

# NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Exercising Power to Lead Healthier Lives – 740,000 Participants Cast Votes for ‘Challenger of Year’ 12 Finalists Share Remarkable Stories, Inspire Others on Resolution Solutions to Lose Weight, Gain Healthier Lives in New Year

— Online Polls Open through Dec. 29 at [50millionpounds.com](http://50millionpounds.com); \$1,000 Prize for Winner, 2<sup>nd</sup> \$1,000 for One Lucky Voter —

**Chicago** – Dr. Ian Smith’s *50 Million Pound Challenge*, the free national health initiative launched April 2007 to rally Americans to come together to ‘Give up the pounds, not the fight,’ is on track to top the 3 million pounds lost milestone this month. To celebrate the progress of so many individuals towards their weight-loss goals and motivate people to renew their commitment to improving their health, the campaign has opened an online poll at [50millionpounds.com](http://50millionpounds.com) so people can vote to honor the first *Challenger of the Year*. For inspiring others to join the fight against the epidemic of excess weight taking so many U.S. lives, the winner receives a \$1,000 prize and one lucky voter also gets a \$1,000 prize.

“Every American has the power to lead a healthier, happier life,” said physician and founder Dr. Ian. “*The Challenge* helps people come together to exercise that power. This month we’re marking a major milestone by asking people to again exercise their power to vote, to honor one of 12 finalists as the *Challenger of the Year*, in recognition of their personal success as well as inspiring more Americans to shed excess pounds and gain a healthier life.

“Surpassing 3 million pounds is an important shared success for *The Challenge*. But even more important are the personal successes of each of *The Challenge*’s 740,000 participants striving for their individual weight-loss targets,” said Dr. Ian, who is also diet expert on *VH1’s Celebrity Fit Club* and *NY Times* best-selling author of *The Fat Smash Diet*. “The personal triumphs and success stories of our 12 finalists are truly remarkable. They’ve shown amazing commitment and have given and received sensational support from their friends, families and *Challenge* team members. Like no other measure, these successes set the standard for *The Challenge*, and prove the power we each have to transform our lives. We can all find inspiration and resolution solutions to lead healthier lives in the New Year.”

To discuss *The Challenge*, *Challenger of the Year* and how reaching the milestone saves lives, Dr. Ian hosted a press conference call Wednesday, December 10, where he also offered tips for how to avoid holiday weight-gain and encouraged people to utilize the myriad of free resources and join one of 17,000 *Challenge* teams at [50millionpounds.com](http://50millionpounds.com). He was joined by two *Challenger of the Year* finalists, Craig Nash of Chicago and Lawana Williams of Southfield, Mich.

**Note to media:** To participate in the Telephonic news conference on Wednesday, December 10 from 11:00 a.m. – noon ET, call number 1-800-895-0231, Conference ID: challenge. Also, all 12 *Challenger of the Year* finalists across the U.S. are available for interviews – see stories on p. 2.

A study in the July 2007 *New England Journal of Medicine* (<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/357/4/370>) found that teamwork is key. It showed close friends and family set a powerful example for each other—they tend to gain, but can also lose weight together. *The Challenge* aims to reach its goal by making it easier for millions to join together to fight the epidemic of excess weight and weight-related illness. Today more than 135 million Americans and two-thirds of adults are overweight, with the obesity rate doubling in the last few decades. Each week, 10,000 die from heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, and other illness related to inactivity and diet. African Americans are especially hard hit: 80% of women and 67% of men face higher risk from weight-related illness, with life expectancy five years below the U.S. average.

Anyone can join *The Challenge* at [50millionpounds.com](http://50millionpounds.com), the campaign’s online support community. The site tallies total pounds lost and offers participants free resources provided by sponsor State Farm®, including a 30-day diet plan, personal weight and activity trackers, and *Challenge* teams to make fitness easier and more fun. Currently, more than 17,000 *Challenge* teams are helping 90,000 members lose 20 percent more weight than the overall campaign average. It’s a winning formula—and cities, churches, civic groups, friends and families across America are teaming up to help reverse the epidemic of excess weight and turn it into a culture of healthier living.

**For more information on the telephonic news conference, *The Challenge* and to get bios and photos, contact:**

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- Mia Jazo-Harris, [mia.jazo-harris.sfdx@statefarm.com](mailto:mia.jazo-harris.sfdx@statefarm.com), 309-766-5242 (o), 309-533-2011 (cell).

