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 Tharps

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

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