

Introduction:

Getting Started

Have you heard the statistic that 95% of all diets fail? For every 100 people who go on a diet, 95 will gain back all the weight they had lost. Depressing, isn't it? No wonder many of us say, "Why even bother? I'll just gain it back!"

This oft-quoted statistic combined with our personal experience of repeated, unsuccessful attempts to lose weight can be very disheartening. After so many failures, some people just stop trying. The chronic dieter, on the other hand, will keep looking for their next magic program, potion, or pill. They begin the cycle of trying and failing, and trying and failing. No wonder many of us have low self-esteem when it comes to our bodies. To cheer you up, let me share with you, as Paul Harvey calls it, "The Rest of the Story."

Dr. Jo's No Big Deal Diet

The Optimistic News about Successful Weight Loss

The statistic that 95% of all diets fail doesn't tell us the whole story. First, this research comes from University-run weight loss programs with hard-core dieters. The University-run programs often have structured programs not much different than the ones we see advertised on television and in the newspaper.

But guess what? The majority of *successful* dieters do not lose weight using organized weight loss programs. Many studies, including my own, have revealed that most people that are successful with weight loss have lost it on their own. They may have used information that they learned from previous attempts, but their last successful weight loss attempt is often self-initiated and self-monitored. Let me quote a few studies:

- The Minnesota Heart Survey (1984) found that while most people presently or formerly overweight had attempted dieting to lose weight, only 47% enrolled in a formal education program.
- Schachter (1982) found that more individuals lost their excess weight and maintained on their own rather than with a weight management program; only 30% sought professional assistance.
- Colvin and Olson (1983) interviewed only the successful dieters and found that 53% of males and 34% of the females followed a structured program for weight-loss.
- Lichten (1989) found that 81% of the Mexican American women who had lost weight had succeeded on their own.
- Fletcher (1994) interviewed 160 "masters" (those that had lost 20 pounds or more and kept it off for at least three years). More than half of these people lost the weight on their own.
- National Weight Control Registry (<http://www.nwcr.ws/>) is an ongoing project of Dr. James Hill of the University of Colorado and Dr. Rena Wing of the University of Pittsburgh. Since 1993 they have collected a database of nearly 5000 people who have been successful at maintaining a weight loss of at least 30

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pounds for one year or longer. They have found that about 50% of participants lost weight on their own without any type of formal program or help.

A second reason why the 95% failure rate for dieters is misleading is that it is based on a single attempt. In other words, if 100 dieters enter a particular program, only five people (5%) will lose weight and keep it off. But statistics about weight loss should not be quoted according to just one attempt. Who can do anything successfully from just one attempt? Do babies learn to walk in a single attempt? How many times did you have to struggle with a new computer software program before it really sunk in? All athletes and Olympic gold-medal winners have many losses before their grand win.

It's no different with weight loss. It may take several (or many) attempts to lose weight, but if you continue to learn from each experience, you will eventually be successful at weight loss. In the long run, many people are successful at losing weight and keeping it off. Famous examples include weight-loss gurus Richard Simmons and Jane Brody (Personal Health Columnist, New York Times). You, too, can lose weight and keep it off if you learn from those who have been successful!

Dr. Jo's Personal Struggle

The reason I wrote this book about successful weight loss is because I, too, struggled with my weight for many years. I had an eating disorder for five years and then spent many more years getting it under control. When I was just 16, I weighed about what I do now. I would now say that I was at an average weight for a female adult. But as a teenager, I felt chunky! I was always jealous of those girls who were barely five feet tall, very skinny, and very popular. I thought that if I were as thin as they were, my life would suddenly become more perfect.

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When I made the decision to do something about my “fat,” I picked up some dieting tips in a young woman’s magazine and initiated my first diet. It was actually a starvation diet. My diet for over almost a year consisted of half a grapefruit (without sugar, of course) for breakfast and a cup of hot water with a chicken bouillon for lunch.

After school I would have a cup of hot black tea and a piece of dry toast. Since dinner was always with my entire family, I ate what they did. But I took extremely small portions and ate very slowly (counting the number of chews) hoping that no one would notice – and because I was one of nine children they often didn’t. After dinner, I would walk/run for at least an hour with my dog or do over an hour of laps in the swimming pool. Late in the evening I would escape to my bedroom where I would do a long routine of exercises including plenty of sit-ups and leg lifts for my “fat” belly!

Within a few months, I lost 40 pounds. At five feet six (and with a large bone structure including size ten shoes), I weighed under 100 pounds and thought I was beautiful. But unlike my hopes and dreams, I did not become more popular. In fact, I grew more shy and introverted. Probably because I was spending every waking moment thinking about how I would burn off that 60 calorie apple, how I could eat less at dinner, or escape someone’s birthday cake without anyone noticing.

That 40 pound weight loss along with other physical symptoms and my extreme preoccupation with food would classify me as anorexic. But when my mother’s concerns about my health sent me to the doctor, I denied that I had lost any weight at all. I kept the weight loss off my entire senior year but did not lose further. Because of the weight loss, I developed a severe intolerance to cold from which I still suffer.

