

BarbaraBrabecProductions.com

TIRED OF BEING FAT?

How to Finally Lose that Unwanted Weight

Barbara Brabec's Successful Weight Loss Journey

“The life-changing weight-loss secrets I learned after eight months’ experience on Weight Watchers may be just the push you need to finally get you serious about starting a diet and sticking with it.”

Introduction

WHEN I JOINED Weight Watchers online on April 27, 2015, I weighed an embarrassing 240 pounds. By adhering to this program’s guidelines and then “doing it my way,” I’d lost 32 pounds by the end of the year, and I did it without going to any motivational/ support meetings and without using Weight Watcher (WW) recipes, which didn’t work for me for a number of reasons.

As I write this report in 2016, I believe that if I use my own recipes and continue to eat the wide variety of foods I’ve been enjoying on the WW eating plan, I’ll be able to reach my target weight and maintain it for the rest of my life. For me, it’s no longer a matter of wanting to do this but *needing* to do it to remain independent in my older age.

This is a long story, so I’ve divided it up into helpful sections with a Table of Contents.

Section I

[My Decades Long Weight Loss Struggle](#)
[The Point Beyond Which I Refused to Go](#)

Section II

[Selecting a Diet That’s Right for You](#)
[Cooking from Scratch](#)
[Creating Your Own Nutrition Reference Handbook](#)
[Starting Your Own Diet Recipe Books](#)

Section III

[Insight on the Latest Weight Watchers Program](#)

[My List of Favorite \(and Affordable\) Food Treats](#)

[Clothing Challenges as You Lose Weight](#)

[Important Lessons Learned](#)

[Falling Off the Wagon](#)

My Decades-Long Weight Loss Struggle



AS NEAR AS I CAN RECALL, I weighed about 155 pounds when I was married in 1962, and Harry, who had gone through a divorce and some health problems before we met, was a skinny, underfed, undernourished man of 140 pounds. Thanks to my good cooking, he quickly “filled out,” and his friends soon began to joke about his needing to lay off Bohemian dumplings for awhile. He gained weight faster than I because he loved good food with a passion, often eating a second plateful because it tasted so good. (I’ve told this story and much more in “On Being Czech,” Chapter 4 of my memoir, [The Drummer Drives! Everybody Else Rides.](#)) I like my own cooking too, so I started to gain a couple of pounds every year, and soon had to buy some new clothes because everything was getting too tight.

Like many people who spend a lifetime trying to keep the extra pounds off, Harry and I often joked about needing to lose weight, and we started one new diet after another, only to soon tire of giving up food we craved, like pizza and pasta dishes with lots of cheese, and sausages, cold cuts, and fat-rich or starchy side dishes. Of course we needed a dessert with every meal, so we often bought pastries, and I made homemade breads, cookies, cakes, and pies galore. We often indulged in Fannie May chocolates as well. (*For one of my husband’s birthdays after he’d begun to put on weight, I carved the figure above and titled it “Big Chief Hole-in-the-Belly.”*)

The problem with weight gain is that it often comes so slowly that one hardly notices it until a pair of slacks or a dress no longer fits. Time goes on and you buy new clothes a size larger to fit the “new you,” once again saying to yourself, “I really need to lose some weight” as you store the now too-small garments in a trunk. One year you find your shoe size has increased right along with your waist, and you need a bigger watch band too. This process went on for decades in the Brabec home.

Due to health issues, Harry lost a lot of weight in the last years of his life while I put on weight as his caregiver. When I was widowed in 2005 and knew I’d never want another man in my life, I didn’t care whether I lost any weight or not because I felt comfortable in my own skin and wasn’t trying to impress anyone. So over the next ten years, although I ate more healthily than I’d ever eaten before, I continued to fill my plate to the max, adding another twenty pounds to my frame and still saying to myself, “Barbara, you’ve really got to do something about your weight!”

The Point Beyond Which I Refused to Go

THE RUBBER MET THE ROAD one day early in 2015 when I weighed in at 249 pounds and realized that I would soon be forced to set the top weight marker on my scale to 250 instead of 200. In a voice loud enough to wake my sleeping cat, I cried, “I AM NOT GOING THERE!”

I was so upset with myself at that point that I immediately curtailed my eating and lost ten pounds by the first of April. But I didn't get serious about actually dieting until that day in mid-month when sister Mollie called to say she needed to lose weight and had just rejoined Weight Watchers to help her do that. “I don't think I should have to be the only one suffering on a diet,” she joked. “After all, you need to lose weight as much as I do.”

We both had special reasons for needing to lose weight, but mine were now more important than ever. I love my home and the area where I live, so I decided I wanted to stay where I'm at until they carry me out in a body bag. But it took a decade for me to finally accept the fact that being grossly overweight was no longer an option for me if I hoped to live alone into my nineties, which my doctor says is likely, given the long lives of women on the maternal side of my family and my present good health.

