From 118kg to 70kg: A striking transformation that reflects discipline, consistency, and a renewed commitment to health. PHOTO/STEPHEN OTAGE

Minister Cheptoris' 48kg weight loss journey

After years of unhealthy eating habits and related health complications, Water and Environment Minister Sam Cheptoris says he has transformed his lifestyle through strict dietary changes, medical treatment and a cleaner living environment, leading to a 48-kilogramme weight loss.

BY ROLAND D NASASIRA

For many years, the Minister for Water and Environment, Sam Cheptoris, weighed about 118 kilogrammes. At 78, he now reflects on that period with a mix of humour and regret, describing his walking style then as resembling "a hippopotamus."

He says the weight accumulated gradually over years of poor dietary habits marked by alcohol and heavy meals. His routine often included a daily bottle of white or sweet red wine, Amarula, or Baileys, consumed after meals or during official travel.

"I do not know how many chickens have died in my compound over more than 10 years," he says. "Little did I know that the food and drinks would later cause disease."

Fried chicken and other fatty foods were a constant feature of his diet, a lifestyle he now links to a series of health complications, including high blood pressure, acid reflux, and kidney-related concerns.

When illness began to set in

By early 2024, Cheptoris says his health had significantly deteriorated. He sought medical attention at Mulago National Referral Hospital over persistent acid reflux.

When treatment there did not resolve the problem, he visited several private facilities in Kampala, including Nakasero Hospital and Case Clinic, but says he did not get a lasting solution.

"I combed the whole of Kampala and visited all the so-called good hospitals, but nothing could be done," he recalls.

He adds that while doctors could diagnose conditions, he felt they rarely offered lifestyle guidance beyond prescribing medication.

A medical journey across countries

With no improvement, Cheptoris says he travelled to Kenya for further treatment, visiting several hospitals, including Aga Khan and others in Nairobi. He later proceeded to South Africa, where he recalls being diagnosed with goitre.

Despite the consultations, he says his condition remained unresolved, prompting further advice from friends to seek treatment in Germany in March 2024.

It was there, he says, that doctors conducted more detailed examinations and identified multiple health concerns, including an irregular heartbeat and cancerous cells that required medical intervention.

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THE MINISTER'S STARTING WEIGHT

He also recalls being told that his spinal structure had stiffened, limiting movement and contributing to pain and digestive complications.

Intensive treatment and lifestyle reset

According to Cheptoris, doctors recommended a combination of medication and lifestyle adjustments, including drugs to manage acid levels, strengthen the heart, and reduce excess body fluids.

He was also advised to change his diet and avoid processed foods, sugar-heavy drinks, and alcohol.

"I have been losing weight gradually with medication and by avoiding foods rich in sugar and places with air pollution, especially smoke," he says.

He also mentions being fitted with specialised orthopaedic support shoes meant to help correct posture and spinal alignment, which he says were expensive but necessary.

The turning point

After leaving Germany in late 2025, Cheptoris says he stayed in Kenya for a while before returning to Uganda.

During this time, he made major changes to his diet, replacing fried foods and alcohol with more traditional and natural foods.

His current meals, he says, include tilapia, matooke, sweet potatoes, yams, carrots, cucumber, and fruits such as apples, grapes, and bananas. For breakfast, he prefers boiled eggs, though he avoids the yolk due to cholesterol concerns.

Instead of cow's milk, he uses plant-based alternatives, drinks green tea, and uses olive oil for cooking. He also consumes homemade juice without added sugar and uses natural honey instead of refined sugar.

"I eat foods such as kalo that are rich in fibre, and fruits such as cape gooseberries (entuntunu), which improve immunity and alertness," he explains.

Battling air pollution and sleepless nights

Despite dietary improvements, Cheptoris says air pollution remained a challenge when he stayed on Jinja Road, where vehicle emissions affected his breathing and sleep.

"I would wake up several times at night and sleep for only about two hours," he says. "I became busier at night than during the day."

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

From 118 kilogrammes at his heaviest to around 70 kilogrammes today, Cheptoris describes his journey as one of self-realisation.

He says the experience has taught him that human health is closely tied to what people eat and the environments they live in.

"Human bodies become what they are fed with," he reflects. "With eating right and living in a natural environment, life can change significantly."

He later moved to a quieter area in Mukono, near a wetland environment with cleaner air, which he says improved his sleep patterns and overall well-being.

"I noticed my body responds better to a natural environment. There has been a dramatic change in my life," he says.

Life now and lessons learnt

Cheptoris says he now weighs between 68 and 72 kilogrammes, a significant reduction from his previous weight.

He strongly advises people to rethink their diets and prioritise natural foods over processed and fried meals.

"When fried foods are your daily diet, you may not notice it, but you are slowly dying," he warns. "You start with one illness, then another, and by the time you realise, it is too late."

He also encourages people to reflect on traditional diets and adopt more natural eating habits.

On the environment, he adds that living near clean, green spaces is important for overall health, especially for respiratory wellbeing.

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