

INTRODUCTION

Coughing, gasping for air, and terrified, I found myself bolting upright in bed, trying to clear the acrid stomach contents from my lungs. Sleep apnea, compounded by gastric reflux, had caused aspiration of gastric juices into my respiratory system. I was momentarily unable to breathe. It had happened many times before; at least I always woke up.

But what if I didn't wake up? That was the unasked question behind the look of terror in my wife's eyes on so many prior nights. I'd come to know the look well. It was almost always followed by insistence that I should see the doctor. Being a nurse, she knew a sleep study, formal diagnosis, and interventions were needed. Being a critical care nurse, I knew where that would lead. Soon I'd be wearing a positive pressure mask with oxygen for breathing at night and taking several prescription medications. I wasn't even 40 years old. I wasn't ready to be some debilitated old man either staggering toward a wheelchair in a nursing home or being confined to an easy chair in my own home and burdening my dear wife, Becky.

Secretly, in my heart I knew the answer was closer to the kitchen table than to the doctor's office. More than 100 pounds overweight, I was facing 40 years old and suffering from chronic health conditions I usually saw in patients a decade older. I was morbidly obese.

Along with the sleep apnea and gastric reflux disease, I had high blood pressure and prediabetes. My bad cholesterol (*LDL*) was high and my good cholesterol (*HDL*) was low. I wore a size 46 pants. I suffered from what was being identified at the time as metabolic syndrome. Had I gone to the doctor, I would have been placed on at least three prescription medications

Your journey begins now.

and the positive pressure oxygen breathing device. In short, I was a heart attack, stroke, and/or diabetic crisis waiting to happen. All the while denying it, I was on my way to a life full of disease in a prison of disability.

Finally regaining my breath and feeling my pulse settle down to a more subpanic level, I looked over and gratefully realized Becky hadn't awakened this time. I didn't need to hear it again—or did I? After getting out of bed and slipping into our bathroom, I sat for a moment to contemplate. How had I gotten to this point? Something had to change, but what? Tears flowed as a familiar feeling of hopelessness washed over me. Vivid and familiar images flashed across my mind: an overweight and ashamed little boy; my enormous belly in the mirror as I tried to suck it in and make it be okay; the alarmed look on my wife's face; my son without a healthy father; me as the disabled and miserable 60-year-old man of my future. What was the answer? Did I even know the right question?

I had tried a hundred diets that always led back to obesity and unhappiness. I had been fat since I was a baby. During my school age years, I endured teasing and ridicule. In high school, I excelled in academics and music but silently suffered from my physical limitations. In my 20s, I had my gallbladder removed.

Finally, I had resigned myself to being fat, even though the well-informed fear of health consequences continued to haunt me. Maybe I was just somebody who couldn't lose the weight and keep it off, I rationalized. Lots of overweight people in my family accepted poor genetics as the cause of their size, perhaps I should too. Or maybe, I thought, I should just accelerate the process, bypassing all the chronic disease and being a burden

on my family. I could plan an "accident" in which I would die, thereby escaping this dreadful fate.

Resolving to fight, I recalled a time period when I had dietary success while following a carbohydrate-restricted diet. This was prior to any low-carbohydrate diets gaining popularity and widespread acceptance. Somehow I knew there was a beginning in that short-lived dietary success. In a moment of clarity and acceptance, I gained access to a new willingness. I was determined to learn all I could. I would utilize my bachelor of science background to devour all the current scientific literature I could regarding the metabolic syndrome and strategies for overcoming obesity. I would not give up and die; I would fight and live well. This was in the fall of 2000.

It is now the summer of 2007. I am at least 100 pounds lighter. (I don't know the exact number because I had stopped weighing myself at 265 pounds.) I shed the first 60 pounds of fat in about 2 years, following parts of what eventually became the program described in this book. I felt much better. I was still overweight, but my blood chemistries and risk for heart disease had markedly improved (without medication). I was becoming free from the sleep apnea, gastric reflux disease, and high blood pressure. For 2 years after that, my fasting blood sugar remained a bit higher than normal, and I was stuck on a plateau about 40 pounds heavier than now. In the meantime, my marriage was disintegrating. Counseling didn't seem to be working, and it felt like Becky didn't really want me to change my health once I started. Change can be such a challenge.

Snapping out of my complacency and despair, I started doing research again, devouring all I could from nutrition

science and medical literature. I started modifying the plan I had been following to incorporate what I was learning about obesity, inflammation, and insulin resistance. I changed my approach to exercise. I shed the next 40 pounds of fat. I developed recipes and strategies to allow my new program to be followed under any circumstances. My blood chemistries made a quantum leap to improvement as my HDL cholesterol increased to a level greater than my LDL cholesterol. I started sharing my secrets with patients, their families, and friends as I continued to voraciously read anything I could find related to these topics.

Soon people started telling me to write a book. I can be a bit thickheaded. It took about a hundred times of hearing that before the light bulb went on. Thank goodness for all those people.

Thank goodness for my personal journey from the terrifying hell of early chronic disease, extremely high risk for heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and daily unwellness to a place of optimal wellness.

If you are significantly overweight and have been for a long time, if you have tried many diets in the past only to return to cravings or feelings of deprivation that caused you to give up, if you can relate to any parts of my story, then please know that there is hope and keep reading.

I'm an ordinary guy who has uncovered an extraordinary way to help you eliminate overweight without feeling deprived or suffering through meals with child-sized portions. I have expanded the work of many health experts and combined proven methods to produce not only my own success but also success with patients and families with whom I have worked over the years.

What I want more than anything is to share my program with you in a way that will help you implement it and create your own story of success. Every cell in my body is convinced that you now hold the key to a permanent solution for your obesity. My mission is to educate you and inspire you.

You can do this. I will show you how.

Your journey begins now.

Phil Larson