

Why We **Gain Weight,**

How We **Lose Weight**

Three Catawba Tribal Members Tell What Happened and What Worked



De Harris lost 30 pounds.

Samuel Beck lost 25 pounds.



WEIGHT LOSS AND GETTING FIT ARE COMPLEX MATTERS. TV and magazines try to make it simple: exercise and eat less, and you will lose weight. But why we gain weight, and how we are able to lose weight, isn't just about our bodies.

Our physical bodies are reflections of our hearts and minds. Many of us gain weight when we are depressed or stressed. We can lose weight when we are inspired by information, a loved one, or the Creator.

These members of the Catawba Tribe in South Carolina are examples of the mind, soul, and body connection. Together, they lost 80 pounds. They are still losing weight and getting fitter. To understand how they lost weight, we must first look at why they gained weight.

■ Depression and gaining weight

One of the most common reasons to gain weight is depression. When we are depressed, sometimes it is hard to just get out of bed and get dressed. The thought of walking for 30 minutes or going to the gym is ridiculous.

At the same time, our reason for eating changes. While depressed, food is no longer a source of nutrition or fuel, it is a source of comfort. Something salty and crispy, or baked and gooey, can make us instantly feel better.

When De Harris lost her beloved mother, the last thing on her mind was staying fit and managing her weight. "I began to eat constantly," she remembers. "I ate whatever was available. It didn't matter. Eating was filling a void. I started eating sweets and ate a lot of them."

When Cindy Allen's beloved husband became ill with cancer, Cindy was so emotionally distraught, she began to eat. "I just kept on eating, not doing anything else."

Cindy and her husband were so much a team that when he lost his hair during cancer therapy, Cindy's hair began to thin. "We were so connected," she says. When he died, Cindy experienced months of sadness and weight gain. She ended up gaining 70 pounds. "It was like I grew another whole person." Now Cindy says, "Looking back, yes, I was probably depressed."

Samuel Beck had diabetes and was on a healthy path when he was involved in a car



Cindy Allen lost 25 pounds.

By Cecilia Kayano
and Ramona Kiyoshk
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Photos by Ramona
Kiyoshk



Cindy says overcoming depression was a first step to losing weight. Her family helped her.

and inactive for over three years.

■ Climbing out of depression

To state it simply, depression can stop you in your tracks and for a long time. Many say that it is almost impossible to lose weight and get fit while depressed. Many say that the first step to being healthy is to be happy.

So how did De, Cindy, and Samuel climb out of the dark hole of depression? No one can point to an exact moment. Rather, the way they recovered from depression was a mixture of spirit, information, and family.

■ Help from above

During her darkest days, De thought about suicide. “The only reason I wanted to take my life was to be with my mom,” she says.

The Creator and her spiritual beliefs gave her strength. “I realized that if I took my life, I would not

Samuel’s wife, Sue, helps him keep the weight off by joining him on walks.

accomplish what I wanted because my Creator would not let me.” Following Native beliefs, De believes that suicide is wrong.

De received help and support from her grown children, but mostly she found her way out of depression through her own will and prayer. She knew it was up to her to make positive changes.

De was hired as a Nursing Assistant at the Catawba Service Center. As if in response to her prayers, the sadness began to lift. She slowly began to change her eating and exercise habits, and in a few months, lost 30 pounds.

■ Help from family and determination

As Cindy’s depression was lifting, she was diagnosed with diabetes. “That was my wake-up call,” she says.

accident. One day he was exercising and eating right, and the next day, he had a broken pelvis. He was put on pain killers. He could barely get around. He could not exercise. For over three years, the once take-charge man did little more than sit in an easy chair. He felt defeated. The weight piled on.

■ Depression’s grip

Depression is a formidable foe. De gives a vivid description of its power, “My mom and I had always celebrated holidays together. When she passed, I could no longer get together with family members. I quit my job. The only thing I could do was housekeeping, because it was on my own time. I couldn’t deal with other people.”