I've got a weight in mind that I'd like to be when I finally stop dieting and go on a maintenance diet, but I may have set it too low to be practical, given my age. So I'm going to rely on my doctor to tell me when I've achieved a healthy body mass index (BMI). Articles on the Web tell me that an ideal BMI is between 18.5 and 25, and that anything over 30 is considered obese. You might want to [check this web page](#) to determine your own BMI based on height and weight.

[Back to T/C](#)

SECTION II

Selecting a Diet that's Right for You

IN THINKING ABOUT the various diet plans and weight-loss programs that millions of people have obviously used with success, I now see the importance of choosing a plan or program that we think we can actually live with for the rest of our life, one that not only helps us shed unwanted pounds but also satisfies our taste buds and teaches us how to make healthier food choices. Anyone can lose weight in the short term on a special diet plan, Weight Watchers, or one of the popular programs constantly advertised on television that glamorize losing weight with delicious meals delivered to one's door. Even if I had the money for this kind of program, I know I'd soon be craving the recipes I've used all my life and be worrying that the food in my freezer and on my pantry shelf would be going to waste.

The real question here, however, is *what are you going to do once you lose the unwanted weight like this?* You can't have your meals delivered to you for the rest of your life, so I figure all these dieters will simply go back to eating the way they used to and will put the weight back on because they haven't learned anything about making better food choices on their own. I decided to give WW a try because I knew it had worked for my sister in the past, but like many others, she had regained the weight she lost and this time around vowed to do better. “We have to decide that this is how we're going to eat for the rest of our lives,” she said

in one of our conversations at that time. “We can no longer eat with abandon without paying a price in terms of how we feel and how well we’re physically able to function in our older age.”

I’ve finally accepted the fact that the “olden golden days” of eating anything I wanted are now gone. But that doesn’t mean I have to give up all the foods and delicious recipes that have given me such great pleasure in years past. I just have to serve myself smaller portions and use my own recipes, now adapted with calorie counts and WW points that have proven to work for me.

Cooking from Scratch

I’m convinced that the only way to successfully lose weight and keep it off is to cook from scratch as much as possible and be very selective in the prepared products used in cooking and meal planning.

MOLLIE AND I agree that the only way to successfully lose weight and keep it off is to continue to cook from scratch as much as possible and be very selective in what prepared products we use in our cooking and meal planning. We also need to build our meals around fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and lean meats, fowl, and fish, while also greatly reducing the number of carbs we used to eat in the form of bread, pastas, crackers, cookies, candy, and other sugar-laden foods. *(All carbs turn to sugar in our bodies, some more quickly than others. (Google “glycemic index” for more information on this topic.)*

There are many fat-free or low-fat products on the market, but we must check the nutrition label before bringing them home and compare one product brand with another to choose the healthiest product. *(When fat is removed from a product, something else is always added to replace it.)* We should also pay close attention to the calorie count of an individual serving as well as the grams of fat in it *(especially saturated)*, carbohydrates, and protein, and avoid all products with [unhealthy trans fats](#) and [high fructose corn syrup](#) *(an article that discusses five reasons why this will kill you)*.

If you have high blood pressure, as one in three Americans do, note how much sodium (salt) is in an item and see if there is a low-sodium choice available. Since sodium is in every food product we consume—especially in “fast food”—young adults don’t have to lift a salt shaker today to easily exceed the recommended maximum of 2,300 milligrams (1 tsp.) of sodium a day. And middle-aged adults, the elderly, and African Americans should get no more than 1,500 mg. a day, according to [this article on Harvard Health](#). It discusses this topic in detail and identifies the top five foods that give most of us the excess sodium that is raising our blood pressure and causing heart problems.

We don’t have to give up eating out when we go on a diet, but we must become aware of how many calories we’re ingesting when we visit a favorite eating place. Today all restaurants are supposedly offering nutrition information on their menu or website so diners can pull up a menu and select healthier, lower calorie choices before they get there. But be prepared to find that a meal in most restaurants and fast-food eateries can easily tally 3,000 calories. You may joke that a meal like this will go straight to your belly or hips, but it isn’t funny.

Calories Matter

Remember this: For every 3500 calories you eat that you're not burning off each day, you will gain one pound. Conversely, every time you eat 3500 calories less than what you need each day, you will lose a pound.

You can search the web and find many articles that discuss how many calories you're burning a day, based on your age and activity level. I've included a couple of such sites below.

Based on my weight loss for 2015, which recorded daily calories, I learned that my daily burn with minimum exercise is about 2,000 calories, and to lose a pound a week, I need to keep my daily calorie average somewhere between 1300 and 1400 calories and get at least some exercise every day, even if it's only running errands, shopping, or going up and downstairs several times a day.

Here are sites I have often used to get nutrition info for a product before I buy it, or when I'm converting recipes:

- » CalorieCount.com - "Calorie Counting Tips and Tools." Includes many options when you punch in a food item; includes calculations for some brand name items.
- » Calorie King.com - "America's Trusted Food Database." Includes a BMI calculator, a TOOLS tab where you can search for nutrition info and get different calculations based on weight, search for health recipes, and more.
- » SELFNutrition Data "Know What You Eat." You can search for nutrition data of countless food items, read informative articles, and register for other benefits.

