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- **Height:** 5 feet 10 inches
- **Former weight:** 244
- **Current weight:** 183
- **Pounds lost:** 61
- **How long he's kept it off:** Started in January 2004
- **Personal life:** Mercer and his wife of 23 years, Karen, have lived in Atlanta since 1992. They have three children, ages 12 to 18. As a salesman for a health care software company, Mercer spends about half of his time on the road.
- **Turning point:** In January 2004, Karen Mercer persuaded her family to join the Carl Sanders YMCA on Moores Mill Road. "I went in for orientation and kept going back."
- **Diet plan:** After discovering last August that his cholesterol levels were high, Mercer cut back his portions, reduced his intake of

alcohol and red meat, and cut out the pizza, fries, bagels and bratwursts.

- **Exercise routine:** Every six weeks, Mercer's designated personal trainer at the Y would check in with him, offering new exercises and helping him stay on track. Mercer works out four to six times a week for 90 minutes, focusing on abdominal muscle toning and cardiovascular exercise such as swimming and walking on the treadmill.
- **Biggest challenge:** "Figuring out good diet and exercise habits on the road," Mercer said. "[I] started packing workout gear, finding YMCAs on the road, forcing my travel schedule to include time to work out." At the end of the day, instead of going to a bar with the gang, he goes to the gym.
- **Munchie antidote:** "Apples,

apples and apples," said Mercer, who often eats one at lunch, one as a midday snack and another after dinner for dessert. "In my house, they all think I'm an apple freak."

- **Secret to success:** "Basically, I view what I did not as a diet, not as an exercise routine, but a new way of living, new habits," he said. "My goal was consistency in work-out frequency and improving my health, vs. counting calories or focusing on weight. In the beginning, I only weighed myself every two weeks, so I would notice a weight loss, vs. weighing every day and getting discouraged when you did not see a weight loss."
- **How life has changed:** Last summer, Mercer had to have his clothes altered; then he had to buy a new wardrobe. Now, he says, he is "much more confident, which could be bad, as I was a

fairly confident person before."

- **Quick recipe:** Instead of throwing bratwurst on the grill, Mercer now makes his own turkey burgers: ground turkey breast, salt, pepper, sage and a high-fiber filler like whole oats. Sometimes he even adds a vegetable like chopped carrots or spinach: "Well, it's good for you, so I just throw it in."

— Deborah Geering  
for the Journal-Constitution

- **Be an inspiration:** If you've made positive changes in your diet and/or fitness routine and are happy with the results, please share your story with us. Briefly tell us your goal (weight loss, an athletic achievement, overcoming a health problem, etc.), how you achieved it, and how long you've maintained it. Include a daytime phone number and before and after photos (by mail or JPEG). Write: Success Stories, c/o Julia McBee, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Eighth Floor, 72 Marietta Street N.W., Atlanta, GA 30303; or e-mail [successtories@ajc.com](mailto:successtories@ajc.com).