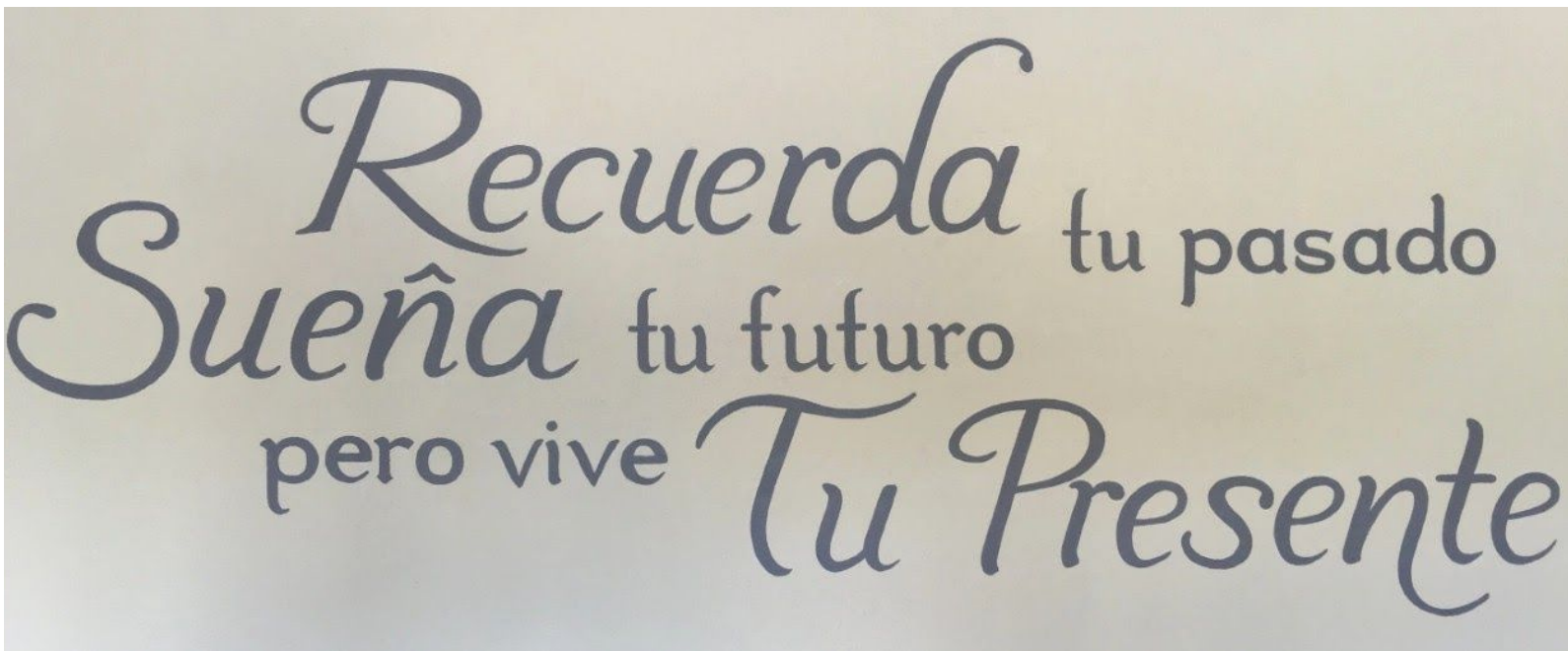


# How to lose 30 kilos in 6 months and love every minute

4375 Words



## Part 1 > Revelation in France

Three years ago, my wife and I decided to call time on our marriage. It was a sombre final chat in the kitchen, sharing the last bottle we might ever share. We were sad but it made perfect sense. We'd tried.

My wife said she'd move out down to her parent's house in the country and she asked me what I'd do, I picked something random from the top of my idiot head and said "Spain."

"Spain?" she said and "Spain" I repeated. No idea where it came from. Maybe I just wanted my departure to be more triumphant, a little more exciting than moving in with parents. Whenever we'd have a fight, that's what she'd do.

I'd run my consultancy for twenty odd years and over that twenty odd years, my role had evolved into taking clients to lunch, dinner, shows and spectacles. Nice if you can get it but it took its toll on my fitness.

By the time I drove off to the Channel Tunnel, I was eighteen stone and I hadn't played a meaningful game of football in years.

For some reason, a revelation always hits me a while after the event, more autopsy than eureka. Something that seemed so clear suddenly fogs up in deference to the new truth. Of course she was right, idiot. You always knew that.

