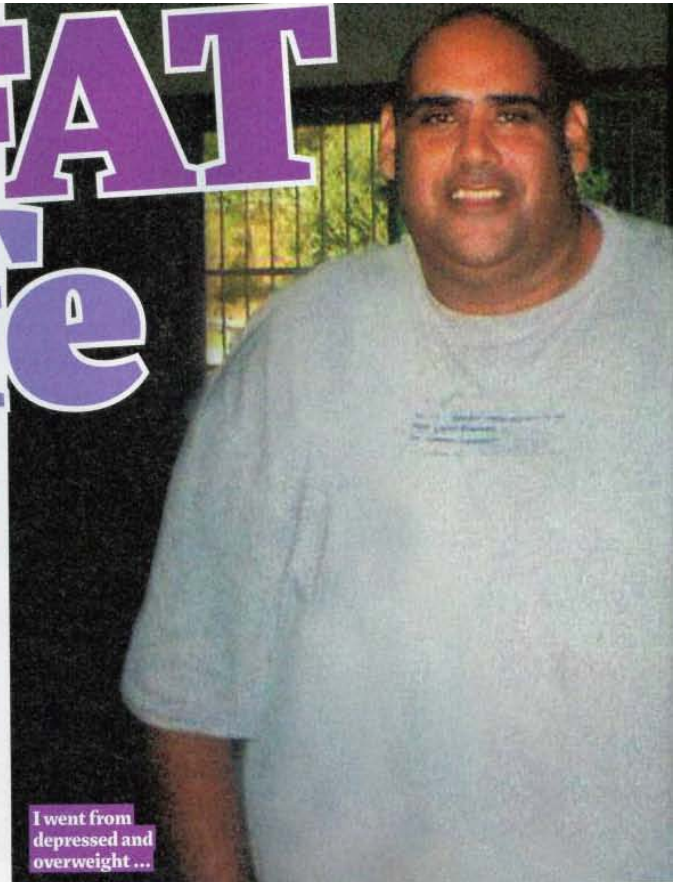
Whenever I popped home to visit my parents, I could tell my dad, Kevin, and mum, Sandra, 53, were worried. "Take it easy, you don't want to end up like me," Dad said, patting his enormous belly.

Dad weighed 130kg and had already had two heart attacks and a triple heart bypass operation.

"I'm fine," I grumbled.

Yet the truth was I was barely able to struggle up a flight of stairs.

Mum begged me to see our GP and finally, in



I went from depressed and overweight ...

December 2001, I made an appointment. After blood tests the doctor confirmed my worst fears.

"You've got type 2 diabetes," he said, gravely.

"How can I get better?" I asked, horrified.

"Lose weight," he said. "You're putting your life in a lot of danger."

His words stung. I'd never felt more ashamed - I'd

I didn't feel full unless I was wolfing a loaf of bread for brekkie

given myself this disease after years of gorging.

"Try to lose weight. We'll support you," Mum begged when I told her.

"Okay," I agreed. But back home, I turned to my old friend, food.

Stuck in a cycle of bingeing, over the next three years I hit 185kg.

One night, I went to the

pub and the bar stool collapsed beneath my bulk. My mates helped me up as everyone cheered.

I laughed it off, but inside, I was mortified.

"I'm fat and ugly," I said to my work pal Geoff.

"You're the life and soul of the party," he told me. "But the lads at work are worried about your health."

Lately, I could barely do the manual labour I needed to at work and had to drive the crane instead.

I confided in my buddy Greg, too.

"Sometimes I can't even face getting out of bed," I told him.

