

You've been seeing your wonderful new boyfriend for a few months now and life couldn't be better. There's just one downside: as fast as you're falling in love, your jeans have been getting tighter and your once-loose A-line skirt is rapidly morphing into a fitted number. Confused by this, you mention it to your girlfriends. To your surprise, your newly loved-up friend is having the same problem, while the one who's recently split up from her boyfriend is the incredible shrinking woman.

The answer to this fluctuating weight? It's all down to your 'love shape' – an emotional phenomena where being in love enhances your curves, while falling out of it sees them disappearing.

Take Kate Hulme, a 29-year-old designer from Leamington Spa. Since meeting Paul, 28, an illustrator, four months ago, her former size-10 figure has crept up to a 14. "Looking good has always been important to me," she says. "I've always eaten healthily and been to regular yoga sessions to keep in shape. But since I met Paul, this has fallen by the wayside. We spend all our evenings cuddled up on the sofa with tubs of ice cream and pizza, and most weekends in bed. I've felt so happy, the last thing on my mind has been watching my figure.

"Also, my job as a design company manager is demanding, so my free time is precious. I don't want to spend them in the gym when I could be with Paul."

Kate is one of an increasing number of women who've unwittingly found their shape belying their relationship status. Nutrition therapist Ian Marber, co-author of *In Bed With The Food Doctor* (Collins And Brown, £14.99) says the lifestyle and eating habits of a couple are very different from those of a single person, and this is often the cause of significant weight gain. "People nest in a relationship, staying home and having early nights," he points out. "Evenings in front of the TV with a takeaway replace activity."

Relationship counsellor Paula Hall, from Relate, agrees. "When you meet someone special, you do tend to share a sense of indulgence and food is a part of that, whether it's breakfast in bed or candlelit dinners," she says. Before you know it, nights partying (and burning calories) make way for food-fuelled, cosy nights in – and the curves creep on.

Curves, confidence... and complacency?

But it's not just lifestyle changes that make loved-up women put on weight. The confidence a woman gains from a good relationship is also a key factor, according to Dr Sidney Crown, a relationship expert and consultant



IS YOUR LOVE LIFE SHAPING YOUR BODY?

Find the man of your dreams and it's not just your emotions that change – your figure does, too. Here's what fluctuations in your weight can reveal about your relationships. By Sali Hughes

psychotherapist. "As love develops, personality becomes more attractive than just looks. This takes the emphasis off body shape," he says.



Such was the case for **Camille Hagglund** (left), a 28-year-old fashion stylist from London, who lives with Kenny, 35, a musician, her boyfriend of five years. "I've spent half my adult life in the gym, watching

calories and worrying about how I look," she says. "Then I met Kenny. It may sound corny, but I found a man who thinks I look great in no make-up and loves me for being funny, sexy and clever – not because I can fit into a size eight."

As a result of this boost to her self-esteem, Camille paid less attention to her looks. "I took a break from the gym and started to enjoy my food for the first time in years," she says. "I've gained >

STARS AND THEIR THIGHS...

< weight, going up to a size 12. A few years ago, gaining so many pounds would've stressed me out, but I know Kenny wouldn't change me for the world. My improved confidence has lessened any weight issues I had before."

Yet love shape isn't solely a female issue. Men, too, can gain weight as they spend more nights hugged up on the sofa with their girlfriend and a box of chocolates. And they also experience the weight-enhancing ego boost that comes from being in a relationship.

While experts believe we should embrace a phenomena that allows us to be curvaceous, Dr Crown warns against sinking too deeply into the comfort zone. "Complacency can come with security. In other words, when you really feel your partner is with you for good, you can feel less motivation to look your best. This is natural, but can threaten the relationship if you really do stop looking after yourself."

Dr Crown often sees couples who feel the initial physical attraction has disappeared from their relationship. "Five years down the road, it's common for one partner - male or female - to complain that the other has lost their appeal, and no longer makes an effort."

Single and slimming

But it's not just couples who experience the love-shape phenomena. Single women - particularly those who are newly separated - can see their weight plummet as their lifestyle changes.

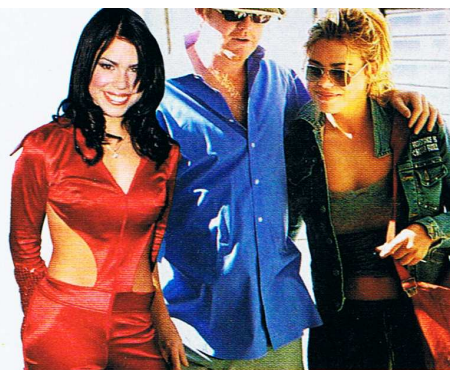


Victoria Reynard (left), 24, a training officer from Leeds, split up with her long-term boyfriend James, 25, last year.

When she decided to change her life, her body changed with it. "My friends were all in relationships, so when James moved out, my evenings were free. I joined a dance class out of boredom, but I loved it. Getting out more also meant I ate less and, in no time, my clothes were falling off me."

