



Interview with Ben Andrew: Young Rotarian disposes 65kg of excess 'waste in the waist'

Linda Le, April 2011

It is a great pleasure to share with you the remarkable journey of a young Rotarian from WA's South West who has put in his heart and soul to shed blood, sweat and tears for the mission of **getting his BMI from a life threatening 53.9 to a healthy range of 25 and under**. This interview was taken after 6 months, after Ben has lost 39kg (however 18 months on Ben has maintained a 65kg weight loss and lifestyle change).



Ben, you have achieved enormous success in the 'Waist' Disposal Challenge. When did your journey begin?

Mid September 2009

What prompted you to change your life?

There wasn't just one thing, I had been concerned about my weight for some time. I found there were activities I was unable to participate in and the obvious long term health risk. Also my weight was directly contributing to my long term bachelor lifestyle which I wanted to change. A month beforehand I had a phone call from the Mother of a close friend of mine from High School informing me that my friend had passed away from swine flu. This news hit me pretty hard. I was building my first house at the time and I decided that things needed to change and for the first time in a while I had the want to change, the desire to change, and the need to change. My Rotary Club started their 'Waist' Disposal Challenge (WDC) and it was the perfect time for me to start changing my lifestyle. I wasn't comfortable with getting on the scales at the club to begin with so I started by myself at home.

How much weight have you lost and from what time frame?

I lost 39kgs over a period 6 months and for the past 4 months I have been in a maintenance mode over the winter period to allow myself to catch my breath.

How did you do it?

Being a Security Officer who works odd hours, I had to take on a complete change of lifestyle. The first part is the diet, there is no point changing my eating habits unless I understand how my body works, even a basic understanding of how much energy my body consumes per day, my BMR (basal metabolic rate). There are plenty of web tools that can calculate this for you once I knew how much energy I needed. I needed to decrease my daily intake of energy (calories) to less than my BMR thus I would start to burn excess energy fat. Next was looking at my foods, I had a high fat, high carb diet - most of my meals were fast food and unhealthy snack foods.

I completely changed my habits and looked at everything I ate. I still ate a lot of things I used to eat but I made my own low calorie versions. Big thing is **NO SNACKING**; I gave up alcohol as I tend to eat when I drink. I was very strict over the 6 months.

“If you don’t have enough time for good health, one day you might not have enough health for a good time”

Exercise was the next part I did nothing special, no gyms, just simply walking 40mins a day every morning when I finished work. I changed clothes and walked from my office through town and back. Doing this before I got home, made sure I didn’t find an excuse to sit in front of the TV. My Rotary club was planning a trip to Kokoda and although I was not going to do the trek, I trained with and supported those members who did and now have started to cycle to work and back which is good for me and the environment!

What role did the WDC play in all of this?

The WDC uses the strong bonds created by members as a major part of encouraging a move to a healthier and better lifestyle. ***"The WDC is well suited for use in any environment where there is good camaraderie between a group of people whether in the work place, community groups, sporting clubs."*** The program helps you understand the basics in nutritional changes, why you may be over weight, and what the healthy ways to lose weight are. You are educated by fellow members/friends and the information is presented in an easy relaxed environment. It’s always fun at weigh-in time to see how every one is going and it makes our ‘fine’ sessions entertaining and a little more profitable.

What drives you to keep moving forward?

I do it for myself, my family and now my Rotary family. I have supported and instructed some close friends and now I feel that I must not fail them or myself. There are activities that I want to take part in and I hope that I can one day do the Kokoda Trek and complete Rotary’s South West Bike Trek.

What is the reaction of others around you like?

Some people didn’t recognise me and the support from family and friends was amazing. Some found inspiration in what I had done to look at their own situation. I had amazing support from my Rotary Club and still to this day they drive me to continue.

Reflecting on your journey, what changes has this made to you as a person?

I have grown more confident in myself and I have become a better public speaker. I am more outgoing, happy to be a part of a wider range of social situations. Not to mention all the extra energy I have these days.

How would you describe yourself before and after this journey?

In some ways I am still the same person. I still enjoy the same pastimes, still work hard; I have my strong commitment to my community and living a life of high ethical standards. The difference is now I have the energy and strength to do these things with a greater commitment.

You mentioned you had a lapse, can you tell us more about it?

Yes, after a personal situation that ended badly, I fell into a bit of a depressed state and lost my way. It is quite amazing how much weight you can put on in a 6 week period. It was a vicious circle, I felt that I was failing those who had supported me, this made me hit a lower point which meant I fell further from the path.

What pushed you to move forward again?

I woke up every day thinking; ***"no more. This will be the day, but the days turned into weeks. Eventually I stepped on the scales and felt so ashamed that I sat down and worked out my battle plan, designed a strict easy to follow eating plan and the main thing was get back to my exercise because exercise helps the release of serotonin - which helps to increase mood."*** Once I got the ball rolling, I was on my way again.

What piece of advice would you give to the readers?

Don't think you have to join a gym or buy expensive meals. Learn about how your body works, learn about the calories in foods and how to calculate this yourself. The WDC has taught me to understand that what goes in your body, if it can't burn it, it stores it. In order to lose weight, you need to consume less than you need so you can burn your fat stores - it is that simple. Obesity is a real problem that affects so many people, there is no quick fix. This is not about hard work for a year then it's all over, it's a life time commitment. Make a commitment to yourself that you can start today. **As I like to say when people asked, how did you lose weight; *"start by putting down the fork."***

What role has Rotary played in being a part of your journey?

I think one of the great attributes of Rotary is that you meet weekly, that you have the ability to evolve and grow friendships easily. One of the core philosophies of Rotary revolves around creating good Fellowship and it is the Fellowship of the individuals and the club as a whole that has helped sustain me through this journey. I am always surprised that in my club especially how many members have formed very close friendships that extend well outside the clubs and I find myself in this situation as well. ***"This all comes back to creating a very solid support network and when you go about a life changing activity, having a support network that extends well over 65 member's help to create a perfect environment to achieve the mindset changes that are needed for a lifestyle change."***

Support isn't just through moral support, Rotary offers a wide range of activities that require some level of fitness and our club participates in a number of these. For example when our members were preparing to do the Kokoda trail we had weekly training sessions hiking through

some local hills, this was a fantastic opportunity for myself to get out to train and support members that were supporting me. There was no way I could have done that 6 months earlier. My public speaking has also improved immensely through more self confidence from an increased happiness about my own personal image.

18 months later...

Now 18 months on, Ben has lost in excess of 65kg of 'waist' and is on his way to reaching and sustaining a healthy BMI range of 25 and under. Ben has recently put his home on the market and is seeking a new career pathway in a management role of a franchise business. Ben plans on taking up a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce in the near future. **OH – and there are a few dates on the way for Ben to fix his Bachelor's lifestyle!**



"I have learnt to my disappointment that society treats and interacts with you very differently when you are normal size, so now it's time to stop working in this dead end job and get a life."

The WDC is a health intervention at the community level to bring about a reduction in Body Mass Index (BMI) and improvements in dietary intake and physical activity. The project has been designed to deliver health benefits at three levels:

Level One consists of three educational presentations about health and wellbeing during Rotary club meetings (including risk factors, overweight, obesity and chronic diseases; nutrition; and physical activity); **Level Two** is a Body Mass Index (BMI) Competition, facilitated by club Champions and a competition between clubs as an incentive (with monthly weigh-ins and a Leaderboard); and **Level Three** consists of a Lifestyle Coaching Program involving tailored weight monitoring and goal setting for Rotarians with a BMI of 26.5 or over, with several telephone coaching sessions.



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