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MONDAY**ACCESSORIES FAN CLAIRE SHED 14st****I spent £50k on shoes, shades and bags to hide 27st bulk**By **JENNY FRANCIS**
and **PHOEBE JACKSON EDWARDS****SQUEEZING** into clothes for a night out was a nightmare for Claire Simcox.

Shoe-horning her bulky size 32 body into a roomy black top and pair of jeans left the obese mum close to tears.

To cheer herself up, she would make her way to the biggest wardrobe in her home to pick out **ACCESSORIES**.

With more than 100 handbags, 200 pairs of sunglasses and 200 pairs of designer shoes, this section of Claire's closet was worth more than £50,000.

But an accessory obsession was a by-product of the divorcee's 27st bulk – she only felt confident when camouflaging herself with pricey designer adornments, drawing attention away from her chunky frame.

'I was hiding behind my handbags'*But doctors warning her that she would not live into her next decade because of her weight finally made Claire slim down.*

She lost a staggering 13st and can now slip into a svelte size 14 – and has kicked her designer infatuation too.

Claire, 48, from Hertford, says: "It makes me cringe how much I spent when I was fat."

"I was compensating for my weight by splurging on designer stuff when I should have been exercising and eating healthily to make myself feel better instead."

"I was hiding behind my handbags. I was so self-conscious. The designer stuff meant people didn't look at me – they were green with envy at my latest bag instead."

"When I started to lose the weight I couldn't believe how much of a difference it made to me and my self-esteem. Now I

**BEFORE**
27st
SIZE 32**AFTER**
13st
SIZE 14

don't need a designer bag to make me feel good, I can walk around in Primark and feel fantastic."

Claire's weight problems began in her teens and she weighed 18st at 18 years old.

But after her first child, at the age of 27, her weight ballooned.

Claire – mum to Harleigh, 21, and Ollie, 17 – says: "When I was pregnant with Harleigh I was 19st and piled on four stone over the nine months. I weighed 23st by the time I gave birth."

"I could barely move and was just sitting at home watching TV. My only exercise was getting chips and burgers from the

freezer and putting them in the oven. I had a sweet tooth and loved biscuits too."

Three years later, when she became pregnant with her second child Ollie, she expanded again.

She says: "I piled on four more stone. I was the heaviest I've ever been, weighing 27st and wearing a size 32. I barely left the house because I was looking after my children but I started to try to avoid it altogether because I felt so disgusting."

Claire, now a life coach, turned to shopping to cheer herself up. She says: "When I did go out, I'd buy something. Designer

accessories were how I filled the void." Unable to find fashionable clothes on the high street in her size, Claire became obsessed with buying expensive bags, shoes and sunglasses.

'I had become a label junkie'

The full-time mum's then-husband was a businessman and she was spending his hard-earned wages on her accessories.

She says: "I was very fortunate. My wardrobe was bursting with over 100 handbags, 200 pairs of

expensive shoes and 200 designer sunglasses. Buying them turned into a quick fix. I was a label junkie and I knew all the staff at the designer shops."

"I loved sunglasses and they had to be Chanel. All my shoes were Christian Louboutin and I'd splash out £500 to £800 on a pair."

"But if they had an ankle strap I secretly had to have it extended to fit around my huge ankles."

"The bigger I was, the bigger the obsession. I was convinced it would make me feel better."

"I had to have a dressmaker custom-make my clothes because at

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'I don't need a designer bag to be happy any more'

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size 32 I couldn't fit into anything in normal shops. I didn't ever have that trouble with designer bags."

An embarrassing incident at Claire's 40th birthday celebrations made her face up to her size. She says: "I bought a dress from the high street in a size 18, four sizes too small.

"I managed to get it on but there was a gaping hole at the back. I'd showed so many of my friends this fabulous new frock and I couldn't bear the thought of not turning up in it, so I had a dress-maker make an exact copy. I was so ashamed."

A week later, Claire made an appointment with her GP. She says: "I'd put off going to my doctor for years because I was scared of what he'd say.

"He took one look at me and told me if I carried on how I was, I wouldn't make it to my fifties.

"I was at serious risk of diabetes and heart problems. I broke down in tears – what would my kids do without a mum? I had to take action."

'Friends didn't recognise me'

A friend recommended a low-carb diet so Claire swapped bread, potatoes and pasta for chicken, eggs and meat. She says: "I lost a stone in a week and couldn't believe it.

"Before, I physically couldn't exercise as I was just too big. But with every stone I lost I became fitter. People started to notice a big difference in me and 18 months later I felt ready to start exercising."

Claire joined No1 Boot Camp and, with healthy meals and personal trainers, she slimmed to a size 14 – reaching her target weight of 13st.

She says: "I was so flattered when old friends walked past me in the street because they didn't recognise me, I loved that I looked totally different.

"To finish off my new look and get rid of the excess skin, I had surgery. I had a breast augmentation, tummy tuck, breast uplift, upper thigh lift, arm lift and Botox."

It was not just her appearance that had changed, her spending habits had too.

She says: "I'm the happiest I've been and I don't need a designer bag to make myself feel better – I've discovered the joys of the high street.

"I've become a life coach and motivational speaker at No1 Boot Camp.

"I was compensating for my weight by splurging on designer stuff but I look back and it was a waste of money."



Diet before:

Breakfast: Six slices of toast

Lunch: Bacon toastie

Dinner: King prawn curry, shish kebab, chicken tikka masala, mushroom rice and onion bhajis

Snacks: Packet of biscuits and three packets of crisps

Diet now:

Breakfast: Muesli

Lunch: Chicken salad

Dinner: Fish with grilled vegetables

Snacks: Nuts and dried fruit