


## P r e f a c e

by Monica Sweeney, MD

*Dr. Monica Sweeney has lost two dress sizes and stayed a reasonable weight for over fifteen years on her own variation of “The Joy of Weight Loss.” She is Vice President and Medical Director, Bedford-Stuyvesant Family Health Center, Brooklyn, NY, past President, Kings County Medical Society, and a member of the Public Health Committee of the New York State Medical Society.*

 When one thinks of illnesses and diseases that result from obesity, most people think of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. We refer to these as the big three. But the list is very long and includes: depression/social isolation, arthritis/back pain, pulmonary embolus (blood clots from the legs, thighs, to the lungs), gallbladder disease, sleep apnea, infertility in women, increased cancer risk in men and women, chronic lack of energy, etc. For over twenty years I have practiced medicine in New York City. From the beginning, my focus has been on disease prevention and health promotion through healthier life styles. These strategies have included stopping smoking, exercising regularly, and losing weight.

I’m really sorry I didn’t have a complete guide to weight loss like Norris Chumley’s *The Joy of Weight Loss* when I began my program. Long before obesity was reclassified by the American Heart Association as a major modifiable risk factor to prevent heart disease, I would tell my patients: “I can’t help you unless you help yourself; this is a partnership.”

The story of just one of my patients stands out, because he only needed the message once. The patient, who is a judge who had been recommended to me by a surgeon friend of mine, complained of severe shortness of breath, especially when walking, chest pain, and indigestion—just to mention a few problems. After I had obtained a complete history and conducted a physical examination, making sure he didn’t already have heart disease, I began to give him his exit consultation. He interrupted and said: “Other than the fact I’m overweight, what else is ‘wrong with me’?”

“Nothing else,” I said. I explained that his blood pressure was high and that his sugar was high, but that the best treatment for all his symptoms was to lose 100 pounds. I then told him that if he didn’t lose weight, he should select the suit in which

he wished to be buried. He left the office without making the recommended follow-up appointment. A few years later at a social gathering held by the same surgeon friend I was introduced to a handsome young man who said to me: “You should remember people whose life you saved.” It was the judge. He had lost the 100 pounds and, with the loss, all his medical problems had gone.

I have hundreds of success stories about people who changed their lives by losing twenty pounds or so. The latest medical evidence confirms great health improvements with modest weight loss. If I had had a tool like *The Joy of Weight Loss*, maybe some of my failures would have been successes. But I’m thankful that it’s available now to millions of overweight Americans. Restrictive dieting is not the answer. Losing weight is easy; keeping it off is the hard part. The best “diet” to accomplish this goal is a varied and well-balanced diet, eaten in moderation for life. That’s the plan in *The Joy of Weight Loss*.

In addition to food self-management, exercising regularly is the other essential part of the program. I tell my patients: find an enjoyable activity, schedule it into your daily routine, and stay with it. I walk around Prospect Park with a friend early in the morning for about an hour. That hour is one of my greatest daily pleasures. When I can’t walk because I have an early train or plane, I feel very deprived. My energy level decreases, my sleep and elimination are impaired, and in the end I just have to go for a walk.

I myself have used *The Joy of Weight Loss* weight loss program. Food used to control me. When I was sad I would eat; when I was tired I would eat; when I was celebrating I would eat; when I was angry I would eat. I was unwilling to accept that anymore; so I made the decision that I wasn’t going to let it happen and...something snapped. “Enough of this already,” I said. I did then what is a fundamental component of *The Joy of Weight Loss*’s success as a program. I sought God’s help.

I had a real burden and so I got rid of the burden. I didn’t do it by myself. I became more spiritual, thinking more about seeing myself in a different place. I thought about my father a lot during this period and how he used to talk about overcoming obstacles. He wasn’t talking about weight, but he was talking about faith and having faith to solve problems. His faith was in the scriptural passage: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” I decided I could lose weight based on that message; I just had to have faith that I could do it with God’s help.

That really was the turning point. It had to do with turning my will over to a higher power.

Developing good habits is the second key step after surrendering your will to a higher power. During my journey, once the idea of putting my faith to work for my weight problem came into my consciousness, it was easy to surrender my will—it's what I had done so many times for other things. Believe me, surrendering is easy after many, many failures. I have always incorporated my patients' spiritual beliefs into their medical care. Once you surrender your will to a higher power, you will immediately feel better.

I have been on a version of *The Joy of Weight Loss* program for years. It works! I eat all the foods I like in smaller amounts. Over the years, I've learned how to let go of unhealthy habits that would jeopardize my achieving health and happiness. I don't weigh myself (I haven't for years); but I wear the same size clothing since I lost two dress sizes years ago. I exercise by walking four miles four to five times a week. The most important part of my journey is that I no longer eat to feel joy. My life is full of joy though my faith in God.

I call it a burden shared, but you can call it what you will. At heart, *The Joy of Weight Loss* is a two-step program: Surrender to your higher power and feel the joy while losing weight.

I try and become centered, to see God in me and in everyone. That helps me also with other problems, because I don't take out my frustration on food now. If you listen to that little voice inside, you'll be guided rightly—something that's true with so many things and food. Now I know how much to eat; I eat more sensibly, and for the right reasons. I have proof: God helped me!