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It's that time of year again when we examine our lives, determined to finally deal with the extra 20 pounds, be a better parent, improve our relationships, or remember what it is we love and start doing it. "New year, new life!" we think. But, what does it really take to turn things around?

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Making your New Year's resolutions? Let Chris Usher's story of transformation inspire you to take the first step in changing your life

Chris Usher is a mother of four who, at age 50, has managed to make those changes as a result of an “aha” moment when she realized that happiness truly is a choice and she had every right to be healthy and happy and live her life accordingly.

This may sound like common sense to some, but like many stay-at-home moms, Usher had created a life that focused on her kids and the issues they faced as they grew, leaving her wondering who she was and where her life was going.

“While raising four children, I had made the mistake that many mothers make of riding the emotional roller coaster with each one of them, which left me emotionally drained,” she says. “I had lived through my children and had lost my sense of self.”

Her relationship with her husband, Bruce, had also suffered over their almost 30 years of marriage, put on the back burner while she dealt with the 24/7 job of parenting her kids through the ups and downs of their teen years.

“My husband and I had become parenting partners,” she shares. “If we had date nights the discussions revolved around what the kids were doing. We had become relative strangers.”

Usher’s first catalyst for change was a ski trip in 2006, which should have been an idyllic family getaway, but she was so out of shape that she was hit hard by the realization that something had to change.

“I was in such lousy shape that skiing was very difficult. I was winded coming down the slopes and would have to stop and rest. My balance was off, and when I rode a chair lift with no ski rests I literally felt like my ligaments were going to rip off of my bones,” she recalls. Add to that a family history of heart disease and the extra 25 pounds she’d gained in her 40s, and Usher knew she had to turn things around.

She began hitting the treadmill at home, walking the dog in the evenings

and doing a simple weight circuit at the gym. The endorphin release during exercise was an unexpected benefit that helped Usher deal with stress and kept her motivated.

As she continued exercising and began to change her eating habits from fast food meals grabbed in-between kids’ activities to natural, whole foods, she began to see the physical change she’d hoped for. “The weight came off slowly, but as I began to see results I began to get more motivated,” she shares. “After a year I had lost 17 pounds, and when I went skiing again I was much stronger, with more stamina. My balance was still a bit off though, so when I got back from that ski trip I decided to start working with a professional trainer to take it up another notch.”

Usher’s trainer, Patrick Thomas of 24-Hour Fitness in Scottsdale, introduced her to free weights and emphasized core exercises to increase overall strength, stamina and balance. Thomas encourages developing a nutrition and exercise plan, saying, “Having a clear vision of your goals is key to staying committed.” He adds, “Take advantage of all your gym has to offer. Seeking professional help and taking free classes is a must for beginners or someone who is stuck in the same routine.”

Thomas also introduced Usher to the benefits of incorporating yoga and Body Pump classes to round out her workouts.

With her physical well-being on the mend, Usher began to focus on her emotional and spiritual needs. She decided to go back to college and finish her degree in business management, starting with just one class. “After my first class, I was so overwhelmed that when I went home that night I cried so hard that the dog howled...he had never howled before,” she confides.

Although she was tempted to give up, friends encouraged her to just write her first paper and see if she could score

a passing grade. The rest is history, and Usher received her B.A. at age 50.

She encourages others to follow their dreams with a plan in place, saying, “Don’t wait until your kids are off to college to get working on those dreams. It is also important to have a plan, as a dream is not a roadmap to success.”

Usher furthered her transformation with the help of a support group for parents of teens and a marriage seminar, both offered by her church. An emphasis on positive affirmations and communication, as well as prayer and meditation, brought her fading marriage back to life and has the Ushers appreciating each other and looking forward to the future. She explains that although many moms might think taking time for themselves is selfish, her new outlook on marriage and family coupled with a healthy lifestyle has benefited the entire family.

“My kids were thrilled—with the turnaround in me, the dynamics of the family started changing. It was amazing,” she declares. “When you focus on your mental, physical and spiritual well-being, you start to become a stronger presence in the lives of those around you.”

Confident about the turnaround in her life, this strong mom is now embarking on a new adventure in her life with modeling, having recently signed with Arizona Model and Actor’s Management.

Looking back on the path she’s taken, she offers this encouragement to other women, “It’s never too late to go back to school, start a new business or get in shape. It is so important to have balance in your life. If you are not happy, some part of your life is usually off-kilter. Mind, body and spirit need to be in balance.”

Although attaining balance in life may seem daunting to some of us, Chris Usher shares the simple philosophy of one of her favorite sayings: “Nothing changes if nothing changes.” Take that first small step—it can truly change your life.



Chris Usher

Mom & Model

Age: 50

Typical Workout Schedule: StairMaster 2-3 times per week, weight training 3 times per week, yoga 2-3 times per week.

Typical Day of Food: Breakfast—Greek yogurt with Kashi Go Lean cereal, ½ banana, blueberries; Morning snack—toast with peanut butter and ½ banana; Lunch—mixed green salad with veggies and chicken, whole wheat roll; Afternoon snack—protein bar and fruit; Dinner—fish, chicken or beef with salad, veggies and whole-wheat pasta, potato or rice; Evening snack—mixed nuts.

Food Weakness: Fresh Fried Potato Chips at Village Tavern and Parmesan Fries at Zinc Bistro.

How She Started: "I made a New Year's resolution to make my workouts a priority. I committed to working out on the weight circuit at my gym 3 times a week and walking on our home treadmill at least 3 times a week on alternate days."

Personal Goals for 2012: Maintain balance in life and improve flexibility with yoga. "I am starting to have those aches and pains which come with age, and yoga does seem to help that." Continue with modeling classes to become proficient as a model. Would also like to take interior design or art classes.

What She Loves About Scottsdale: We moved here from Iowa in 1981 and I really enjoy the mix of people here. I am grateful that my children have had the opportunity to grow up here in Scottsdale as it has given them a wider view of the world. I love it here!