

[PRE-CONTEST BACKGROUND WITH VENUS]

These 12 weeks have been a continuation of a 6 month transformation that I began September 27, 2011, when my son Hunter was born. I weighed about 185 lbs just before his birth, which was 45 lbs over what I weighed in early 2011 when I found out I was pregnant. Despite the weight gain, I had a very healthy pregnancy. I continued to work out with weights right up to the weekend before he was born, I walked, I swam, I barely bought any maternity clothes, I even wore a bikini all summer! The blood pressure and swelling issues I experienced during my first pregnancy 7 years did not resurface.

I knew Naomi from the Turbulence Training forums (I had used Craig's workout programs to get back in shape before trying for another baby), and I remember we had a Facebook discussion when the first Venus contest was starting. I recall telling her it wasn't the time for me to get started with a contest and a new program since we were trying to have another baby. But I still calculated my VI metrics, saw I wasn't all that far off, and planned to come back to the workouts in my post-baby period. I started listening to the Venus podcasts too.

After seeing the results of the first Venus Transformation contest, I did buy the Venus workouts (phase 1) and did them from week 17 to early in my third trimester when I switched to shorter workouts. I became active on the community, where there were a few other pregnant Venuses and plenty of mothers of small kids! I felt the Venus perspective (both community and workouts) was so well targeted to me, and I loved the podcasts for delving into the psychology of weight loss, the simplicity of calories in/calories out, and the success of contest winners. I will always be grateful to Craig and the TT workouts because they initially got me back on track with working out, but once I found Venus, I didn't renew my TT membership. I bought phase 2 near the end of my pregnancy and could not wait to start it! I think Naomi had to talk me down a bit there. Fortunately my little guy arrived two weeks early so I had no choice but to take a break from working out.

After the initial few weeks of recovery after his birth and so little sleep, I finally weighed myself (163.5) and started to track calories and walk a little every day. Once I had been cleared to work out again, I slowly got back into lifting and started phase 2 in November. I had listened to Felicity's and Kass' podcasts carefully since I was also a nursing mom, and appreciated their insights and experiences with calorie restriction while nursing. I knew from my past experiences with weight loss that I would be comfortable with setting a consistent daily deficit goal, so that is what I did.

I lost weight pretty consistently until December 1, when I weighed in at 152.5 lbs. I remember feeling stuck around 152-3 for a few weeks, and fortunately that was when Alisha started up the Uncontest group on the Venus community, for women who wanted to lose or maintain over the upcoming holidays. That extra accountability was just what I needed to push ahead! I set an initial goal of losing 4 lbs before the start of VT4, but I had actually lost about 8 lbs by the time VT4 started on Jan 16th.

[CONTEST ESSAY]

My official starting weight for VT4 was 144, with a waist size of 27.5, hip size of 37.5 and shoulder size of 40.25. I was not sure exactly where I would end up hitting my measurements, but my contest plan was

to lose at least a pound a week. My eventual goal has been to reach my VI numbers by the end of May when pool season starts. When the Transformation Diet came out, I bought it, input my current measurements into the calculator, and it gave me numbers that agreed well with what I was currently eating and how fast I was losing. It gave me a most likely target weight of 125, which helped set my expectations for how far I still had to go. It also gave me a water weight range, which was very helpful in understanding (and de-stressing) daily weight fluctuations.

I took and submitted my before pictures on January 16th and the contest was now officially underway. I blogged every 4-5 days, and was as active as I could be on the community, but having returned to work full time, I haven't always been able to do as much as I would have liked. I often read others' blogs during work breaks or while I was nursing my baby. Keeping in touch with women who were all going through this process with me (or maintaining or tweaking their Venus bodies) helped me so much! I can't say enough about the community and the women in it. I have never been part of an online community like this one-it is truly special.

