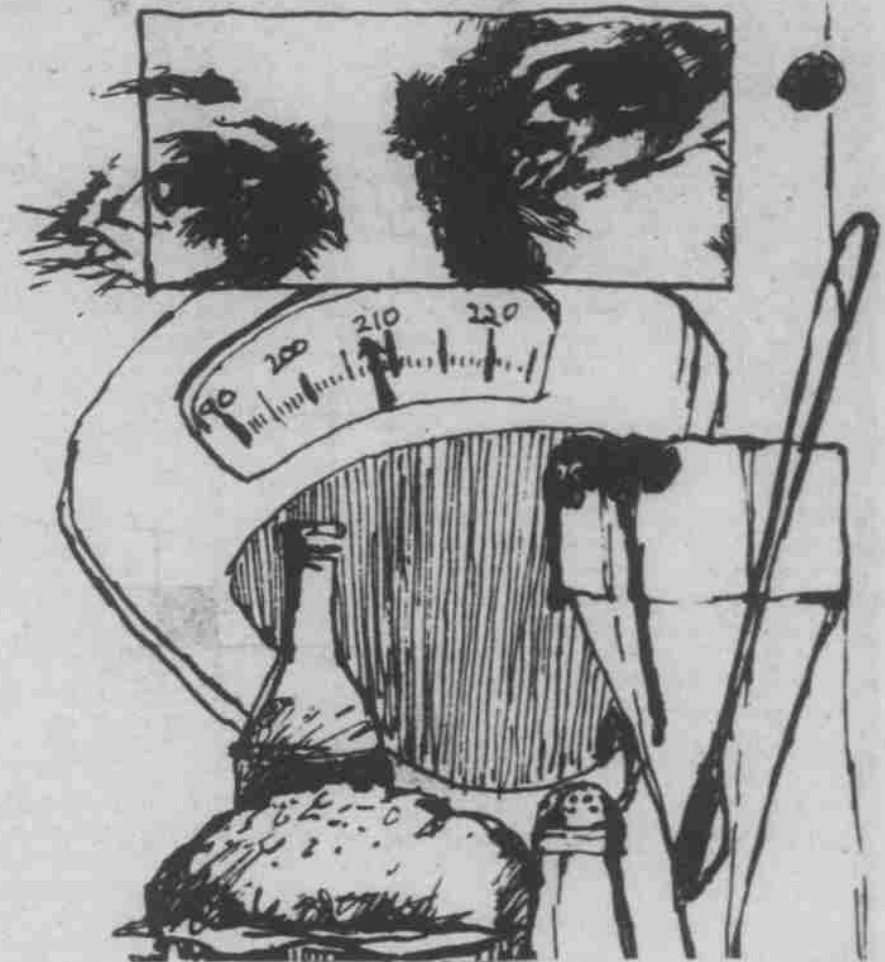




Some helpful pointers on eating properly

Lucy Minuto, a UNC Student Health Service educator pictured at left, offers several ways to developing good eating habits and avoiding the urge and practice of overeating. Some of Minuto's hints are:

- List all food and drinks consumed for a few days, so that obvious excesses can be discovered and eliminated.
- Eat slowly and in the same place at every meal.
- Give up distractions like television or reading while eating.
- Leave something on the plate at the end of every meal.
- Increase physical activity.
- Avoid pitfalls like beer parties or restaurant meals that can sabotage a diet.



about nutrition, but they are usually really sensitive about their problem," she said. "They may be afraid to try to diet again, to come to me, because I'm just one more person they might go to—to fail."

For Martha (not her real name), Chapel Hill's Overeaters Anonymous has become the latest attempt to lose weight in an adulthood full of failures, of different cures and tools designed to reduce her poundage.

Vital to the O.A. philosophy is the idea that self-examination, group support, re-education about food dependency and restructuring of an entire value system are essential to the obese person's success in the program.

In a meeting last fall, Martha, who was taking her turn as group leader, retold the story of her weight problems. Like so many others, Martha had been overweight all her life. When she left school at 19, she weighed 200 pounds.

"For reasons I still don't understand, I never admitted my problems as an adolescent. I deliberately went against my own best wishes to defy my family," she said in a quiet, controlled voice strengthened by some three other testimonies in her two years with O.A.