[Back to T/C](#)

Creating Your Own Nutrition Reference Handbook

THE FIRST THING I DID after I joined WW was take a few days to copy to a notebook the nutrition information for every food item on my shelves and in the freezer so I could punch that data into the WW online calculator and determine points for an ounce, a cup, or one or more pieces of something. A few things I'd bought turned out to be so bad for me that I closed my eyes when I put them in the garbage because it was like throwing money away.

Unless one is retired or has a lot of time on their hands, they aren't likely to have the time to do what I've done, but this sort of thing could be done a little at a time, as meals are being prepared with ingredients on hand. As a WW member, you could log in, get the points for whatever you're eating that day, and jot it down on paper so you could start your own reference guide. (If/when you leave the program later, you'll have something to work with as you continue your weight loss efforts.)

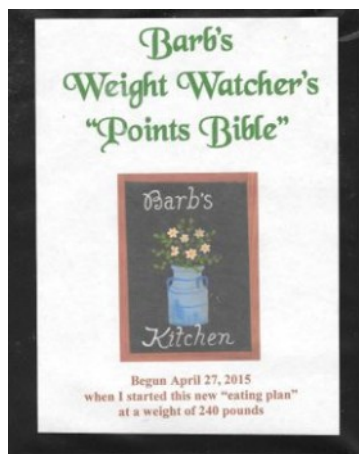
After I learned how the WW program worked, I decided I didn't want to do anything online except get points for common food items and cooking ingredients. But I quickly got more serious about calories, which WW said they were taking into consideration in determining points but weren't providing in members' food product searches.

Protein Considerations in a Diet. Because Harry developed diabetes soon after we married, I quickly became calorie conscious. So at the start I wanted a lot more from WW than just the points for a meal, and I took it upon myself to create a detailed record not only of points, but calories and protein as well. My doctor was thrilled when I said I had joined WW, but she said that this program doesn't take into account the higher protein needs of older people, so she urged me to not worry about exceeding my daily WW points if I was getting more protein in the bargain.

My research suggested that I needed about 70 grams of protein a day when I started, but I found it hard to stay within the WW points limit each week without eating larger portions of meat, fish, and fowl and increasing my calories as well. "You need to eat more beans," my doctor advised, which delighted me because Chili, which is high in points, is one of my favorite Saturday night dinners.

As my diet progressed, I didn't press so hard to lose a pound a week, but upped my points a bit, at least on weekends, and aimed for less than a pound a week in exchange for getting more protein into my diet. I'd decided earlier that at my age I couldn't make this a marathon run, believing that Aesop had the right idea when he said, "Slow and steady wins the race." (This [article for seniors](#) will help you determine your protein needs, which are based on your weight.)

»The current recommended dietary allowance for women older than 70 years is 0.36 grams for each pound of body weight or 46 grams of protein for a 130-pound woman. This amount is the same for all women 19 and older.



Once I had a considerable amount of nutrition info and calculated WW points, I started my *Weight Watchers Points Bible*, a Word document that includes nutrition info on every food item I normally eat, as well as every ingredient I use in cooking and baking. I formatted pages in this document to fit a 6x9-inch 3-ring binder that is now worth gold to me. (Page size could more easily be an 8-1/2 x 11-inch book if you don't want to use a paper cutter to make smaller pages. A small book is simply what I prefer, and it matches the size of my new typed recipe books as well.)

Divided into various food/ingredient categories, the pages contain countless food items with their calorie, protein, and WW points info, and I continue to add new food items and calculations to it all the time, printing out replacement pages when I've made a lot of changes to any one page. Bit by bit, to make it easier to convert a recipe, I've refined individual entries to include different measurements from a tablespoon or ounce to various cup measurements used in recipes, and I'm constantly adding new commercial food items to my lists once I find they can be worked into my new

eating program. Lately, having become aware of how much sodium I'm getting in my food without knowing it, I've started to add this information to my book as well.

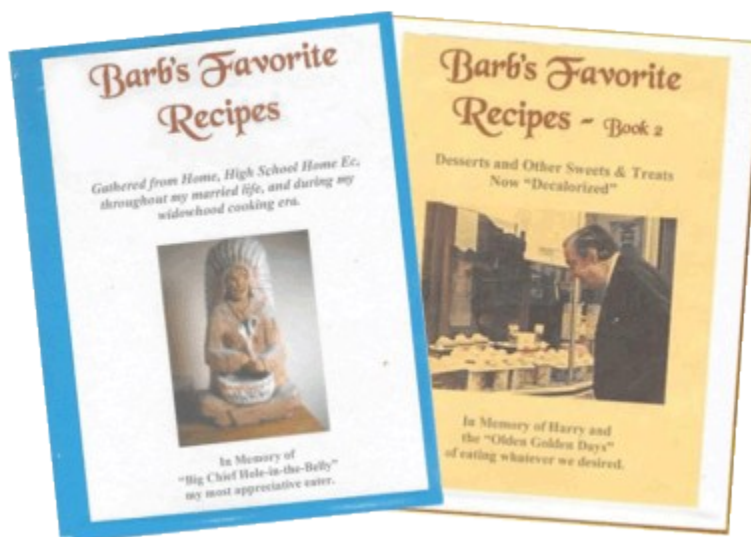
[Back to T/C](#)

