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Is losing weight – and keeping it off – as simple as changing your outlook? PJ Powers realised it's all about self-love and a shift in how you view every aspect of your life, not just food.

a scorching hot day when I walk into the Hyatt lounge in Rosebank Mall. I find PJ sitting on a couch with a warm smile on her face, looking relaxed: 'I love it here; people keep to themselves and I can enjoy myself.' Her bubbly personality spills over instantly. 'I just want everything,' she tells the waiter. 'Bring me a skinny cappuccino, a sparkling water and that bowl of nuts.' One of South Africa's best singers, this 52-year-old is an icon. But today we're here to discuss her remarkable physical transformation: she has lost 23kg, dropping from 96kg to 73kg – and has kept it off. PJ looks svelte in her blue jeans and flowing white top; to say she looks amazing is an understatement.

She is upfront about her emotional rollercoaster with food and weight. She was labelled the big, tall, awkward girl at school and her resultant lack of self-respect and

negative mindset was exacerbated when she began her music career, because her manager weighed her every week. Between the ages of 18 and 28, PJ was consumed by the idea of being skinny, even though she knew that her build and frame would never allow for it.

When her career took off in the townships, she developed a more positive self-image: 'It wasn't planned – I was accepted by the black community, where my weight wasn't an issue. I'm enormously grateful for the confidence they gave me.'

However, the first phase in her dramatic turnaround was seizing control of her excessive nature – she was an alcoholic. 'I haven't touched alcohol for three years; I started to see the value in my life and how blessed I actually am. The 12-step programme taught me to see the

gorgeousness of life.' It was through that journey that PJ realised that self-love is not an option, it's a given, and that she had to learn to love all of herself – the light and the dark. She also began Paula Galvao's Eden clinic weight-loss programme

and says it was life-changing: 'I have come to understand that just as smoking is bad for your lungs, weight is bad for your heart.' The programme also gave PJ the confidence and courage to change: 'I realised it was okay to

want to look my best and I came to the understanding that it wasn't shallow.' And Paula taught PJ a valuable life lesson: 'Weight isn't on your legs and stomach; the root of weight gain is in your head – the core issues are always mental.' She gave her the tools to have a healthy relationship with food, 'by sorting

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