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The following year, I went away to college. As a freshman, I was required to live in the dormitory and use the all-you-can-eat cafeteria pass. And eat I did. In the beginning, I told myself that I was thin and deserved to have the desserts that I had not had for over a year. Unfortunately, I lost control at nearly every meal and ate until I was sick to my stomach. Then I hated myself for my lack of self-discipline. By the time I made my first trip back home from college, I had gained back nearly 30 pounds. My parents were pleased but I was not. I not only felt fat, but completely out of control. I knew I had to do something drastic.

That's when I began to experiment with every diet I read about, laxatives, self-induced vomiting, and periodic fasts. Every day for the next four years throughout college, I was either on a diet or losing control. When I got really disgusted at myself for losing control, I would fast for two or three days. Then I would convince myself that my eating was in control, my stomach had shrunk and now everything would be normal.

But it wasn't. Every moment of every day, I was thinking about what I wanted to eat, feeling guilty about what I had already eaten, or planning when I was going to start my next diet and how I would approach it. One of the diets I followed was the liquid protein diet. In fact, I was drinking my liquid protein one day when I heard on the radio: "16 people have died from the liquid protein diet." I remember looking at the very expensive protein supplement and internally debating as to whether I should take a chance and continue with the diet or throw it away. I finally poured it down the toilet, afraid that if I had put it in the trash I would later feel desperate and pull it back out.

Several times a week I would binge on 2000-3000+ calories of sweets at a time. Sometimes it was a whole box of what I had convinced myself was *healthy* granola. Othertimes it was a secret and elaborate ritual involving specific foods that were available between the dorm and the shopping mall.

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Every weekend my friends and I would take the school bus to the mall. There, I'd eat a large, soft pretzel and an ice cream cone. While my friends would take the bus back to campus, I would elect to take the two-mile walk by myself. And on that walk, I would continue with my private fast food binge. I would eat a large dipped cone at Dairy Queen®, six doughnuts at Dunkin' Donuts®, and three large chocolate frosted brownies at the local supermarket. I'd finish the binge with a large diet soda at McDonalds®. There was little information about eating disorders over 30 years ago, but I now recognize that I was bulimic.

After all my dieting, purging, and fasting, I still graduated 20 pounds over my *original* weight (60 pounds over my lowest weight). And I had majored in the study of nutrition! Although I was certainly no role model, that first summer after graduation, I began my work as a dietitian. I was, in fact, a personal example that knowledge alone does not motivate one to change.

That summer, I got even sicker and began having what I called my "coma" dreams. Even while napping, I would fall into such a deep sleep. Although I could hear my brother or sister trying to wake me up for dinner, I couldn't move or speak. I was so scared that I was going to die, that I finally went to see a doctor. After some tests, he sent me to see a dietitian! (Mind you, I *was* a dietitian).

But that dietitian (thank you Margaret Koniz, MS, RD), helped me to recognize that when I went long periods of time without food, my blood sugar would crash to unhealthy low levels. I never told her I was bulimic, but I began to realize that the low blood sugars were what set me up to binge. Determined to stop my coma dreams, I followed her suggestions and began to eat six small meals a day. To this day, I still eat frequently throughout the day because it makes me feel more energetic. I no longer completely restrict sugar or any of the so-called *bad* foods from my

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eating, because I have learned that completely restricting foods only makes me crave it more.

It took years before food no longer controlled my life. And it took a few more years for me to get back to my original weight. But I wasn't binge eating, purging, or fasting. Nor was I spending every waking moment thinking about food or body fat. And that was a good feeling.

Give or take a couple of pounds, I have kept my weight down for 25 years. Whenever my weight begins to creep up, I ask myself the same questions you will ask yourself as you read this book. I have never been on another diet for I've learned that dieting only sets you up for disaster and disappointment. When I use the word "diet" in this book, I am not referring to a structured list of do's and don'ts but rather, the Webster's dictionary definition of "everything that one eats and drinks in a day."

Since my eating disorder recovery, I have completed my Masters of Science in Human Nutrition at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and my Doctorate in Adult Education at Texas A&M University focusing on personal change. For my doctoral dissertation, I studied people, who like myself, got their weight under control and kept it off. That research is the original basis for this book.

Willpower versus SkillPower

Take a look at your body. Do you like what you see? No? Well, then let me ask you another question: Do you know more about diet and exercise than your body shape demonstrates? It doesn't surprise me; most people do! If you're like the average American, you've already heard quite a lot about nutrition and exercise. Every magazine has a new diet. The latest diet is always a popular topic on television and radio. In fact, I wouldn't be shocked if you told me that you know so much about diet and exercise that you could write your own book!

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But, if you already know what you should be doing, why aren't you doing it? Don't feel bad, you're not alone. In fact, two-thirds of all American adults are overweight; 25% are obese. This high rate of overfatness is not because Americans don't recognize that they need to lose weight. And it's not because they don't know that exercise is good and that calories count.

It all boils down to this simple fact. Research demonstrates that knowledge alone doesn't necessarily bring about corresponding changes in behavior. And yet most weight-loss programs are structured around giving you more diet and exercise information. Think about it, does simply knowing the fat content of your favorite foods make you stop enjoying it?