Starting Your Own Diet Recipe Books

BEFORE I JOINED WW, I had already decided to computerize all my favorite recipes, which were in many forms and hard to find when I wanted a specific recipe I knew I had somewhere. Some were on 3x5 cards, some in various cookbooks and notebooks, and many were in the two diabetic cookbooks I'd written by hand when my husband was diagnosed with diabetes and I had to learn a whole new way of cooking. I gave myself a crash course in nutrition at that time so I could convert all my favorite recipes to diabetic exchanges, and now I've once again converted most of those recipes to work for me.

One of the biggest benefits of having my recipe collection on computer is that it is now backed up on Carbonite, and I never have to worry again about losing a cherished recipe to a fire or tornado. Another benefit is that a *Word* document is keyword-searchable, so when I have certain ingredients on hand and am wondering what to do with them, I search my cookbook document to find recipes to consider, much as many of you probably look for recipes on the web.

When I get bored with my own recipes, I search for new recipe variations for meats and vegetables I use all the time. I compare three or four recipes, take ingredients from each that I have on hand, and make a new recipe. If it's good, it will go into one of my recipe books below.



I NOW HAVE TWO RECIPE BOOKS, one for my favorite meal recipes, the other strictly for desserts and other sweets and treats I've de-calorized, all filed by name. (*I have so many recipes now that I will soon need to buy two more notebooks to hold them.*) Each has tabbed dividers for general categories that work for me, and each section in the *Word* document version has a T/C that lists the recipes in that particular section. Each recipe for two to four or more servings includes total calories, protein, and WW points, with calculations for one serving. I adapted and greatly modified a few WW recipes, but overall found they didn't work

for me because I don't normally cook with some of the ingredients they use, and their recipes were usually calculated for 6, 8, or 12 servings when I was cooking only for myself and occasionally one or two guests for lunch or dinner. All my old recipes were for four servings—sometimes six—because Harry and I rarely entertained. He'd eat the same dinner twice, but only if I put a day between them. As a widow, I like using those same recipes for four, enjoying them two nights in a row, and freezing the rest for some night when I'm too busy to cook.

Adapting a Recipe. I've been a recipe clipper for decades, and when I get bored with my own recipes, I either look for an idea on the web or dig through my folders of untried recipes, print several for the same dish, and then see how I can adapt a de-calorized version by comparing all of them. In adapting a recipe, it helps to have some "cooking sense" so you know how much butter, oil, sugar, and salt you can eliminate without harming the recipe. You also need to experiment to find which high-calorie ingredients might be replaced with lower-calorie substitutes.

For example, a recipe may call for cream or half-and-half, but be just as tasty (though not as thick) and much lower in calories and points if you used fat-free half-and-half or 2% milk. Although many recipes list two or three tablespoons of oil to sauté a skillet full of food, if you use a nonstick skillet you can usually do this with just half a tablespoon and some extra stirring. Don't automatically salt anything if you're using any canned or packaged product because they have more than enough sodium in them to begin with. When you do want a little salt, try sea salt or a no-salt substitute. I'm thankful there are now many more canned no-sodium/low sodium vegetables and broths available. What salt used to do for me is easily replaced with many salt free herb blends, such as those from Mrs. Dash; and I love Trader Joe's "21 Seasoning Salute" for both meats and vegetables.

Like my Grandma Williams, who always needed "something sweet to quit on," I can't stay on a diet if I can't have a sweet treat after lunch and dinner. Although my diabetic recipes for Harry used Sucaryl, there are now better sugar replacements such as Stevia and Truvia, which I love for baked desserts. (*WW recipes never include alternative sweeteners, and as [this article on the Mayo Clinic site](#) suggests, although they can be helpful in weight loss they should be used with discretion.*)

WW recipes often get around sugar by substituting honey or applesauce, but I haven't done much experimenting with this option yet. I add a little Stevia to smoothies and yogurt-fruit breakfast combination but don't bake with it. I use all sugar if a recipe calls for only a tablespoon, or all Truvia if it calls for no more than 1/4 cup. Truvia's special white and sugar blends, which are recommended for baked items, are my preferred sugar alternatives for all desserts and other sweets. (*Unlike "pure Truvia," both have some calories, but not much.*)

I learned years ago that many dessert recipes call for a lot more sugar than is needed, so when trying a new cookie recipe I first test a recipe by cutting perhaps a quarter of the amount of sugar called for. For example, by experimenting, I was able to cut about half the original amount of white and brown sugar in my ages-old Peanut Butter Cookie recipe so I don't need to use any sugar replacement to get a delicious two-inch crunchy cookie full of peanut butter taste with only 70 calories. (*For comparison, one peanut butter cookie from Subway has 220 calories. The average seems to be between 120-135.*) For other cookies, I usually replace no more than half the amount of sugar with Truvia's white or brown sugar blends. (The texture changes but flavors intensify. Sometimes you might have to add a little extra liquid. I *never* try to adapt any recipe that starts with more than a cup of sugar. *To lose weight, there are some foods and recipes we simply must stop eating.*)

Stevia and Truvia, which are recommended to diabetics, are said to cause side effects if too much is consumed, but I have never experienced any side effects, and my glucose blood tests remain normal. This article on EverydayHealth.com, [“The 9 Best Sugar Substitutes for People with Type 2 Diabetes”](#) will be helpful to your planning on what’s right for you.