"If you can't respect your own body," she said. "How can anyone else?"

And there it was. Respect your body. Respect your mind. Fitness. Breathe new air. Everything is going to change.

If my automated blurting of "Spain" was taking me to Spain, then let it be Spain. I would return triumphant, slim, toned and sleek and everyone would say how awesome and happy and better-without-her I was.

I was more than halfway from Calais, driving to a small French town called [île de Ré](#), an island off [La Rochelle](#) on the West Coast. I remember the exact spot because the signs had shown their first direction to Le Mans. From that sign, 300km shy of my target, facing three more driving hours, I lost a lump of time I can't account for.

The next thing I knew there were signs for La Roche Sur Yon. I remembered it from my planning stage because it was pretty close to where I was headed. The sat nav confirmed I was suddenly only an hour from Ile de Rey in what seemed like a blink.

I couldn't tell you why it happened and I have no idea what, if anything, I was thinking in the missing time. What I can tell you is the clarity on the other side.

My new start. My new energy. My mission.

Maybe the universe had supplanted a new person into me. Maybe it took me time to reboot. It felt like it. At that moment, I couldn't possibly have imagined anything else.

I'd booked a little room overlooking the harbour at [Le Colannes](#). I was soon checked in and I unloaded laptop and cables to start the mission I hadn't quite fleshed out yet.

6 foot 1. 18 stone. I fumbled my finger over the [Body Mass Index](#) chart, into the blue, sailing past green and into the orange, and just before getting into the red, there it was. My number. My target. 32. I was actually clinically obese. I needed to be 24 to fit into that little green zone of health and fitness. 25% of my bodyweight was surplus.

This was a holy \*\*\*\* moment as I pulled back from the screen.

I closed the laptop and swore foulness on that 25%. My mission had shown its numbers and my plan had started.

That night would be the finest French cuisine a man can enjoy and the next day, everything would change.

## Part 2 > Mission Planning

I woke up remembering [Le Skipper](#) in the harbour, the fillet steak with crushed pea purée and dauphinoise potatoes that would serve as my turning point. Something I wouldn't deserve again until my mission was accomplished.

I was still buzzed. Normally, revelations are flushed with the first order of the day but not this one.

The morning after a revelation is a test of human willpower. If you fold at such an early point, there is literally no hope for you. If the stakes are this important and you fold, you, my son, are an idiot. As one lady said to me more than once, "It's not a rehearsal, boy."

I wasn't sure if I was still an idiot or not yet as all manners of sweet and savoury things greeted me in the breakfast room at the hotel. Bacon, eggs croissants, jam, cheeses and hams, but hang on, my eyes focused on something else, like they were being moved by another force. The fruit section. Normally I'd be starting a three course mini marathon under the guise of getting the day some energy.

Today though, I took a little bowl and filled it to the top with melon and orange, mango, cherries and all colour of things and I sat down with orange juice and looked over at big people and little people, busy people and relaxed people. I knew I was on a different level to them, just for now, in the light still shining on me.

Your willpower gets a serious shot in the arm. I had more research to do about the exact food groups I'd need but I knew this was right.

Then the first glimmers of insubordination popped up briefly and reminded me that I had a fallback and that fallback was called lunch and every day I

had a fallback plan to the next meal. Maybe fruit wasn't enough, surely a bit of bacon and cheese?

No, fuck off, I said, turning a head or two in the dining room. I gestured an apology and then I smiled at the last cherry in my bowl.

I munched that little cherry up. There would be no bacon or cheese. Those dark little glimmers were crushed and squished and left pleading as I got up and left the room.

I was smiling as I approached Bordeaux. Today's destination was about six hours over the Pyrenees to [Pamplona](#) in northern Spain. This is where they do the bull run every July. Basque country, and the Bordeaux signs told me I was about a third of the way there.

The night before had included two bottles of Fitou. Le Skipper was quiet and the staff had time to chat. After dinner, I was pretty much the only punter there so they wrapped it up and took me to [Bar Kokot](#) with their Austrian Rum. So, there hadn't been time to do the work I needed but what a fine farewell to my old life.

Yet another sign flashed my licence plate and said I was going too fast and I anticipated a box full of speeding tickets waiting for me whenever I got back to London.

But I didn't care. I couldn't wait to get to Pamplona and get the laptop out, make my plan. A few hours later I was in my room at the [Pamplona Cathedral Hotel](#) doing just that.

I already knew how much weight to lose. Thirty kilos, almost 5 stone. One of the first results, I found out about the Okinawa diet. [Okinawa](#), a little island off the south of Japan has the longest living humans on the planet.

