

Geoff Huegill

- *Skippy* bounces back

The former Olympian went from butterfly champ to doughy chub – then made a comeback last year to win gold in Delhi. But it didn't take an athlete's iron discipline to lose weight, he tells Brooke Tasovac.

After years of success as an international sprinting swimmer, Geoff Huegill retired at age 26 and slipped into a lifestyle that included everything he'd sacrificed for his professional sports career. An indulgent diet and lack of exercise pushed his weight to 138 kilograms – a worrying combination with a family history of heart disease.

Eight years later, he won gold for butterfly at the 2010 Commonwealth Games and was voted by the public as Sports Performer of the Year. Yet the astonishing turnaround comes from just plain common sense and realistic moderation, he explains.

HHW: You've said your weight gain began after retiring when you started travelling – how did you go from just having fun to overindulging?

GH: I did all sports when I was young, everything from swimming and surf lifesaving, hockey and rugby league, so I had a pretty active childhood. I got into swimming at the age of four and really enjoyed it. But after 16 years in the same pool clocking up 38,000 km, it was pretty easy to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction. Instead of following diets and exercise my life involved take-out, nights out and being lazy.

When I got home from travelling overseas. I realised that I had to start taking my life seriously. I started taking little steps by starting a food diary and doing as little as 30 minutes of exercise daily. Gradually the weight started coming off and then an opportunity came in 2008 when the NSW Institute of Sport put together an elite sprint program. They had one position available and I went to them expressing my interest in swimming for Australia again at the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

HHW: Did depression play into your weight gain?

GH: Yes and no. I was getting depressed for putting myself into that situation, but my depression had started long before I decided to retire. It was more the fact that I hadn't set up the appropriate steps for life after sport and I'd lost my sense of purpose while chasing that black line.

HHW: Was it embarrassing for you to gain weight while in the public eye, especially after having been a former athlete?

GH: Of course, it's pretty embarrassing knowing how fit and strong I was and what I'd let myself become. The Australian public can be pretty tough and everyone has an opinion! I hope that others out there will be inspired to dust off those sandshoes, and make the time to look after themselves.

HHW: In addition to swimming, what other training did you do and how much do you credit your weight loss to common sense?

GH: That's the funny thing about common sense: unfortunately it's not common! The biggest secret to weight management is consistency. It's a Monday to Monday approach, with balance, moderation and portion control. I did everything from implementing a healthy diet to running, weights and spin classes.

HHW: Do you plan to train towards the 2012 Olympics in London?

GH: That's a question I can't answer yet. Currently I'm working with my business partner on a life coaching program called Be Your Best. What I've come to realise is that I will always be swimming, but how long I keep swimming competitively is the question that needs time. ♥