[Back to T/C](#)

SECTION III

Insight on Changes in Weight Watchers Program

WEIGHT WATCHERS revised its program again in 2016, still trying to find what really worked for their members. I left the online Weight Watchers program in 2015 after only a few months on the site because I could no longer justify paying the \$19.95 monthly fee when the only thing I’d ever done on it was use the site’s points calculator tool. By then, I’d broken the code for how the calculator worked and no longer needed it to convert my recipes.

On logging into the new site in January of that year, my sister found all the changes so frustrating and different from what she was so familiar with that she left the program too, planning to deal with her weight loss goal on her own by following the basic guidelines of the old program.

Note: Both Mollie and I cancelled our membership in WW using their online cancellation page, and both of us found charges on our credit cards for the following month's membership. If you leave the program, be sure to get a confirmation number to prove it. This wasn't provided on WW's web page confirmation of my cancellation notice, and I had a hard time getting my money back without it, even though I thought my proof was the fact that I could no longer log in after I cancelled.

Articles on the web (*see boxed content below*) suggest that many previous members were unsatisfied because they regained the weight they had lost, and when WW changed their program in 2016, I wondered how many members they would lose because they so dramatically changed the program. What used to be PointsPlus when I originally joined in April 2015 changed to SmartPoints, with many of the point values in previously published recipes changing with it. In updating this article in 2019, I discovered that Weight Watchers had once again “reimagined” their program in 2018 and were now calling it “WW Freestyle—a science-based approach that works.”

Curiously, a little research turned up a web page that talked about the different versions of Weight Watchers going back to the sixties. One of the first things I noticed when I visited this site was a descriptive line referring to “WW Freestyle SmartPoints.” So it looked like that “new” version included some WW roots. The descriptive content on the page read:

“While many online diet services are restrictive and can be difficult to stick with, this one gives you the flexibility to eat what you want, promoting the philosophy that you'll ultimately eat less if you opt for healthy, filling foods.” (*Funny how I figured that out after only eight weeks in their old 2015 program.*) WW has changed its program several times since 2016 but

I stopped paying attention to this once I'd devised a weight loss program that will work for me the rest of my life.

NOTE: The above referenced web page was removed from the web. I didn't like the language used, but I'm including a paragraph from the collection of comments from WW users to illustrate the dissatisfaction one veteran WW dieter had about the program:

Excerpt: "The thing that they seem to have going for them is an uncanny ability to convince their clients to credit WW with short term weight loss and blame themselves for the weight regain that almost everyone experiences, and convincing people to keep coming back for multiple rounds of the same (me included—I'm a 6-time WW veteran.) When I speak out about Weight Watchers I always get fat people who say, 'You shouldn't say it doesn't work, their program worked for me six times!' These people have a different definition of 'worked' than I do."

Recording Your Daily Food Intake. WW wants its members to do everything online, but who wants to live on the WW site? I chose to do everything on paper, not wanting to have to go online every day to monitor my daily points or type in recipes to get a points value for a serving. I created a daily worksheet, and each week I printed a set of seven, stapled it, and kept it handy on the table along with my *Points Bible* so I could immediately log everything I was eating for each meal. I've never snacked between meals because so that simplified things for me. As a professional writer, I've practically lived on a keyboard most of my life, and when I work I'm so engrossed in what I do that I sometimes forget it's long past my usual lunch or dinner hour.

In time, I added pages to my *Points Bible* that list the single serving nutrition info for recipes I use all the time (soups, favorite dishes or dinner combinations), as well as my favorite breakfast and lunch meals. Thus it took only a minute or two to grab the info I wanted to log to my daily food log.

Yes, it takes *discipline* to write down everything you eat, but doing it on paper takes only minutes to do once you have created your own points or calorie reference handbook of foods you eat all the time. Until I lost fifty pounds, I logged everything I put in my mouth. I found it important to do that so I could adjust my dinner menu if I'd eaten too much for breakfast or lunch. In fact, being able to see my day on paper was *the only way* I could stay on this diet for the first two years. I suspect that most WW members soon tire of having to constantly log in to tally a day's food intake, and I wonder if this is one reason why many don't do well on this program. If you log in only at the end of a day, unless you have an iron-clad memory or have made notes all day long, you'll surely forget some of the things you've eaten that day.