Taxi drivers are ninety years old and still dance. People eat whatever grows near them and that's it. One photo I saw was of an elaborate table. You could sit about ten people round it. The table was a tea making machine.

A few strips of bamboo were hooked up to an inlet and brought mountain spring water into the table. Most of the water would trickle out and continue down the mountain, unsure of why it had been put through the bother, but when you turned a little handle, the water would be diverted around a spaghetti of pipes and on towards the bowels of the table.

It would slip and slide through channels lined with fresh tea leaves and elements gradually heating it up as it travelled. Turn one of the eight little taps under the table edge and you have a steaming cup of the freshest tea.

So, the fine people from Okinawa told me how you could eat perfectly well and get everything a body needs. And you didn't need meat or anything processed to do it. My first culinary casualties. I also learned that my whole eating schedule had been wrong all my life. The best way to do it is to [eat small but eat often](#).

I'd been so proud of myself some days when I was too busy to eat anything and had six tons of dinner at about 9pm.

Wrong. The body is a sensitive little baby. If it doesn't get fed often enough it throws its toys out the pram and truly believes it's starving. It then converts what you do eat into fat, sensible storage for a rainy day when maybe you do starve. How a brain can fail to tell a body that it's ok, no-one's going to starve is beyond me but apparently it does.

So, by the time I'd showered and got ready to see what this former bastion of the Roman empire had going for it, I had successfully mapped out my new diet. And it was all the stuff I like to eat anyway.

I'd start with some fruit, in deference to the first successful morning. Then give it a couple of hours and a little low fat cottage cheese on a wholewheat crispbread, and a few crushed walnuts sprinkled on it.

Before what was probably the main mini meal of the day, about two o'clock, it was exercise. My wife's brother had told me the body prefers to exercise then eat as it's still burning, rather than the other way round.

Maybe A little tuna steak with bok choy, a bit of spinach, greek yoghurt and some kidney beans or chickpeas. Amazing things chickpeas, fibre and protein all in one little pill. It wasn't a problem designing these mini meals, the problem was there was too much choice.

If you're going to have pasta, have wholewheat pasta. If you're going to have rice, have wild rice or brown rice and not too much of either. Your 5 or 7 a day is so easy to achieve and better.

Let your milk be zero fat milk, let your greens be asparagus, broccoli, kale, spinach, artichoke, sprouts and bok choy. Eat nuts, almonds, walnuts. Eat pulses. Kidney beans, chickpeas. Prefer fruits of the forest over others, raspberries, blackberries and the like. Loads of antioxidants.

And let your booze be anything but beer, predominantly white wine and a glass of red a day comes straight from the doc.

All the stuff I already knew. Lettuce, peppers, tomatoes, celery, onion, garlic. Jesus I could do a meal planner for a month without getting bored.

This was going to be tasty. I could still love my food but carry that aloof grin that comes with a man shedding timber and having fun doing it.

I'd know exactly how many calories came with each mini meal and how much exercise to do to burn them off.

The laptop was closed up and my phone map and I set off to explore Pamplona. The city is called Iruna in the native Basque language and there was an ever-present but subtle show of the independence from Spain the Basque people had been after for a long time.

Basque flags were draped over balconies and stuck on cars but a local told me, do not take a flag out in public or you'd get carted off. One local comedian had added a bit of graffiti to a low wall, poorly translated as "Anything but a free state is just a load of bulls."

Back in the hotel room, I tackled the exercise aspects. Swimming would always figure, especially in Spain, but what else? Running can be high impact, shin splints and the like. It would be rowing. It's got everything, loads of muscles getting tickled gently, great cardio and hang on here we go, I can get a machine for the house for a couple of hundred euros. I'd join a [kayak club](#) or some such but winter was on its way and even the Spanish winter doesn't lend itself to being in the sea.

And that was it, a meal for all moods and occasions and an all year round exercise regime. When it was too cold to swim, double up on the rowing. Just make sure you get in some form of water as soon as you finish exercising to loosen up your muscles.

I also learned how little anyone should need a gym (apart from my little rowing machine of course). We really do have everything we need around the house.

First of all, a running machine? What? Just run around the block. If you want to run uphill, run uphill.

Muscle tone is also important. If you're shedding tonnage, you want the tonnage that's left nice and tight.



Push ups, pull ups, weights, dips, pec toning, ab toning and your core. You can pull up on anything, a couple of chairs, backs together, get your balance and you're away. Climb something.