## 12 'CHALLENGER OF THE YEAR' FINALIST SUCCESS STORIES – PROVING THE POWER TO TRANSFORM LIVES

- **CRAIG E. NASH, Chicago, IL** (*Challenge Team: The Power of Friendship-Craig's Friends*)  
**I started at 390 pounds and lost 199 pounds!**  
 Thank you, State Farm and The 50 Million Pound Challenge, for changing my life forever! I started turning my life around on March 1, 2007. At 390 pounds and with the support of two great friends, I started eating better and working out on a regular basis. I have been and continue to be encouraged by you, my State Farm agent and The Challenge to make wise decisions and apply the lessons learned going forward to maintain my transformation. I hope people can find inspiration from my story and photos to 'turn around' their lives and move in a healthy direction.
- **LAWANA R. WILLIAMS, Southfield, MI** (*Challenge Team: Sisters Inspiring Sisters*)  
**I've lost 38 pounds myself and motivated almost 500 others to lose more than 3,300 lbs!**  
 I signed up for *The Challenge* in July 2007 after participating in the Detroit rally. Since then, I started a team, *Sisters Inspiring Sisters*. I am proud to say we are nearly 500 members strong and growing – and together we have all lost more than 3,300 pounds! *The Challenge* has helped me to stay focused, determined to lose weight, and be a healthier and happier person. I work as a receptionist and most of the day I am sitting, so I made up in my mind that no matter what, I was going to walk on my lunch break for 30 minutes and eat a healthy lunch the other 30 minutes.
- **CHARMEN DALEY, Orlando, FL** (*Challenge Team: Women in the Mirror*)  
**My starting weight was 429 pounds and I've lost 127 pounds!**  
 Charmen made a New Year's resolution in 2007 to lose 100 of her then 429 pounds, but didn't get serious until eight months later when watching sad stories about morbidly obese people on TV and realizing she was one of them. With a good friend who is a personal trainer helping get her started, the 29-year-old joined *The Challenge* and lost 127 pounds. She encourages others "to realize effort only fully releases its reward when you refuse to *quit*. Today, I feel great! I eat three meals and two snacks daily and drink lots of water! I weight train twice a week with my trainer and I exercise at home 3-4 times a week at least 45 minutes. I learned how to eat. I'm more mobile than ever, my self-confidence is through the roof, and I've lost 82 pounds in 5 months! I get so excited every time I see my weight-loss tracker.
- **TAHIRA DAVIS, Cleveland, OH** (*Challenge Team: Fit4Cleveland*)  
**I lost 29 pounds and I'm still losing!**  
 I've always struggled with my weight but I didn't realize how much until this year. It was our 100th anniversary at my job and the manager decided to compile a DVD of all employees...I couldn't believe what everyone saw when they looked at me weighing 187 pounds. I decided then and there I needed to do something ...I am losing more and loving it. Water is a key part of my success.
- **MARCELLA JONES, Yorktown, VA**  
**I lost 60 pounds and regained my confidence!**  
 My motivation was the guy that worked at 7-11. He said to all the other people in line, "Pregnant people are gorgeous aren't they? How far along are you?" I was devastated because I was not pregnant! I had lost my husband and myself to obesity. The next day I typed out what the clerk said and I began my journey to 140 pounds. I lost 65 pounds in 5 months and kept it off for over a year.
- **ANNA MARY LOPEZ, Orlando, FL** (*Challenge Team: Busy Moms - started by Lopez & Team Destiny - church team*)  
**I lost 46 pounds and plan to lose 24 more!**  
 As a stay-at-home Mom with 2 babies under two, *The Challenge* has helped me shed my "baby weight" despite barely having time to eat, let alone eat right. I am taking charge of my health for myself and my kids. I drink a glass of water before each meal and watch portions – bought smaller plates so the portions look larger. For exercise, I use my kids as weights and run back and forth from task to task to get my heart rate up! My dream is for my husband to pick me up and carry me like his bride!
- **FEMI MARTIN, Brandon, FL**  
**I've lost more than 50 pounds and I'm close to my goal!**  
 The turning point came when my doctor informed me that I had gained an additional 15 pounds and had now reached 234 pounds. I couldn't fathom that I had put on exactly 100 pounds at 5'7" since graduating from college. I dusted off the kicks and got to walking every day. My most prized memory in my journey came when I stepped on the scale and it read 199 pounds. Now, I have so much more confidence and reassurance I will continue to follow this healthy lifestyle.
- **CHRISTOPHER MCCRAY, Hampton, GA**  
**I changed my eating habits and life forever!**  
 I was diagnosed with Type II diabetes in 1999, and hit rock bottom when I topped out at 345 pounds. In Nov. 2007, I started my weight-loss program by cutting out sugar and my intake of starches and began to eat 5 small meals a day. I work out at the gym and home 4-5 times a week. I can't stress how much water has been a key to my success. I now weigh 295 and am more active and feel better than ever. In May 2008 he married his high school sweetheart, motivating the 41-year old McCray's decision to get healthier. He wants to be here to enjoy the beginning of the rest of his life.