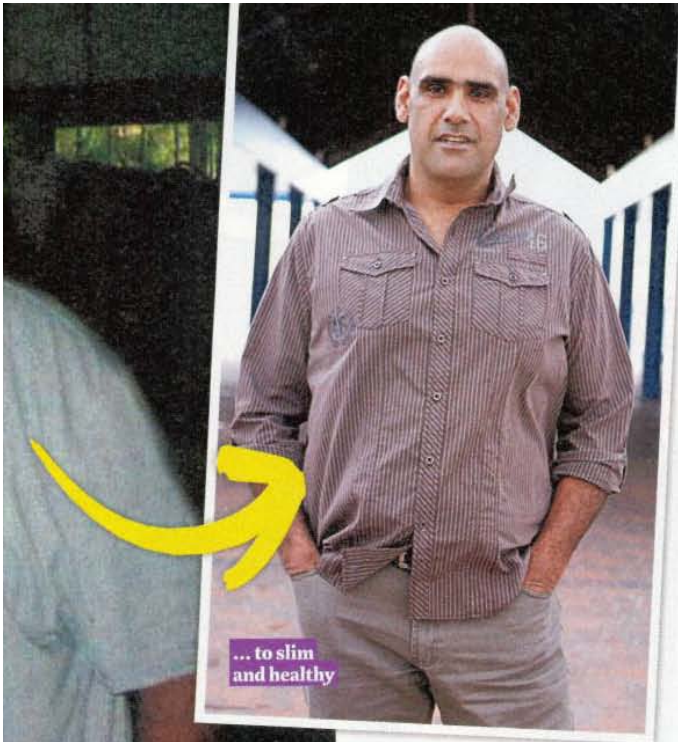
"You could join the gym," he suggested. "Or I'll come for a walk with you."

But I refused. "I get out of breath just walking to the shops," I admitted.

One night, on August 9, 2003, I was in the pub when my uncle Bruce called.

"Your dad's had another heart attack," he wept.

When I arrived at the hospital, I took one look



... to slim and healthy

Surgeons make a small hole in the tummy, and then insert a silicone band through it to fit around the stomach.

Tightening the band allows doctors to control the patient's appetite.

Some patients who'd had the operation had shed two thirds of their body weight.

I begged my doctor to refer me for surgery.

A specialist said I would be the perfect candidate. But he explained that it would cost \$10,000.

at Mum's face and grief hit me full-force.

"He's gone," she said. I burst into tears. Dad had suffered a massive heart attack and had died.

He was only 55. At that moment, Dad's words echoed in my head. "You'll end up like me."

My mates rallied round. Geoff and Greg persuaded me to meet up with them for dinner. But I stopped wanting to go out.

Two years on, feeling desperate, I went to the doctor again.

"What are my chances?" I asked. "If you carry on like this, you'll die early," he said.

Returning home, I cried helplessly. Soon after, I saw a TV documentary about a new procedure called laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding.

"I'll never afford it," I said. I poured my heart out to Geoff.

"I'll lend you some money," he offered. "I want to see you get your life back together."

Floored by his generosity, I was speechless as Geoff offered to lend me \$5000.

"I can't thank you enough," I whispered, tears in my eyes.

Then Greg offered to help out too, lending me the rest of the money.

It felt as if I'd been given a second chance.

In August 2008, I had the operation at Sydney Private Hospital in Ashfield.

My stomach was reduced to the size of a ping-pong ball and I woke up feeling weak and sore.

For two weeks, I could only eat soup and water. Then, I could only eat small bowls of pasta and rice.

But stepping on the scales, I'd dropped 20kg within the first month.

I was amazed and started walking around the block. Three months later, I was walking for an hour.

"Come to the gym with me," suggested another pal, Nathan.

This time I agreed. Lifting weights and

jogging every day, I dropped to 112kg in six months.

"All the girls will be after you, mate!" Nathan joked.

He encouraged me to enter Sydney's City to Surf - a 14km walk/run.

On August 9, 2009, the six-year anniversary of Dad's death, I set off on the run in Sydney's CBD.

I really pushed myself and, reaching the finishing line at Bondi Beach, I couldn't stop the tears from flowing.

"This is for you, Dad," I said, proudly.

Soon after, I met up with an old friend, Alicia, 32.

"You look fantastic," she marvelled.

I had started to go out more since losing the weight and it felt great to be getting attention from girls again - it really boosted my confidence.

Now, I've maintained my weight and have made contact with my kids again.

Nathan and Jordan are 15 and I love taking them to Sydney's Luna Park and the movies. I'm back at work too, and I've paid my generous mates back.

Thanks to them, my body no longer holds me back.

**Rodney Ardler, 39,
La Perouse, NSW.**



With Nathan's help I completed the City to Surf



Greg (left) and Geoff were really supportive of me

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