I did implement some strategies I picked up from other Venuses, as well as others that have worked well for me in the past. For example, I got a planner and stickers, and set some simple goals:

1. Get at least 7 hours of sleep a night (It was harder than you would think at the beginning with a 3 month old!)
2. Walk a minimum of 6000 steps a day and note how many steps on my planner (As measured by my BMF armband. I have a sedentary job, so to hit this usually required me to get out for a short walk at least once a day.)
3. Do 3 VI workouts most weeks (In reality this worked out to 2-4 workouts, depending on the week and what my schedule was like)
4. Track what I ate every day (using the BMF software). I would note if the day was Forward, Neutral, or Backward based on my calorie balance. Despite the inherent errors with these devices, this worked well for me. My criteria for a forward day changed over the contest-I went from counting a day as forward if my calorie balance was a net negative of 500 or greater (when I still had more to lose) to now when I consider a 250 calorie deficit as forward. I aimed for 5 forward days a week, on average. I used the TD number as-is, assuming the calories burned by nursing would take care of the error due to consumption underestimation and burn overestimation.
5. I would note if I walked, how much I walked, or any other cardio I did (which was rare)

Since I started listening to the Venus podcasts and internalizing the AGD kind of mindset, I've definitely changed how I eat. In contrast to past weight losses and attempts, I did not follow a specific "diet plan." I did not focus on macros, specifically protein, which had been a focus for me in the past. I drank almost no protein shakes during the 12 weeks, unless my husband happened to have one and wanted to share. I did not have a list of specific "bad" foods to avoid, though I avoided foods that I found didn't agree with me and limited calorically dense foods I could live without.

Even though I was cutting calories, I made sure to eat foods I liked so that I didn't feel deprived. I made lower calorie versions of my favorite splurges and ate them often. For example, after eating quite a few maple oat nut scones from Starbucks while pregnant (~500 cal each!), I found a similar recipe online, figured out the ounces and calories, and ate one for breakfast pretty much every day of the contest (~250 cal depending on weight). I made 2-3 salted caramel mochas at home using my own recipe (110 cal vs. 330 for the Starbucks version). I ate chocolate whenever I could fit the calories into my day. I had the occasional backwards day when I was feeling I needed to eat more calories, then got back on track with my planned deficit.

I also weighed myself almost every day of the contest, first thing in the morning before breakfast. I used my weight as a data point to help assess progress but didn't let it get me down if I stalled or bounced around. When I didn't lose for a few days or even a week, I would always go back to the BMF software and do a report to compare my calorie deficit over the past few weeks. In all of those cases, the reports showed clearly when my average calorie balance was just not great enough to lose. Looking back at the cold hard truth of the data really prevented me from feeling like a failure-when I had a week where not much happened, I just resolved to tighten up on calories and things would start moving again. I had plenty of backwards and neutral days calorie-wise but I tried not to let these bother me, I just kept moving forward as best I could, always thinking about John's phrase "controlled stumble forward."

I was halfway through phase 2 when the contest began, so I finished it and restarted during the contest. I just love the supersets, X-sets and pyramids! I may go back to the original workouts in the future, possibly with lower reps, for variety, but for now, phase 2 is keeping me happy. Like Alisha, I didn't like the 21 rep sets and so when those came up, I just did another 13 rep set instead. Also, partway through the contest, I saw some posts about not training abs with specific exercises. I decided to experiment by dropping the ab and arm exercises from the phase 2 workouts since both areas were getting plenty of stimulation from other exercises in the program. Whenever one of these types of exercises appeared, I replaced it with pullups, TRX rows or pushups, DB snatches or DB swings. I had started the contest close to VI for shoulders and was hoping to maintain my shoulder measurement even as I lost more body fat.

I weighed in at 130.8 on April 7, which means I have met my goal of losing 12 lbs during the contest. I am very close on all my metrics! The most important thing is I am still losing, so I believe I'll meet my May goal and continue to improve from there. Now that the contest has ended, I have had moments that I wished I had been a bit more aggressive and gotten all the way to my VI waist and target weight during these 12 weeks. However, I stuck to my original plan, which targeted the end of May. I knew it would start getting more difficult as I got closer, and above all, I didn't want to push too hard and end up overtraining, binging, or backsliding. So I elected for slow and steady loss, at an average of 1 lb/week. I'm very pleased at how close the 12 lb loss actually did get me near to my ideal measurements, and I'm confident that I will continue to progress if I stick to meeting my calorie deficit targets and process goals.

Thanks for an awesome set of programs and an amazing community! 😊