

## [COVER story]

Star Jones knows how to tackle tough opponents. From her days as a New York City prosecuting attorney (she won 31 out of 33 convictions) to her nine years debating fellow cohosts on *The View*, Star has always stood her ground. But in 2003, TV viewers couldn't help but comment on the one battle she was clearly losing: "I had spent my entire adult life up until then, at age 41, as morbidly obese. At my heaviest, I was 307 pounds, and I'm only 5-foot-5," she says.

Finally, a close friend forced her to confront the issue. After consulting specialists, Star had gastric bypass surgery, a procedure in which most of the stomach is sealed off, drastically reducing the amount of food a person can digest. Although experts agree the operation is a last resort, it was

# *"I got a new lease on life"*

TV pundit Star Jones explains why dropping 10 dress sizes was only the first step on her road to good health.

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the push Star needed. Along with forcing her to eat less, the surgery spurred her to clean up her diet and exercise. Within a few years, Star had lost 160 pounds and thought her health issues were finally behind her.

But in March 2010, Star noticed a change. “Something didn’t feel right,” she remembers. “For weeks, I was short of breath and having heart palpitations—it felt like someone was punching me in the chest.” Once again, a loved one



*“Love yourself enough to save your own life. I learned late that my health is my greatest asset.”*

insisted that she take action. After extensive testing, the doctor’s verdict shocked her: “I had fluid around my heart and was diagnosed with a faulty valve. If I didn’t have surgery immediately, I was looking at a valve replacement.”

To Star, the diagnosis seemed unfair. “I had beaten obesity and for the first time in my life, I was hitting the gym regularly and practicing portion control. And after all that, I had heart disease.”

A week before her 48th birthday, Star had open-heart surgery to repair the valve, followed by three months of cardiac rehab. “A lot of patients don’t do the rehab, but getting back my physical strength—and the emotional confidence that my heart won’t fail—is what allowed me to recover. That’s what saved my life and kept me on my weight-loss path.”

Now, at age 50, Star says she’s “in the best heart health ever” and wants women to learn from her experience. Her message: “Love yourself enough to save your own life. I learned late that my health is my greatest asset.” Here, Star shares the tips that keep her waistline and her heart happy.

**\*Confront “heavy” emotions.** Off camera, Star felt alone and turned to food for comfort. “About a year after gastric surgery, I realized I needed to lose the weight in my head,” notes Star. “The [physical] weight gain was more about depression, which is why I wasn’t focusing on my health.” She began seeing a therapist to help her deal with negative emotions rather than “stuffing” them down with food.

**\*Sneak in exercise.** Before weight-loss surgery, Star admits that she was sedentary. “I never met a driver I didn’t love,” she jokes. Even when going just a few blocks, she used to let some-

one drive her. Now, Star builds fitness into her day by walking whenever she can. “The day I finished cardiac rehab, I celebrated by walking 12 blocks home.”

### **\*Find an outlet like Pinky.**

Star was “prescribed” an emotional support dog—a pet trained to provide therapeutic benefit through companionship and affection (see box for more

info). “My dog, Pinky, is a service animal. There’s nothing better than when you walk into a house and there’s a tiny dependent greeting you. She doesn’t care if someone says something nasty or if I have two trials to cover. She just sees me as ‘mommy’ and thinks *Do you want to cuddle?* She’s really the best thing that I could have ever, ever done.”

—Gina Roberts-Grey

## Could a therapy animal help you?

A greeting at the door. A kiss when you seem depressed. A calming presence when you’re afraid to be alone. These are a few of the benefits of adopting an emotional support animal (ESA), a type of pet—often a dog, but it can be any domestic animal—“prescribed” to help you cope with stressful feelings that are affecting your daily life. Unlike service dogs for the blind or hearing-impaired, ESAs need only as much training as an ordinary pet requires, although they might be taught ways to relieve psychological distress, like jumping into their owner’s lap when they sense anxiety. To find out more, talk to a mental health professional or visit [petpartners.org](http://petpartners.org).

