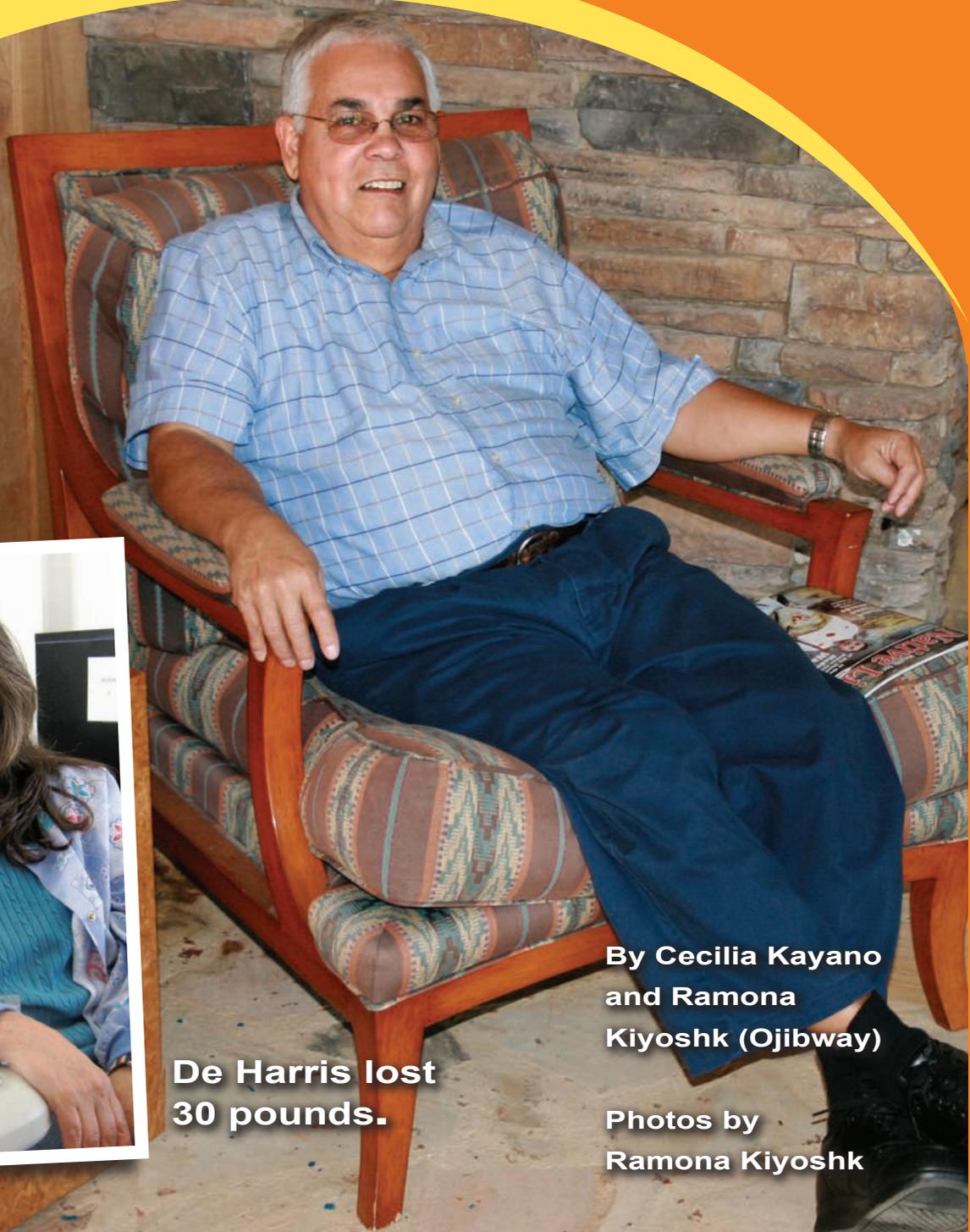


# Why We Gain Weight, How We Lose Weight

Three Catawba Tribal Members  
Tell What Happened and What Worked



**De Harris lost  
30 pounds.**

**By Cecilia Kayano  
and Ramona  
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**Photos by  
Ramona Kiyoshk**

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.



**Cindy Allen lost 25 pounds.**

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

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 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 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.

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.