'Those whose largest focus for pleasure in life is food have to find something just as pleasurable as eating beautiful, gooey food.'

Marcia Mills

Her first step toward solving her problem was to go to a doctor, who prescribed amphetamines. But, she said, "Although I got down to 150, the pills did it all. I never learned anything about food. I never learned to discipline myself."

After a marriage and two children, she watched her weight climb even higher, to more than 300 pounds. "I worried only about eating," she said. "I longed for food more than anything else in the world."

Martha said she tried both fasting and the "rice diet" at Duke University with considerable temporary success. On the rice diet, for example, she cut her weight in half—from 330 to 165 pounds—only to gain it all rapidly back when she went home to old problems and habits.

"By that time," she said, "I realized that my problem was more than could be solved by just knowledge. I

was sure I knew intellectually all I had to know about eating a balanced diet and counting calories."

Overeaters Anonymous has given her what all the other diet programs she had tried lacked. "I am learning to make over my life, put food in its right place . . . I'm thinking in spiritual terms."

O.A. borrowed the concept of reliance on some "higher power" from its parent rehabilitation group, Alcoholics Anonymous. Indeed, the religious

atmosphere, a feeling of nurturing fellowship, is not lacking from O.A. meetings. They open their meetings with a prayer and close with the Lord's Prayer as the members hold hands in a parting circle.

The guidelines for self-help that the members follow are far from mystical, however. The essential aspects of weight loss recognized by most psychologists, physicians and counselors interviewed was shared by O.A.—that delusions about eating be recognized and steadfastly overcome, "named, claimed and dumped," as one O.A. member put it.

The member, call her Jane, explained the importance O.A. has had in helping her admit her compulsive eating.

"We have a disease and meetings are our medicine," Jane said. "We need to keep in touch with other human beings, to break the isolation so many of us live in."

Jane, like the others in O.A., relies on the telephone to link her with other members to discuss crises or downfalls.

"I will not lie to someone else like I lie to myself," Jane said. "It sounds silly at first, but it (communication) gives me a freedom I wouldn't have known otherwise."

Each day or week, O.A. members plan their own diets (within reasonable nutritional limits) and read them over the phone to their particular "food sponsor," who will approve the diet or make suggestions.

Their goal is merely to successfully repeat this process on a day-to-day basis, following O.A.'s concept of "abstention," eating their three (approved) moderate meals per day with no snacks in between.

In this way, Jane explained, they are really laying plans for good habits in the future, not just "going on a diet" until the novelty wears off. Like alcoholics, they recognize themselves as compulsive eaters whose problems will never be cured but can be kept under control. "We're growing up, learning how to get well," she said.

Part of that learning process is recognizing the kinds of things in the environment that can encourage eating.

Marcia Mills, who runs a private diet counseling service in Chapel Hill, advises clients about weight management by analyzing their nutritional and behavioral patterns.

"I help people to learn to be in control of their own situations, to look for problems in their lives other than food that might cause them to eat," she said. "We examine eating behavior and emotions, nutrition and exercise—all need to be treated."

'Social development has a lot to do with one's body image, and any overweight person is at a disadvantage. The picture of the jolly fat lady in the circus is a myth.'

Lucy Minuto

"Most people who come to me have some problems with assertion, but almost anything can get someone to overeat. Those whose largest focus for pleasure in life is food have to find something just as pleasurable as eating beautiful, gooey food."

Private sessions with Mills at her Community Diet Counseling Service cost \$32 per hour and group meetings are \$5. Overeaters Anonymous costs nothing, although specific dietary information is not discussed. The group meets at 7 Monday nights at University Baptist Church.

Another popular group option in the area is Weight Watchers Inc., which meets at 7:30 Monday nights and at 10 Wednesday mornings at the Chapel Hill YMCA and at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays at the Orange County Mental Health Center in Carrboro.

Weight Watchers costs \$10 to join and then \$3.50 per week thereafter. There are weekly weigh-ins where the food program, the voluntary exercise program and behavior modification techniques are discussed.

Whatever the program or techniques used for weight control, all the experts interviewed agreed that motivation was the key to any of the client's successes.

"It's a matter of short-term vs. long-term goals," said one psychology Ph.D. candidate who has studied obesity at UNC. "For the immediate pleasure of a chocolate sundae, most people will gladly forget about their health."

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