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easily the first time around. But with the stresses of daily life and motherhood, Leanne found herself skipping gym and grabbing meals on the run – her personal recipe for rapid weight gain. Then she fell pregnant for a second time, on a heavier base. After eight months of breast-feeding Gabi, still wearing bigger clothes and feeling uncomfortable, she decided it was time to get back into shape.

Leanne called Eden Life Weight Loss Clinic in Sandton, who'd contacted her previously, offering to put her on their programme when she was ready. 'I always kept it in the back of my mind, and I phoned them up. They said, "Are you sure? We didn't offend you?"', and I said, "No, of course you didn't. Let's go for it!"

She embraced a complete lifestyle change: low-carbohydrate, low-sugar, high-protein meals, plus Eden's specialised products and a return to gym. In hourly sessions three times a week with her personal trainer, Gail Lechinsky, Leanne favours boxercise but also adds running, cycling and weights to the routine. Since February 2013 she's lost an impressive 17kg. 'If I can lose another 10 I'll be very happy. I'll be back where I was when I got married,' she says.

However, living *la vida* low-carb does get a touch boring, especially when she's serving the kids tempting pastas and flavoursome veggies such as butternut and pumpkin. The weekly 'cheat day' (read 'pizza') is Leanne's life-saver. 'Do I cheat? Oh hell yes, I do! I love food. The problem is that my whole life has been about families getting together and eating.' In her parents' Lebanese household, tables were laden with delicious traditional food, and Marc is Greek by heritage, so sticking to grilled fish and salad doesn't come naturally to either of them. 'I miss everything, especially

bread! But I just realise that I unfortunately have to be very conscious of what I eat.'

NEW BEGINNINGS IN STORE

As if Leanne doesn't have enough on her plate, in between babies she launched Simply Manas Gift Emporium with her sister-in-law Mandy in 2011 – 'the realisation of a dream'. Mandy Manas, who is married to Leanne's brother, owns Koco Bino, specialising in babywear and maternitywear. 'We saw a gap in the market, and when we were offered space in the new wing of Sandton City, we went for it. The shop was never meant to be that big. We in fact wanted a little neighbourhood store, and it landed up in the biggest shopping centre in Africa. Typical of us!'

The harsh reality was that they'd opened during the world's worst recession. 'Financially it's still very tough. I would never give up my day job to go into retail. It's so much fun but we've had sleepless nights just trying to make rent money. It's constant hard work, especially the continual re-inventing of the store.'

From being primarily a gift shop, Simply Manas now stocks an eclectic mix of trendy homeware (Implexions crystal from Austria, PiP Studio products from the Netherlands, jewellery boxes, candles and silverware from Cara Mia), clothing, Hunter boots and a spoil-yourself jewellery range made with Swarovski elements, Crystalp, for which Leanne is the brand ambassador: 'I love the range and wear all the pieces for work.' She notes wryly, 'If you're buying a gift, you walk in saying, "I have R200 to spend", but if you're buying something for yourself, you don't have a budget. You know what I'm saying?'

Leanne's Top 5 Diet Tips

1. Stay away

from carbs. As much as I love them, they're the fastest way for me to pick up weight.



2. Fill up on

salads and protein. It really does work. Eating out is easy: I order a piece of steak and salad, or chicken breast or fish with salad.

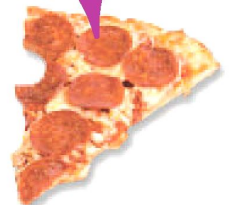
3. Drink lots

of tea and water. I love tea and that curbs my appetite for the snacking, which is my big downfall.



4. Have a

cheat day. If you don't allow 'normal' eating habits to become a lifestyle, then you'll binge and pick up all the weight again.



5. For mothers

whose kids are not good eaters: don't put whatever your child doesn't eat into your mouth. I know it's an easy place to dispose of it, but the weight gain from that is crazy!