

# Sweet Success

A 12-step program and healthier eating habits helped Rosa Lewis kick sugar addiction's butt.

May 30, 2007 As told to Lori Sharps

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**Name** Rosa Lewis

**Age** 65

**Height** 5'1"

**Weight Before** 165 lbs.

**Weight After** 140 lbs.

**Weight Loss Method** 12-Step Program (Overeaters Anonymous)

**HOW I GOT HOOKED ON SWEETS** I always had a routine that worked—I walked every day for at least 90 minutes. But then my dog died and I retired from teaching so I stopped walking. I started eating a lot of sugar and after a while I was addicted; I couldn't get enough. I would drive all over to get a particular type of jellybean and eat sweets for meals.

**THE LOW POINT** At 165 pounds—my all-time heaviest—I had no energy. I was pre-diabetic, suffering from hyperthyroidism, and had a mysterious cyst on my leg that caused excruciating pain.

**THE TURNAROUND** I got tired of my own behavior. I needed to be in a program that would help me cut out the sugar. But it had to offer structure and a spiritual answer.

**THE 12-STEP SOLUTION** After doing research, I discovered and joined Overeaters Anonymous (OA), a 12-step program that helps people recover from food addiction. OA emphasizes abstaining from compulsive eating and provides a worldwide network of support. But while I did love my daily talks with my sponsor, without a concrete diet plan, I was afraid the cravings would take over. A woman at my meeting told me about a stricter OA spin-off that forbade snacking and would require me to weigh all of my food. After joining the alternative group, I did a 180-degree turnaround.

**THE NEW ME** I drink lots of water; and I eat yogurt and strawberries for breakfast and 4 ounces of lean protein and veggies for lunch and dinner. I've also started walking again, but I mix it up with belly dancing and Pilates.

**THE PAYOFF** In over a year, I've lost 25 pounds and my medical issues have disappeared,

including the cyst. It was not an easy fix, but I'm healthier now than when I was 50.

## **ROSA'S TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

### **Support is key**

It's not always easy, but if I ever have a craving for sugar, I can pick up the phone and call someone anywhere in the world, any time of the day to get advice.

### **Portion control**

My eyes don't always tell me the truth. Now, I weigh all of my food on a scale to make sure I do not overeat.

### **Believe in yourself**

Don't lose hope. No matter where you are, the weight can come off.

## **IS OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS FOR YOU?**

Twelve-step programs combat addiction with meetings, peer support and spirituality.

**PROS** OA is best "for people who believe their overeating is attributable to emotional problems," says Thomas Wadden, PhD, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Weight and Eating Disorders.

**CONS** To some health pros, it's problematic that many members diagnose themselves as "addicted to sugar and flour" without a caregiver's opinion