



A WEIGHT OFF HER MIND

BY DENNY ROSEY

Comedian Magda Szubanski would still be carrying the equivalent of an eight-year-old child on her small frame if it weren't for sleep apnoea.

Unlike thousands of people many kilos overweight, Magda was happy with her body, although 109.5kgs meant she often felt exhausted. Still, fatigue wasn't enough to propel her into dieting; after all she could still zip around whenever a role demanded it.

Millions hold a vision close to their hearts of Sharon Strezlecki's po-faced Irish jig that made Michael Flatley look like a clapped out show-off in tight treads; or Sharon's futile, near lethal manoeuvres on the netball court.

But threatened by obstructive sleep apnoea that could have killed her or left her nimble mind and body at risk of a stroke or heart attack, Magda was forced to take decisive action.

Sleep apnoea results when the throat walls collapse repeatedly during sleep and block the upper airways for up to a minute. The body's oxygen stores can last only a few minutes after breathing stops before damage occurs to the brain, heart, kidneys and other vital organs. When the flow of fresh air into the lungs is absent for more than a few seconds, the body's defence mechanisms are alerted and the sleeper is stimulated to wake up.

In severe cases this happens 400 times a night. Typically people do not wake fully and often have no memory of having a disturbed night's sleep. The only symptoms may be early morning headaches, daytime sleepiness, poor concentration and irritability.

A lot of fat around the neck plays a big role in most cases of sleep apnoea as fat settles inside the neck as well as outside. Diet or die was a no-brainer decision and Magda chose to use the services of a well-known diet organization to support her efforts and supply the information about food choices she needed to lose weight wisely and keep it off.

"I'm making better food choices on my own now, and it's been surprisingly easy to stick to my eating plan. Paparazzi snapped me the other day hoping to catch me EDI (eating under the influence) but I was eating poached eggs and salad," Magda laughs.

"Before I would have Eggs Benedict with extra bacon, or I would have been snacking on lollies or chocolate. I even seem to have tamed the chocolate monster – it's nowhere near as crazy as it used to be."

Dieting is a slog, however much support you have and who hasn't heard the siren call of chocolate and scorched almond ice-cream or a plate of lamingtons when they're feeling tired, stressed, or in a month with a vowel in it – Magda certainly has but each cheat session has been moderate and she doesn't thrash herself with guilt over small lapses.

Magda is one of the few celebrities prepared to admit they see a psychotherapist to make sense of their inner and outer

worlds. Eating too much of the wrong stuff was comfortable, comforting and exceptionally easy but since losing weight, she can see how she's limited her conceptions of herself and the public's too.

"I have made a career out of looking unflattering," Magda says. Her best-known stable of characters – Mrs Hoggett, Chenille (proprietor of the House De Beaute and Hair Removal) and Sharon Strezlecki – are lovable, but more bovine than sex goddesses.

But after dropping more than 26kgs Magda could put Kath and Kim, the bombshells of Fountain Lakes, in the shade. "Yes I am feeling a bit foxy. When I lose another 8.5kgs I may have to sedate myself!"

Life is much simpler in other respects she adds: "I went to a restaurant the other night and for the first time in years I didn't have to calculate in advance how to squeeze through the tables to the loo. Honestly, I tell you in the past it has been like planning the allied landing at Normandy!"

Like anyone undergoing monumental change, Magda discovered there's a lot of re-adjusting to be done: "Before I used to hate shopping. I didn't have the luxury of wondering if I would actually like the thing I was buying; all I was concerned with was finding a size that was big enough to fit. So now I have a whole new problem. I am going to have to decide what style is 'me'. This is a whole new and exciting world!"

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"Thinking back to how I was when I started compared to where I am now, I can see such a massive change. I feel so much lighter and happier. I said to a friend that this is one of the best things that I've done in my life. I have such an incredible sense of accomplishment," says Magda delightedly.

She couldn't help but feel great. Losing a wheelbarrow of fat is a major achievement and she has half of Australia barracking for her.

Sharon's friend and life coach Kath Day-Knight spoke to Link while rehearsing for *Barbarella Redux*. "It's a weight off my mind. All that av wee du pooies – Spanish for weight – wasn't doing her an ounce of good. I'm thrilled to see less of her and she's loving herself sick. We all have a book in us and I reckon ours is *Running with hornbags*."

Whatever. Magda sleeps well at night now. 🌀