I'd start slow. An hour on the rowing machine, weights and core stuff and finally fifteen minutes of laps in the pool.

It was all mapped out.

That evening, I sat down in a little restaurant I'd spied earlier, down some steps to a little square, live jazz music in the middle. The menu didn't have much of the stuff I needed and I'd definitely give the "grosse crevette" and "assaulted pasta" a swerve.

I wondered if this would be a problem going forward. I remembered many menus and I wasn't sure many of them were fit for my new purpose. But then I saw the celery and walnut salad. Fine, little glass of chablis to go along and everything was still on track.

### **Part 3 > Execution**

The next day around four o'clock, I arrived at my final destination. A little town called Javea, a hundred kilometres south of Valencia. Look at Spain. There's a little nose about two thirds down the east coast. Tip of that nose. That's us, pressed against the sea by the mountains. It felt like its own little island.

First priority after wandering around was the supermarket. Go get the super foods.

My place was in Cabo la Nao right up on the point near the lighthouse. My mission hadn't been created when I booked it, but with my new mission head on, the remoteness of my location would be a good thing.

When I went outside to get back in my car, I was reminded it had just carried me from London to south east Spain.

Over those 1800 miles, the front of the car had accumulated a second skin of unfortunate insects. Insects of all shapes, colours and sizes had become one single cloak of wonder food for any bird that took a fancy. And they did. A feeding frenzy was underway and even this one approaching human and a mystery cat that seemed to appear from nowhere couldn't scare them off.

They each had an allocated section of bodywork to pick at and they did well but still couldn't get it all off. The earlier casualties were part bug, part Audi.

The nearest supermarket was down in the Cala Blanca bit and was called Consum. It was the strangest supermarket shop I'd ever done. A hundred euros of good healthy stuff. I'd never put walnuts in a shopping cart. But I carried the same internal smugness of someone whose every passing minute is making them healthier than everyone else.

It was a hot day and I knew if I didn't get it all fridged up quick smart, for the whole six months here, there would be a sea bass, salmon, octopus and monkfish essence in my car.

The pool was warm enough not to have to thrash around like a perishing salmon and it was my first test of where I was fitness-wise. It was a fifteen metre pool. Breaststroke was the best all round stroke for what I was after so I took off up and down. I'd have to do this for at least 30 minutes every day so how close was I?

I managed about 15 minutes and thought it was a good start for day one. My own salmon was ready to go under the grill and I was hungry. Baby steps.

The house and garden had to provide me with my makeshift gym. Soon, I had two sturdy wooden outside chairs back to back for pull ups, a couple of buckets from the gardener's shed filled with pool water. The rest would need

no props. The push ups over there next to the pool and that little wall would do the ab stuff. Suspend myself on it and hold myself there for ten seconds, ten second break, repeat until knackered.

I had a little go at all my disciplines. The props held up just fine and my routine was set. There was only one thing missing and it would be the majority of my cardio workout. The rowing machine.

In five days time, it would be on my doorstep.

I carried on with my eating regime and stepped up the swimming and workout aspects and on day five, the rowing machine arrived. It was lovely and orange and it went right where I hoped it would, between two columns on the terrace.

Then I suddenly realised, apart from the supermarket on day one, I hadn't been out yet. The days had been formed around my mini meals and exercise and going out didn't sound as healthy as staying in.

But I had to prove to myself I could carry on the mission in or out. That night, I did go out, met some nice folks, Lee and Tracey from Southend and a drummer called Hector, saw a band and drank white wine and had lubina a la plancha, grilled sea bass, asparagus and a few slices of grilled aubergine, every so slight drizzle of local honey.

My taxi got me home at a reasonable hour and I got out without that heavy feeling I'd get when I went out back home. Always too much beer and always too much red meat. I took a quick stroll round my makeshift gym and my new rowing machine and then slept better than I had for ages. Tomorrow, a full programme for the first time.

The rowing machine soon got me sweating. The readout was like trying to wish away the miles in the car, watching calorie after calorie clock away, minute after minute. The machine was fine, nice and easy, smooth strokes,

keep your back straight. Pretty soon I'd done my hour and I took a break for water. The weights and pull up and everything else was becoming faster and I was doing more of them. By the time I got into the pool, I was feeling muscle burn and my heart felt reawoken.

With the help of a great little tool called [Supertracker](#), I had it all mapped out. Today I would eat 1200 calories and burn off 2000.

And so it was for the next couple of weeks. The cats started popping in to see what this strange noise was an hour every day and soon they stuck around for some cheeky tuna and I had one or two pusscats to talk to while I worked out.

