

NATURE'S WEIGH

Spurred on by her post-baby bulge, naturopath Narelle Stegehuis created a personalised weight-loss strategy

Five years ago, Narelle Stegehuis gave birth to more than just her first child. The arrival of baby Anna also delivered a set of challenges the fit and healthy naturopath hadn't bargained on. Burdened by a post-baby bulge that wouldn't budge despite a determined diet and exercise regimen, the new mum embarked on a mission to find out why she and so many of her patients couldn't lose weight. Narelle's research became Mass Attack, a weight-loss plan that is having amazing results.

'I recently calculated that all up it's been some 10,000 hours of work,' the Melbourne-based naturopath says.

'The last eight kilos just wouldn't budge and I knew there had to be a reason for it. The more I delved into it, the more I realised that we've got the whole weight loss thing upside down. We treat the symptom, which is the weight gain, instead of treating the cause, the reason why we are gaining weight.'

Narelle's research highlighted a common thread: hormonal imbalance.

'I really think hormonal imbalances, especially after childbirth, can be a significant factor in women gaining weight and not being able to get it off.'

'In my case it was thyroid dysfunction. I haemorrhaged during Anna's birth and I found out afterwards that can lead to thyroid dysfunction in women.'

'I treated the thyroid with herbs and supplements and noticed that within about two weeks the weight began to come off, and that was the catalyst for me to really pursue this.'

Australians spend millions of dollars on weight-loss programs, but Narelle says these can't work unless the underlying cause of the weight gain

is addressed. For many, a prescription to eat less and exercise more is too simplistic, she adds.

'I believe the main contributing factors to weight gain are diet, exercise, hormonal imbalance – which I think is a major factor – and emotional disorders.'

'Defining why we gain weight is not easy, and for many people the cure is not as easy as heading off to the gym and eating lettuce leaves. That's a dinosaur principle. Weight loss should be personalised. What works for you will not necessarily work for me.'

Narelle's program targets the weight gain's underlying problems, and she encourages her patients to stop dieting.

'Research around the world shows that many people not only regain the weight they lost but actually end up heavier than when they began. Food is crucial to providing our bodies with the nourishment and energy we need

'The cure is not as easy as going to the gym and eating lettuce'

to get through the day – so doesn't starving yourself of nutrients seem irrational?'

Through the web-based Mass Attack questionnaire, Narelle says she can identify the main causes of a patient's weight gain

and can prescribe a personal program to resolve those issues.

'It's tailored to each individual, and that's the key to long-term weight maintenance. It's all about educating people to tune into their own bodies, what works and doesn't work for them.'

'But more than anything I want to instil a sense of hope in everyone that no matter how many diets you've been on, you can lose weight.'

By Sue Smethurst
Pictures: David Mason

● For more information, visit www.massattack.com.au or phone 1300 133 536.

Mandy, Narelle and Joanne attacked their stubborn weight gains.



HAIR AND MAKE-UP: LELA GLENDOZA. CLOTHING: MY SIZE, MAGGIE T. JEWELLERY: REPLOQUE. SHOES: GARY CASTLES



Narelle and daughter Anna.

MANDY'S STORY

▢ Mandy Johns was size 24 and had been on the diet rollercoaster for 20 years. Frustrated by her GP's lack of answers, she turned to Narelle.

'I read Narelle's ad in the local paper and it mentioned two key words: metabolism and weight loss.'

'I thought I knew everything there was to know about diet because I'd done every diet imaginable, but Narelle was able to give me a list of foods that would and wouldn't suit my metabolism, and I finally started getting results,' Mandy says.

After nine months, the busy teacher was enjoying amazing results, even though her scales hadn't moved.

'Don't go by scales alone! Mandy warns. 'My scales told me I hadn't lost any weight, but I'd lost two and a half dress sizes and I could clearly see my body shape was changing.'

Mandy is now a size 14.

'I have so much more confidence and I can keep up with the kids which is great. I don't get sick any more, my energy levels are higher and I fit so much more in my day.'

'I used to be the type of person who would hide at parties when everyone was on the dance floor, now I'm out in the middle and you can't stop me,' Mandy says.



JOANNE'S STORY

▢ With her 40th birthday approaching, Joanne, a size 18, decided to get to the bottom of why she couldn't lose weight.

She asked several doctors for advice but declined the prescription pills they offered as a solution.

'I knew that there had to be a reason why I couldn't take my weight off. Narelle was really my last hope, and straight away she diagnosed that I was having too much caffeine and too much sugar in my diet which was having an adverse affect on my body.'

'It was a real eye opener for me because I thought I was eating reasonably well, but as soon as I began to change my diet the weight began to come off.'

Joanne is now a size 12 and has kept her weight off for two years.

MASS APPEAL

Polycystic ovarian disorder and thyroid problems are two of the most common causes of weight gain in women, according to Narelle.

Polycystic ovarian disorder is an imbalance of the ovarian function that can elevate insulin levels and encourage the body to store fat rather than burn it. Cutting out high-sugar foods, foods with MSG and foods containing caffeine will encourage weight loss.

People suffering thyroid conditions also struggle to burn fat. Thyroid conditions can slow the metabolic rate, which means the body burns up fuel more slowly.

For those hoping to shed a few kilos, avoiding vegies like broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, sprouts and parsnip will help. Instead choose bok choy, capsicum, eggplant, French beans and lettuce, which will encourage weight loss in bodies with thyroid conditions.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▢ One in four Australian women suffer from ovarian disorders, which are a major contributor to weight gain.
- ▢ Irregular periods are also linked to weight loss and weight gain.
- ▢ The years surrounding the onset of menopause are associated with weight gain.