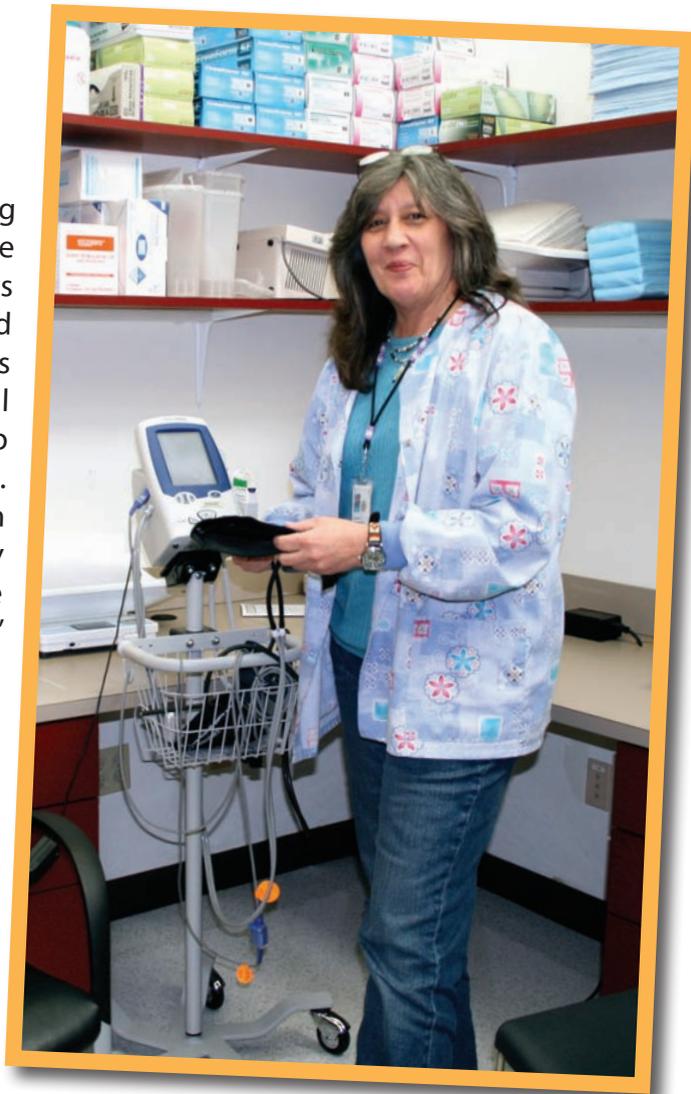
Cindy returned to one of her former good habits: She started reading health magazines. She became re-inspired to lose weight, get fit, and manage her diabetes. She started using a pedometer on her daily walks.

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 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

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.



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.”

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

### ■ 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.



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## Donald Rodgers

Chief of the Catawba Tribe

Lost: 30 pounds  
Gained: More energy

Years with diabetes: 14

Old habits: Ate whatever he wanted, no exercise

Reason for not changing habits: "I enjoyed food."

**Moment of change:** Five years ago, the doctor told him he needed to go on insulin. He went to talk to his mother, who has many diabetes complications. She said to Donald, "Quit eating the way you are eating. Start walking. You need to exercise and lose some weight."

**What helped him change:** Prayer and support from his mother and his wife, Cindy

**What he does to keep the weight off:** Walks regularly and eats more fresh fruit and veggies, less sugar and fewer carbohydrates

**What he orders at restaurants:** Salads, grilled food, and water to drink

**Weight before and after lifestyle change:** 260 to 230 pounds

**Weight loss:** 30 pounds

**Hemoglobin A1c:** 6.5%

**Added benefit of losing weight:** "I have lots of energy!"



## Florence Wade

Elder of the Catawba Tribe

Lost: 17 pounds  
Gained: Ability to play with great grandchildren

Years with diabetes: 10

**Moment of change:** Immediately after being diagnosed.

"The doctor told me I had to lose weight. I went home and set a goal to lose 15 pounds."

**What helped her change:** Has a "just-do-it" attitude to do whatever it takes to be healthy and live long

**What she does to stay fit:** Walks one mile every day, does yard work, dances traditional Catawba dance, makes pottery, doesn't eat sweets, limits desserts to one on Sunday, eats lots of fresh fruits and vegetables

**What she does to relax:** Makes traditional Catawba baskets

**Weight before and after lifestyle change:** 124 to 107 pounds

**Weight loss:** 17 pounds

**Added benefit of losing weight:** "I have energy to babysit three great grandchildren!"



Produced by IHS  
Division of Diabetes  
Treatment and  
Prevention, 2/2012