Fighting fat to fighting fit

Genevieve Tang
genev@yah.com.sg

His is a tale rarely associated with active sportmen. He was once grossly overweight.

As a 16-year-old, he tipped the scales at a hefty 118kg — some 30kg over his ideal weight.

Undergraduate Felix Tang, 24, said: "I've been overweight since I was 9, but wasn't reaching obese levels yet. In secondary school, I hurt my lower back, and the doctor recommended that I avoid strenuous activities. "I used that as an excuse not to take part in any sports, including PE lessons. "That, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle, caused me to reach 110kg when I was 16."

"I am very sorry from the fit young man of today, who now weighs 78kg — considered healthy for his 1.76m frame."

These days, not only does Mr Tang regularly go trekking, kayaking, biking and running, he also heads the Youth Advolution for Health (YAH) Executive Committee.

SHAPING LIFESTYLES

Started in September last year, YAH aims to encourage youths to lead a healthy lifestyle.

The programme is driven by those aged 17 to 25, and promotes healthy habits, with a focus on a smoke-free lifestyle last year.

For Mr Tang, the turning point came at 16 when his 71-year-old grandmother died of multiple myeloma — a rare form of bone marrow cancer.

Said Mr Tang, who now studies at the Singapore Management University: "She had been a heavy smoker all her life."

"During her last days, it was painful to watch her suffer. Her condition deteriorated rapidly as she suffered from other ailments like high blood pressure as well."

"It was a wake-up call. It made me determined to help the people I care about lead a healthy lifestyle."

To inspire others, he decided to take the first step himself.

So, in December that year, he embarked on an exercise programme with the support of his parents.

He said: "My parents bought me a rowing machine that allowed me to work out without straining my back. I also made an effort to go swimming as often as I could, as it is a low-impact activity and would not strain my back."

"I forced myself to give up my favourite foods and ate only half of what I used to eat."

It was tough. Mr Tang had to put up with gnawing hunger pangs.

"I told myself that the fat had to go. By the time I started junior college, I had lost almost 10kg."

"It didn't stop there."

As a student at Tampines JC, he joined the Trim and Fit (T&F) Club where he ran, and even danced, his way to fitness.

He said: "The club bought two Dance Revolution game machines. We were made to go to school at 7am every morning, run 2.4km and then spend 45 minutes on the machines."

"I also avoided eating during recess by walking around the school and talking to my friends."

By the second year of JC, he had lost some 30kg. He was then 80kg.

Through his years in national service and since entering university, Mr Tang has managed to maintain his weight by running four times a week, and cycling or kayaking every weekend.

CAMPAIGNING FOR HEALTH

Last year, he joined YAH and organised several awareness campaigns.

His most memorable was the Love Depot, which coincided with Valentine's Day this year, where youths were encouraged to quit smoking for their loved ones.

Said Mr Tang: "We were not preaching that one should quit smoking, but trying to communicate that commitment to love is the same as committing to a healthier life."

YAH, which started off with just six like-minded young people, now boasts close to 60 members and volunteers.

"Learning to take charge of your life and being in control of it means you have the power to decide. Making changes to your lifestyle is not hard."

YAH, it's party time

YOUTH Advolution for Health (YAH) will celebrate its first anniversary on 16 Dec at the BDX Club, Colours by the Bay.

The party, Be Free, Live Life To Its Fullest, will start at 6pm.

Party-goers can expect activities such as henna painting, magic shows and face painting. Artists like DJ Inquisitive, West Grand Boulevard and Radikal Force will also perform at the event.

For more information, visit www.myspace.com/yahbefree. To register for the party, visit www.yah.sg.