- **TIKIA BROWN-MONTGOMERY AND MICHAEL MONTGOMERY, Indianapolis, IN** (*Challenge Team: We Believe*)

**We lost a combined 31 pounds and are on track towards our goal!**

When my husband and I first got together his weight was 220 and mine was 170. He now weighs 370 and I weigh 240. We got tired of people telling us we need to lose weight...so we decided to make a change! It was very hard at first because we were so used to eating fast food, fried foods, and all types of sweets. Together, we're putting forth effort to lose, and reach our goal weights.

- **KENYA MORGAN, Salisbury, NC** (*Challenge Team: Isenberg Elite*)

**I lost 70 pounds and surpassed my goal!**

I decided to lose weight when my health became a real issue. I had very high blood pressure that couldn't be controlled by the strongest medicines. I began walking each day. As my strength grew, I began jogging and am now up to running 8 miles a day. I eat six small healthy meals a day, stopped eating sugar and drinking sodas, and drink only water, 80 ounces or more a day. I'm down to a slim 119 pounds from a starting weight of 189 pounds. Now, she says she no longer needs her blood pressure or heart medication. I knew I wanted to be there for my husband and children and they deserved to have me at my best. There's no greater motivation than that.

- **MICHELLE THOMAS, Colorado Springs, CO**

**I lost 60 pounds and that's half of my goal!**

I've been obese and eventually morbidly obese since grade school. In July 2006 after tipping the scales at a whopping 265 pounds and only being 5 feet tall, I decided to change my eating habits and add exercise. The pounds started to come off easily. I am religiously at the gym 5 days a week...and I can't mention how much I love water. This has been a fun and adventurous challenge for me. So many people have come up to me at the gym just to tell me I look great or keep up the good work and I have inspired them. Just knowing that I can inspire others to change has been the greatest thing that can happen to me. Another plus, Thomas adds, is teaching the healthy habits she's learned to her children.

- **DEBORAH WRIGHT, West Haven, CT** (*Challenge Team: Bethel AME New Haven*)

**I lost nearly 50 pounds, dropped 2 sizes and no longer need my diabetes medications!**

After going to the doctor and being told that I was diabetic, she knew she could no longer put off losing weight and getting fit. "I started to focus on many smaller goals instead of one large goal. I soon realized it was achieving the little goals that kept me motivated to continue. Who knew something as simple as eating 6 small meals a day, instead of skipping breakfast or dinner, would truly help you to lose weight? One small step today...one large goal tomorrow! Being on *The Challenge* means I can now fit into a size 22, and I no longer need my diabetes medications.

For more details on *The 50 Million Pound Challenge*, also visit [50millionpounds.com](http://50millionpounds.com).

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**About The 50 Million Pound Challenge:**

Dr. Ian Smith's *50 Million Pound Challenge* is a national health initiative encouraging people to come together and take control of their health by getting fit, losing excess weight and turning back the deadly toll of weight-related diseases that threaten nearly half of Americans and hits the African-American community especially hard. *The Challenge*, a free campaign supported and endorsed in name and deed by national civic and health organizations, is sponsored by State Farm.

**About Dr. Ian Smith:**

Dr. Ian is a diet expert on *VH1's Celebrity Fit Club* and author of the *NY Times* #1 best-sellers *Fat Smash Diet* and *Extreme Fat Smash Diet*, and other works of fiction and non-fiction. He hosts his own TV and radio shows, *BET's Meet the Faith* and *HealthWatch* on *American Urban Radio Network*. Dr. Ian is a contributor to *The View* and *Men's Health Magazine*. He has filed reports and written for *NBC Nightly News*, *Today Show*, *Essence*, *Ebony*, *People*, *Cosmopolitan* and the University of Chicago's *Medicine on the Midway*.

**About State Farm:**

State Farm insures more cars and homes than any other insurer in the U.S., is the leading insurer of watercraft and is also a leading insurer in Canada. State Farm's 17,000 agents and 68,000 employees serve more than 78 million auto, fire, life and health policies in the United States and Canada, and more than 1.9 million bank accounts. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company is the parent of the State Farm family of companies. State Farm is ranked No. 32 on the Fortune 500 list of largest companies. For more information, please visit [statefarm.com](http://statefarm.com) or in Canada [statefarm.ca](http://statefarm.ca).