Depression is powerful and can last for a long time. De was depressed for five years. Cindy was depressed for four years. Samuel was lethargic



Her sisters and children had supported her during her husband's illness, and they were there for Cindy to help her with diabetes. They joined her in taking better care of her health by walking with her. When they went shopping, they all read food labels.

Cindy returned to one of her former good habits: She started reading health magazines. She became re-inspired to lose weight, get fit, and manage her diabetes. She started using a pedometer on her daily walks.

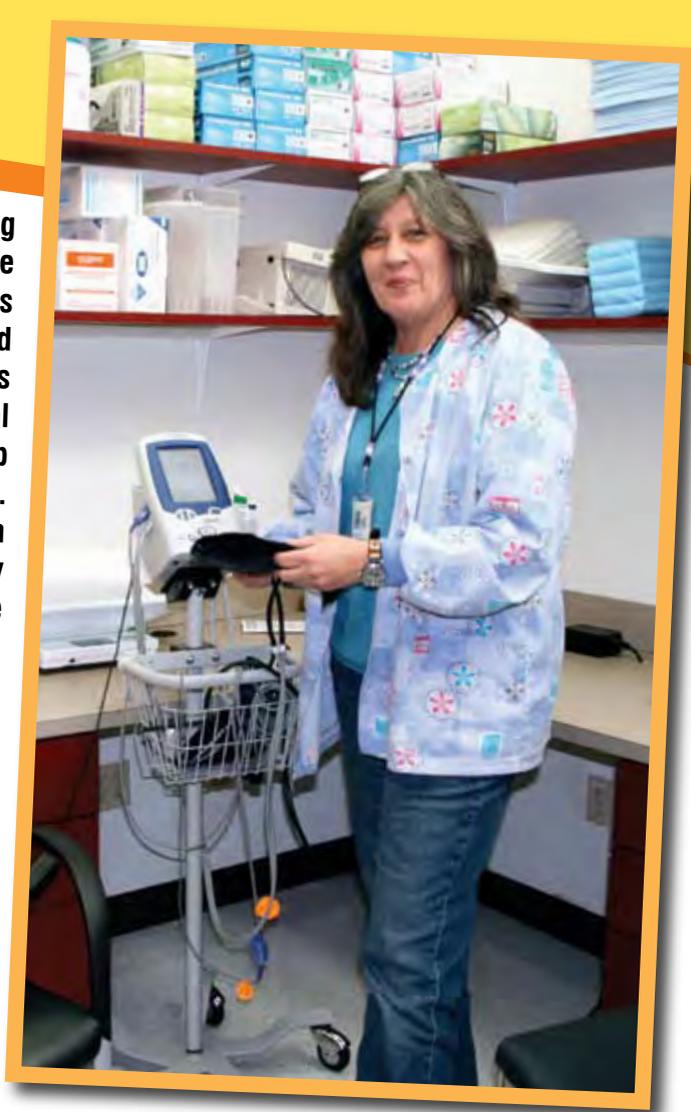
She says she was able to climb out of depression with help from her family and her own determination to be well with diabetes.

■ Help from the Lord and wife

Samuel is like De and Cindy. He says it was the Lord and his wife who enabled him



As a Nursing Assistant, De helps clients see that good eating habits and physical exercise help body and spirit. "The motivation to be healthy has to come from inside," says De.



to quit using pain medications, which helped him start feeling more clear minded. "When I quit taking the pills, I started walking. At first, I could only walk to the end of my driveway. Then I could walk an eighth of a mile, then a mile. Six months later, I could walk two miles a day."

His wife, Sue, helped him. "She walked with me. She still walks with me. We walk in the morning, about two and a half miles, before we go to work. Her company helps me tremendously."

■ Much more than weight loss

The weight-loss stories of De, Cindy, and Samuel make you want to cheer. De lost 30 pounds. Cindy lost 25 pounds. Samuel lost 25 pounds. But after you know their real stories, you are even more in awe. You realize that their weight loss is not their big success. Their big success is that they overcame depression. They overcame it with a belief in big powers—knowledge, the love of family, and the Creator.