[Back to T/C](#)

My List of Favorite—and Affordable—Food Treats

AT MY AGE, after decades of eating anything I wanted, I needed to find a few slightly decadent food items that would work in the WW eating plan, such as:

Cookies: For example, to stay happy, I need two small cookies every day for lunch. I've found a few low-sugar commercial cookies with no more than 70 calories and no undesirable additives or fructose in them, and I've developed several different cookie recipes with that average calorie count that give me the variety of tastes I crave.

Wine: I've had a glass of wine with dinner every night for decades, so giving up wine forever simply wasn't an option for me. I did this in the beginning for three months, however, settling for key lime juice in water served in a wine glass, but that changed after I did a study of fluid ounces so I could calculate recipes that called for a cup of wine.

WW said that five fluid ounces of wine was 100 calories and 4 points, so I was measuring my half-glass of wine by pouring it into a one-fourth cup measure (4 ounces) plus one tablespoon. Imagine my delight when I discovered that five *fluid* ounces is actually a 2/3-cup measure, and I'd been measuring five ounces in a regular measuring cup, which was giving me only half of what I was entitled to, points-wise. So I found some wine glasses that hold exactly 2-1/2 ounces (1/3 measuring cup) and now have a little wine with dinner for 50 calories and 2 WW points. That adds a lot to my dining pleasure. (This article explains [the difference between fluid ounces and ounces.](#))

Cheese and Crackers: I have dramatically cut back on the cheese I used to eat, but I refuse to give it up completely. And I'd rather have an ounce of the real thing than most of the low-fat cheeses I've tried, although I have found a couple of sliced cheeses that are one point per slice that I enjoy with my homemade soup-and-cracker lunches. I weigh other cheeses I like in my salads to make sure I don't exceed the one-ounce general rule for a serving of cheese. (I got so good at eye-balling an ounce of the different cheese I buy and slice that I can now cut two or three slices to give me almost exactly one ounce.

I was very happy when Trader Joe started to sell a Lite Shredded Mozzarella cheese (50% less fat) that works well in my Italian recipes. I've also devised several yogurt, cottage cheese, and cream-cheese combinations that I can spread on my lunch crackers (no more than three to five crackers, depending on their fat and calorie count).

Desserts: I don't consider a half-cup of fresh fruit a dessert. To me, that's breakfast. I've found many ways to make a sweet treat by combining a thin slice of pound or angle food cake, chocolate wafers, or a meringue with 1/4 cup of low-fat ice cream or yogurt (such as Edy's Slow Churned and Half-Fat ice creams, Blue Bunny's tasty yogurts and sherbets, and Breyer's Carb Smart ice cream and bars). Hershey's lite Syrup or a spritz of aerosol whipped cream often adds the finishing touch without upsetting the WW cart. Most of my desserts, however, are ones I've developed and de-calorized to make them work in my WW diet in a serving size that is satisfying to me. And feeling satisfied when the meal is finished is a big secret to staying on any diet.

Chocolate, Nuts, and Popcorn. I can't close a day, it seems, without having an ounce of chocolate and a small handful of one kind of nuts or another. I have carefully calculated the calories and WW points for all the chocolate treats and nuts I enjoy, and I find that the key here is to keep such treats to less than 150 calories or 4 points. I've also worked popcorn (home-popped, not microwave) into my Saturday evening treats by popping corn in an old

non-stick skillet with a little PAM, and then I spray the popped corn with Crisco's butter spray alternately with a little sea salt.

I'm a night owl, so when I need something more to finish the day and am out of points, I grab a crisp apple, and apples have never tasted as sweet and satisfying to me as they do now. I've found that the natural sugar in fresh fruits has helped to curtail my old cravings for high sugar desserts.

In a nutshell, I've found that enjoying a little of things I love a lot helps me steer clear of feeling denied.

[Back to T/C](#)

Clothing Challenges during Weight Loss

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR CLOSET as you begin to lose a significant amount of weight? If you're not short of money, you'll probably give garments to Good Will and buy some new things to replace them. But if you're short on cash and can sew, you may find that you can take in many garments without affecting their overall look. Some, however, will have to be discarded in favor of buying some inexpensive replacements to keep you going.

Thankfully, I can sew and, more important, I never discarded favorite or practical garments as I gained weight. In mid-December of 2015 with my weight loss then at thirty pounds, I opened the two trunks in my downstairs storage area that had been moved from one house to another over the years, each getting heavier each year as I added more of my favorite garments to them that were so nice I couldn't bring myself to get rid of them. Each time I'd done that, I told myself that some day I might wear them again.

Opening those trunks so many years later was like Christmas, because in them I found many outfits I'd forgotten I once had—clothing I'd loved that was still like new and so basic in style that it blended into my current wardrobe: slacks, shorts, blouses, sweaters, jackets, and suits I'd worn at weights of 165, 180, 200. To my delight, I found several handmade quilted and ribbon vests I'd made back in the sixties that I was eager to wear again. I sorted everything by size so I could "go shopping" each time I lost another five or ten pounds. When I've finally achieved what I feel is an ideal weight for the rest of my life, I'll treat myself to some new clothes. This thought has given me yet another strong incentive for staying on the healthy eating plan that's working for me now.