Losing weight when you're single, however, doesn't always happen accidentally. "Many people who want to attract a new partner come to me, saying they want to get back in shape," says Marber. "And that's often easier when you're single because bad habits - such as staying in with a takeaway - are more common in a relationship."

Dr Jim Bolton, a psychiatrist at St George's Hospital in London, agrees. "Our main drive as sexual beings is to pair up," he says. "We try to look our best to attract a partner. It makes sense that when you're single you're thinner, because society promotes being slim



▲ Billie Piper

When Billie met Chris Evans, she went from slimline teen to curvy housewife in under six months. As her gruelling tours and energetic dance routines were put on hold, Billie was seen regularly chilling out in the local pub and simply hanging out at Evans' quiet country estate.

KEEP FIT, STAY SEXY

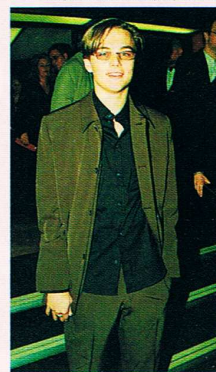
Daran Woodward, Group Fitness Manager for Holmes Place Health Clubs, has these tips to keep your love shape in check.

- Join a gym with your man and ask your trainer to come up with ideas on how you can work out together. You won't have to spend time apart and you'll be able to motivate each other to keep it up.
- Treat going to the gym as a date, not a chore. After a workout, relax in the Jacuzzi or sauna together, followed by a healthy meal in the café.
- Instead of following a romantic dinner with a film, move on to a club and dance the night away. Try salsa, to make exercise a sensual experience!
- Put some extra effort into your sex life and you'll reap huge emotional and physical benefits.
- Single people often see their weight yo-yo because of lifestyle inconsistencies. Eating regularly is far healthier than bingeing for one day and starving for two.
- If you're newly single and often out, balance all that partying with regular exercise. Try yoga, going to the gym, or maybe a team sport - you never know who you might meet.



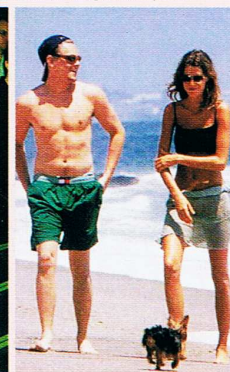
◀ Madonna

After years of highly disciplined workouts, Madonna fell in love with Guy Ritchie and declared the thousands of hours she'd spend at the gym had been, "A complete waste of time"; preferring instead to concentrate on her children, husband and yoga. The lean, mean, Queen of Pop even admitted to indulging in the occasional sticky toffee pudding and pint of Guinness. As a result, she looks more sensational than ever!



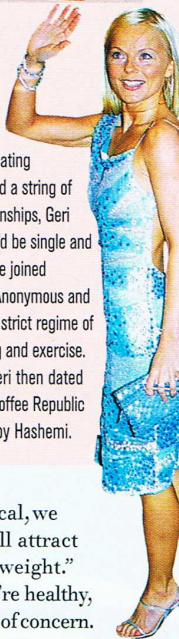
▼ Leonardo DiCaprio

Ironically, one-time heart-throb Leo piled on the pounds when he settled down with the owner of the world's most amazing body, Gisele. A talented cook, Leo was rumoured to like nothing more than a night in with his gorgeous woman and a big bowl of pasta.



◀ Geri Halliwell

After a lifelong battle with eating disorders and a string of failed relationships, Geri decided she'd be single and fabulous. She joined Overeaters Anonymous and undertook a strict regime of yoga, dieting and exercise. A happier Geri then dated super-rich Coffee Republic tycoon Bobby Hashemi.



as being attractive, and you're making every effort to attract someone new."

Sarah Flower, 22, a journalist from Bristol, lost all the weight she had gained during her five-year relationship, and more, when she and her boyfriend split up two years ago. "I'd been with Bill since I was 15 and had put on three stone over the years," she says. "When we split up, I decided to catch up on the adolescence I'd missed. I started to wear sexy clothes and would go clubbing three nights a week. Within eight months, I was a size 10 down from a size 12 to 14. While I looked great, I felt frazzled."

Steve Bloomfield, of the Eating Disorders Association, warns that such a dramatic size change can be dangerous. "It's extremely common for eating disorders to develop after the break-up of a relationship," he warns.

Dr Crown agrees: "Sadly, most people - male and female - feel less confident outside of a relationship, and

when we're being self-critical, we often feel the only way we'll attract a new partner is by losing weight."

Ultimately, so long as you're healthy, your new shape shouldn't be of concern. If you feel those curves are getting out of control, however, Dr Crown says the solution is to give the sofa a day off. "This will also give your love life a boost. Whether that means going to a concert, or joining a gym. It will enrich your partnership no end."

Now she's back in a relationship, Victoria is doing exactly this. "James and I actually got back together," she says. "But, this time, I was determined not to get stuck in a rut. I persuaded him to come along to my dance class, which he thought was hysterical, but I wanted to make sure we had plenty to do together. It's been such a laugh, losing weight has been just one of the benefits. We really look forward to it - and it gives us extra energy to spend cuddling!" □