

Exercise Challenge!

One couple's top 10 fitness tips from their time on "The Biggest Loser" ranch.

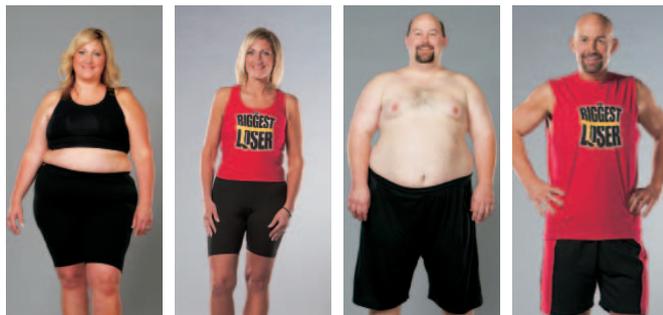
Just two years ago, South Carolina natives and "The Biggest Loser" season eight contestants Phil and Amy Parham were severely overweight and living a sedentary existence. They knew the extra pounds were taking a toll on their health, but it wasn't until after their son was diagnosed with autism that the

couple decided it was time to get off the couch and make a change.

"I knew we had to be healthy for our son, but I was also so depressed about his diagnosis," Amy explains. "I was literally watching 'The Biggest Loser,' crying and eating ice cream." That's also the night she saw NBC's casting call for season eight and eventually tricked her husband into going to Atlanta for the casting.

And call it luck, divine intervention or fate, but the Parhams were selected to be on the popular weight-loss show and lost a combined total of 256 pounds and the highest percentage of weight loss of any married couple in "The Biggest Loser" history to date. Today, they're healthier than ever and just released their first book, "The 90-Day Fitness Challenge" (Harvest House Publishers), which details many of the things they learned while on "The Biggest Loser" ranch.

"I was close to saying this was my lot in life, that I was meant to be a fat person," Phil says. "But when we went there, we realized there were some very basic things we didn't know and now we can help tell other people what we learned." But more than anything, they say they wrote the book to inspire and motivate other overweight people to realize they can achieve similar goals. "We're not trainers and we're not nutritionists," Amy says. "But we are two people that have been trapped in obese bodies." We were so impressed with their continued success, we wanted to know their top 10 fitness tips for achieving weight loss. Here's what they told us. —Sarah Gleim



Amy before

Amy after

Phil before

Phil after

1. Drink plenty of water.

Take your body weight, divide it in half and drink that many ounces a day. (A 200-pound man should drink 100 ounces of water a day.) "We drink 16 ounces right when we wake up," Phil says.

2. Include weight training in your exercise routine.

When you add more muscle, it burns more fat and calories. And work your legs because they make up the biggest muscle group.

3. Don't neglect your core.

The key to health is a strong back, and the key to a strong back is strong stomach muscles. Strengthen your core with exercises like Pilates and yoga.

4. Eat five to six small, nutritious meals a day.

"We eat breakfast, a snack, lunch, a snack and dinner," Phil says. "It helps balance our blood sugar levels so we don't hit highs, lows, etc. One of the secrets to losing weight really is eating."

5. Always mix protein, carbs and a little healthy fat at every meal and snack.

6. Tell yourself you love exercise.

"So much of the battle is mental and emotional," Amy says. "So you have to keep telling yourself that you're lucky you can even exercise. Be thankful you can do it."

7. Eat plenty of fiber.

"We learned at the ranch we need at least 30 grams a day," Phil says. "Most Americans don't get that at all."

8. Stretch before and after exercise to prevent injury.

9. Buy the proper fitting shoes.

"Go to a running store and have them fitted for you," Phil says. "So many people who are overweight are afraid to go into those stores so they buy the wrong shoes, end up with injuries like shin splints and then quit exercising."

10. Count your blessings.

"More than anything, just be thankful that you are healthy enough to exercise," Amy says.

For more information, visit philandamyfitness.com.