[Back to T/C](#)

Important Lessons Learned

1. To lose weight, we must first accept the fact that this is something we need to do, either for health reasons or our personal well being. We all want to look and feel better, and shedding weight can lift a load from your spirit, add a bounce to your step, and improve your self-esteem. As a Christian, I've become more mindful of the fact that God considers our bodies to be our temple, and we're supposed to take good care of it. I like this Bible verse: "No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the Church" (Ephesians 5:29).

2. Most dieters need a good push to get started. If my sister hadn't pushed me over the mental barrier that had been holding me back for decades, I might never have accomplished the first stage of my weight loss goal. No one really wants to give up eating the way they've always eaten because it was so much fun. But once I saw that I could actually lose weight every week while still eating food I loved and craved, it became much easier to stay on the diet.

3. Losing weight takes discipline. I've always had the discipline to do my work, meet deadlines, and stick with a project until it was finished. But until I started Weight Watchers, I'd never had the discipline before (or the right reasons, perhaps) to stick to a diet once begun. So this time around, the first thing I did was to pray for the discipline I knew it would take to shed at least 50 pounds.

4. You need to find a way to stay motivated. Many people need outside motivation, but for one who has been self-employed most of her adult life, I've always been able to motivate myself to do anything I really wanted or needed to do. Once I committed to the idea of losing weight so I could live independently as long as possible, remembering that became my best motivation to keep going. But I don't think anyone can stick to a diet for long unless they have someone to talk to about their struggle. Thankfully I not only had my sister for encouragement, but a cousin who was once a WW member. Skype and phone chats can add a lot of fun to the dieting experience, and sharing recipes is part of that fun.

5. Most of all, I think dieters need tasty, healthful recipes. I'm convinced that the use of one's own low-cal recipes is key to achieving weight loss goals and then keeping the weight off afterwards. WW offers hundreds of recipes, but some WW members have called them "bland and tasteless," not the kind of food one wants to eat for a lifetime. That's why I believe that all WW members and dieters in general need to create their own weight-loss cookbooks of favorite recipes that they've calculated to work in their diet. I found some of the WW recipes interesting, but they didn't work for me because they were too hard to recalculate (or even make) for one person who really wanted recipes for two or four at most.

6. We must deal with diet plateaus and metabolism adjustments and not get so discouraged that we go off the diet when we don't see pounds falling to the wayside. *Any time your weight doesn't change over a period of three weeks, you're on a plateau.* This [rather discouraging 2015 article](#), ("*Oprah's Investment in Weight Watchers Was Smart Because the Program Doesn't Work,*") offers insight on how our body continually fights us when we diet.

It indicates that 95 percent of all dieters eventually gain back the weight they've lost: "If your body detects that not enough calories are coming in, your metabolism changes so that you can run your body on fewer calories than before, leading your body to store more as fat. So if you eat the same amount of calories that you were eating when you lost weight on your diet, after a while you will stop losing weight, and maybe even start gaining it."

I was happy to find this [Huffington Post article](#), ("*Preventing the Dreaded Weight Loss Plateau*"), because it offered some excellent tips on how to break a plateau. I've found other articles on the Web that confirm the importance of "shaking up the body" and confusing its memory about how we're eating, and this has worked for me sometimes. In fact, after being on a plateau for three weeks in December 2016, I broke through it by shocking my body with three 2,000+ calories a day for three days over the Christmas weekend, after which I immediately dropped a pound. I lost a couple pounds after that, concluding that the body really does have a memory that we can shake up by changing our daily calorie intake

occasionally to a higher level before dropping back down again. Exercising more could also make a big difference.

It was discouraging, however, to learn that I'm still in the "obese" weight loss category. Even if I could lose another ten pounds, I'd still be considered "overweight." The sad fact is that for my height (which is now three less than it was when I was young) this means that I'd have to weigh a lot less than I do now to be in the "normal" range. Yes, I weighed that at eighteen, *but don't tell me that someone in her eighties should weigh what she weighed at eighteen. I don't have the same bone structure now that I did in my youth.*

Balancing this article was what I read [in this article](#): "... it is possible that a few extra pounds may not be as harmful to those over age 65 as they are for younger people, and that being underweight is more of a concern for older individuals."



2017 UPDATE: When I first started my new way of eating, I found that to lose weight faster I'd need to eat no more than 1200 calories a day. Given my age and the fact that I was still working full time and needed energy, my doctor advised against going that low for long. I tried that for awhile but soon decided I couldn't be happy eating this little and, more important, I decided I was too old to do a marathon weight-loss run. I'm in no hurry, and since cooking and eating good food remains a special pleasure of mine, I just want to achieve a goal I've had for decades.

At this point I have no idea how long it's going to take me to achieve the weight loss that's realistic for me at this stage of my life. I know now that I will never lose the 80 pounds I set out to lose in 2015, but I'm patting myself on the back for what I've done to date, and I'm not done yet. I think weight plateaus are going to be hard to get past, but it would be a considerable achievement for me to lose another ten pounds and get down to 180.

