

Life & Style

Hitting the shops could be good for your health – according to slimming winner Susan Roberts, who dropped a dress size with the help of a bit of retail therapy.

Helen Tither finds out more

'Shopercise' - the slimming plan we can all believe in

SHOPAHOLICS rejoice – Warrington mum-of-two Susan Roberts is living proof that being a fashion addict can be good for your health.

Not only did the customer services worker from Bewsey lose almost a stone in weight and drop a dress size in a month, she did it by going shopping.

She shed the pounds while she pounded the aisles of the Golden Square shopping centre in Warrington. That hard work earned her a fabulous £1,000 makeover in the process, as winner of the mall's Drop A Dress Size challenge.

Her slimming success will be music to the ears of the region's dedicated followers of fashion, eager to find an excuse to carry on hitting the shops in these credit crunch times. So what if it's bad for your bank balance – if it's good for your Body Mass Index.

At least, that's according to research from the Golden Square, which found women could burn up to 12,000 calories a year just by browsing the shops. Sounds too good to be true? Newly svelte Susan, 27, says it worked for her.

"I just walked round town

with the kids," she says. "First, I got a pedometer to measure how many steps I was taking normally.

"Apparently, you are supposed to take 10,000 steps every day to keep fit. I was shocked at how little walking I was doing.

"So I started walking into town from my house, leaving the car behind, to reach that target. It wasn't hard at all. Then, if you are walking round the shops for a few hours you soon hit the target."

Susan decided to embark on her "shopercise" spree after seeing an advert in the mall, and was one of 160 women who took up the challenge, with the prospect of a makeover at the end of the month for the winner.

Applicants were weighed, measured and given a health check at the beginning and the end of the challenge. Armed with a diet diary and some exercise tips – including marked routes around Warrington town centre designed to burn off different amounts of calories – it was then up to them to battle the bulge.

Susan won the challenge, which was judged by an NHS health specialist to make sure weight had been lost in a safe and balanced way, after going from 14st 4lbs to 13st 5lbs and dropped from a dress size 16 to a 14.

"I know it sounds too good to be true but it shows walking really is the best form of exercise," says Susan.

"It helps that I am a real shopaholic – but it also helps me to get out of the house with the kids.

"I also followed some of their diet tips because you have to combine exercise with some dieting to lose weight. I opted for a Weight Watchers scheme. Of course, losing weight

should always be done in a safe and healthy way in accordance with a GP's advice.

However, Susan says the competition element of this particular challenge, which was overseen by NHS experts, was simply the motivation she needed to start a healthier lifestyle.

"Basically the challenge was just the kick up the bum I needed," she laughs. "I never thought I would win.

"After having my two children – Alicia, aged three, and two-year-old Lucas – I put on weight. Now I'm motivated to get back to a healthier size I am happy with. I'm definitely going to keep this routine up. In the run up to Christmas I can walk into town every day and buy presents one at a time to keep up the exercise."

Over at the Trafford Centre, they are also pushing the health benefits of a shopping spree – having teamed up with Trafford council's sport and health development team to launch a regular Mall Walking scheme. Apparently, it's all the rage in the US.

With trained instructors leading the weekly window shop, they say the three-mile trek around the centre's halls is a good cardiovascular workout – as well as working those arm and leg muscles.

"We are eager to support Trafford Borough Council in their bid to get the public fit and improve their health," says Gordon McKinnon Director of Operations at The Trafford Centre.

"Don't worry, you won't get a telling off if something in a shop window distracts you from your walk"



IN SHAPE Susan is determined to keep up her new healthy regime

CREDITS
Hair, make-up and spray tan: Jakata Hair And Beauty
Clothes: From The Golden Square's personal shopper, Nicola Cupples



BEFORE Susan was shocked at how little walking she did