The hour a day on the rower needed a bit more entertainment than the readout. By now I knew my pace and you just have to finish the hour come what may. Being in my own head was amusing enough but I needed a bit more autopilot.

The laptop was enlisted to provide comedy shows and every so often, this Spanish course I was taking. The hour started to go by like the missing time I'd felt in La Roche Sur Yon. I was doing more miles to the hour, I was doing more laps in the pool and I was looking forward to every stage more and more.

Pretty soon though, the pool became unswimmable so I got a wetsuit but that only really extended it a few weeks. My regime changed and I doubled up on the rowing.

My daily meal plans were sometimes not planned, just cobble together the right food groups in the right quantities. Some of the taste combos were worth jotting down, others didn't really work but still, the scales in the bathroom were starting to show results. I'd got down to 100 kilos from 108 in the first 3 weeks.

I couldn't believe the progress. I was never hungry, I felt great and the pounds were escaping with ease. I'd have this done in a few more weeks. I started a weight chart and logged as much as I could, something to be proud of.

Then the rate of weight loss slowed. I checked the scales. How could doing exactly the same thing every day cause a different result? I changed the scales so that it seemed more of a dramatic reduction.

A bit more research told me the scales were fine, the programme was fine. It's just the first bit of weight drops off you because you're reducing your water retention. After that, you work just as hard for half the initial result. And don't forget, the programme is increasing muscle mass as well, which weighs more than fat. That's fine. So be it. This was the realistic rate. Months not weeks. And I was enjoying it. I was enjoying succeeding, winning. This wasn't so hard.

A couple more weeks went past and still the pounds tumbled. Sometimes the reductions were erratic, same programme, 2 pounds off one day, half a pound off the next. I didn't really need to know why as long as the weight kept dropping.

The thing was, I had been looking at myself in the full length mirror by the door every day after my workout before the shower and I still didn't look any different.

I knew all the machinery and logic associated with my mission couldn't all be wrong at the same time so I was pretty sure there would be a decent reason for it and so there was. What you're doing initially is sorting out your core. That's where you're losing the initial weight and water.

Your core is what's getting beefed up and fit, out of sight. It made sense enough to a layman but you still like to see changes. And then it happened.

My jeans had been feeling a little looser than normal for a few days and then I realised I needed the belt in another hole. There it was, the first sign. I couldn't confirm it from the mirror but this was incontrovertible.

Maybe it was something psychosomatic in my head showing me something, but soon after that, I started to see some definition around my middle, not so much abs per se, just prepping the ground for them.

The pounds kept shedding off my weight chart. I will freely admit, I did have one or two blowouts, the need for a kebab and a cold beer, and I knew the numbers would show it, but I was now not actually fitting into trousers and shorts and some shirts looked like nightdresses. I needed healthy persons clothes. I have never felt so happy about an impending cost.

I looked good, like I did in my 30s.

By the time four months had passed, my target of 80 kilos remained and I was only a couple off at 82.

I had two months to drop that and I knew I would. I looked at photos of me in London 6 months before and it was incredible. I looked like a different person altogether. I looked tired, heavy, dreading the next flight of stairs.

Warning. This is a pivotal moment. When you're ahead of the curve and bossing it, its easy to entertain the notion that you can ease off a bit. Physically, you're probably right but don't do it. It changes your mindset from achieving something to already having achieved it but it's not yet achieved. Rabbit and the hare. Achieve it first, then reward yourself with easing off.

I hit my 80 kilos with five weeks to go and the next five weeks kept me there. It was done. I'd smashed the shit out that 25%. It was gone.

I took off from Valencia and landed at Gatwick requiring second glances at my passport photo. Yes, folks that really is me, just an awful lot more of me.

By the time I wandered down the street to the pub, I'd already decided I wasn't going back to the UK for good. Spain was my home now. My mission, my new life was born on the French highways and realised in the Spanish mountains.

I wasn't even really thinking of the reaction I'd get when I walked in. I didn't need reactions. I knew what I'd done. Me and my water buckets, pussycats, rowing machines, the glorious island of Okinawa and singing, dancing Spain.

The reaction was complete astonishment. Not just someone telling you you look well. This was holy \*\*\*\* across the board. My choice of a pink leather coat to mark the occasion drew its own conclusion but I was stronger and fitter and more vibrant in mind and body. And I looked it and we all knew it.

Life's new plateau had been reached with a simple regard for my own well being. A respect for my only asset.

And it was simple, inspiring and very enjoyable.