Whatever happens, I plan to keep going—to keep using my own carefully calculated nutritious, low-calorie recipes while thinking in terms of simply losing *one pound at a time* until such time as I can look at myself in the mirror and be completely happy with what I see. And if I'm still considered "overweight" then, so be it. At least I'll be happy.

[Back to T/C](#)

Falling Off the Wagon

2021 UPDATE

I WAS STILL MAINTAINING my 50-pound weight loss in 2018 but was discouraged about being unable to lose even a pound all year long. I'd been on a plateau for so long that I figured my body had grown content with itself at 190 pounds. But at least I'd moved myself from the category of "obese" (which I hated the thought of) to merely being "overweight," which in itself seemed a worthy accomplishment.

FYI: One of the [latest articles on the topic of obesity and overweight](#) in America states that, “Obesity is not just a problem of ‘girth control’; it is now considered a chronic disease . . . [and] is, in fact, a national epidemic.”

When the holidays drew near, I rebelled and decided to give myself a treat by fixing some special meals and desserts for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s. *Maybe this would shake up my metabolism*, I thought.

It didn’t seem as though I was overdoing it that much, but I was stunned when I stepped on the scale in January and saw that *I’d gained ten pounds*, meaning my “successful weight loss” had dwindled to just forty pounds. My waistline and belly had grown and I hated myself for abusing my body like that.

As it turned out, 2019 proved to be one of the most difficult working years I’d had since losing my husband because this was when I decided I had to start thinking about building a new website. The FrontPage software running the site I’d designed and built in 2000 was archaic and could stop functioning at any time. More important, if I wanted to keep writing and publishing my own books, I had to have a good looking website that worked well and reflected my current writing interests and professional services. I also wanted to be able to blog on the new site, so that meant I needed a WordPress site.

With this huge goal in front of me, I began to work long hours on the computer most every weekday. I learned years ago how to manage my stress ([see my articles on this topic here](#)), but I’ve remained a workaholic all my life. Now I was so focused on my work that I began to eat at irregular hours, didn’t exercise much, and gave little thought to meal preparations. But my lab tests remained good and my doctor said not to worry, that my health was excellent and she knew I’d get this weight off when I was ready to focus on this challenge again. She was satisfied that at least I didn’t gain any weight that year.

And then came the pandemic in 2020. When it hit in March and upset my life and the lives of everyone on planet Earth, I lost all my resolve to even try to lose weight. I couldn’t go anywhere and no one could see me, and who cared how I looked anyway? Like many others, food became a comfort even as it became a challenge to be able to shop safely to buy it, and then sanitize everything in the garage before I brought it into my kitchen.

When the country began to open up a little in July, my spirits lifted enough to snap me out of my “[diet doldrums](#).” Once again I began to focus on what I was eating and started exercising regularly. I was finally making progress on populating my website with some content and finding ways to socialize in person with a few friends. Being able to dine outdoors in local restaurants with a treasured friend who wasn’t afraid to give me a hug gave me a huge emotional boost.

By year’s end I was again thankful that I hadn’t gained a single pound and patted myself on the back. But I’d been stopped dead in my tracks in late 2020 on the building of the website because of a WP theme-related technical problem that affected WordPress sites all over the world (a topic beyond the scope of this writing). Suffice it to say that I had to work at controlling my stress and not letting worry consume my thoughts. ([See this page](#) for articles on dealing with worry and stress, both of which affect our ability to remain healthy.)

AS I WRITE THIS UPDATE to my original 2016 article in June 2021, my weight is still holding at just under 200 pounds, and I have no idea how I’ll do with my continuing weight-loss journey in the months ahead. I think my real problem may be hormonal (insulin or

estrogen, probably), so I'll be pursuing this with my internist this year. In time I'll blog about what I continue to learn about the difficulty of losing weight because so many others are dealing with this problem too. Meanwhile, you might want to read this article: [“An In-depth Look at Blood Sugar and your Hormones.”](#)

For now, I remain in good health overall with no serious medical issues, and I'm grateful to still have the physical and mental ability to work up to ten hours a day on my writing and website work, which I've always enjoyed. I maintain my belief that there is much to say for religiously eating a nutritious and well-balanced diet and getting adequate sleep. (I'm still working on the latter.)

I hope the information and resources shared in this little “PDF book” will motivate you to get rid of at least some of the unwanted weight that is hindering your happiness. My best wishes to you for success in whatever weight loss plan you try.

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Your feedback to this writing is invited.

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BARBARA LAUNCHED BarbaraBrabec.com in 2000 and quickly began to populate it with home-business articles and resources. Over the years she added hundreds of articles on several other topics related in one way or another to the larger topic of LIFE.

Now, LIFE itself is Barbara's focus. Unlike her original website, her new domain launched in 2021 features only her own writing—new content and an archive of timeless and relevant articles in fourteen life-related categories, all updated and reformatted for republication on the all-new [“Barbara Brabec's World.”](#) It reflects Barbara's current writing interests, latest books, and professional services.

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[\[Back to Top\]](#)