While we may need to bone up on our knowledge of diet and exercise in order to get the best results, that isn't what is most needed. What is lacking from those who have not been successful at permanent weight loss is the skills to get from I *know* it - to I *do* it. Notice I didn't say that the successful people have more willpower. Too often I have heard people use this as an excuse: "I just didn't have the willpower to stay with the program." It's as if they believe that willpower is something you either have or don't have.

After reviewing the research examining people who have successfully lost weight, I found that weight loss occurs only if and when an individual is ready to make changes, has decided to do it for themselves, and has empowered themselves to design their own program. The successful weight losers didn't follow any *one* specific diet and exercise program. There is *no* one perfect diet and exercise program for everyone - only the *one* that works for *you*. So don't worry about not having willpower. There are 7 distinct skills that will help you to get the results you want. These are the skills that make up *Dr Jo's No Big Deal Diet*.

This book is based on two kinds of research. First, research (including my own) that asked people who have been successful at

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losing weight: “How did you do it?” And secondly, research that looked at the difference between those who succeeded and those who either dropped out of programs or regained the weight. I’ve combined this research with more than 20 years experience counseling individuals and conducting seminars nationwide to develop this practical, hands-on program to help you learn from the successful.

Are You Ready?

When I first began my research, I looked at what differentiated people who were successful at losing weight from those who were not successful. I assumed I would find one diet that worked better than the rest. But when I compared the successful from the non-successful, I found there was *no* difference. For each type of approach (the same exact diet or the same exercise program), there were successful cases and those who failed. If there was no difference between the approach of these two groups, why did *some* people keep it off while *others* gained the weight back? It has to do with mastering the seven skills of *Dr Jo’s No Big Deal Diet*.

Before we reveal the seven skills, it’s important to find out if you’re ready and committed to change. So, answer the following questions as truthfully as possible.

√ Activity:

Are you ready to lose weight?

1. *Why do you want to lose weight? What is your motivation? Are you doing it for you or are you losing weight to make someone else happy?*

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2. *What other major changes or adjustments are you going through in your life (such as a divorce, job change, dealing with death or illness of a close friend or family member, or working two jobs)?*

3. *Changes in your life will often impact the important relationships you have. What kind of affect will losing weight have on your relationship with your friends, family, or significant other? How will you handle this?*

4. *Do you ever binge on food to the point where you feel out of control and/or purge by self-induced vomiting; taking laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications; fasting; or excessive exercise?*

Your answers to the previous questions are very important. For any lifestyle change program to work, you must be ready to make the necessary changes. And you must be willing to do it for you, not just to make other people happy. Halfhearted attempts or doing it for *other* people will only lead to failure in the long run. Successive failures lower your self-confidence and self-esteem - making each future attempt progressively more difficult and less likely to be successful. Let's look at each question separately.

Discussion:

1. *Why do you want to lose weight? What is your motivation?*

Did you answer that you wanted to lose weight to decrease the risks of diseases including heart disease and diabetes, to make

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movements easier, to fit into the clothes in your closet, or to look and feel better? These are all healthy reasons to lose weight.

Be honest though. Are you losing weight to make someone else happy, to find a spouse, to be considered for a job promotion, for an upcoming wedding or a high school reunion? Each is an external event. These are not long-term reasons to lose weight. Why? When you lose weight to make other people happy or to impress other people or to make people notice you, you also set yourself up for failure. Let me offer you an example to help you understand why.

One of my patients, Lynn, weighed 267 pounds. Lynn told me that she was losing weight because she was sick and tired of job discrimination. She felt that she was continuously being passed over for job promotions because of her size. When Lynn started to lose weight, people began to notice her, including her boss. As you would expect, they often gave her encouraging praise. This additional attention only made Lynn angry and bitter. She wanted to ask: “Why didn’t you pay attention to me before?” Out came the two-year-old rebel child that resides in many of us that said, “I’ll show you.” Lynn then ate until she put back on all the weight she had lost. Her anger and disappointment in other people resulted in an “I’ll show you” self-sabotage each and every time. Lynn wasn’t ready to lose weight for “Lynn.”

Ultimately, you have to lose weight for you and you alone. Not just because your mother is worried about you or because your significant other nags you about your weight. Not because the high school reunion is coming up and you don’t want your old friends to see you like this. You need to do it for *you*. Don’t you deserve it?

On a 1996 Geraldo Rivera talk show, I watched a young overweight woman who was distraught. She wanted to lose weight because her male friends never thought of her as anything other

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than a pal. Richard Simmons, the weight loss guru, responded to her: "Before you can have a love affair with another person, you need to first have a love affair with yourself." I agree. We're not talking about an egotistical, selfish love for you and your needs only, but loving yourself at least as much as you love the other people in your life. When you love and respect yourself, you are far more likely to be committed to looking after your needs. Do you love and respect yourself enough to lose weight?

2. What other major changes or adjustments are you going through in your life (such as a divorce, job change, dealing with death or illness of a close friend or family member, or working two jobs)?

Sometimes a job change or a divorce can be an easy transition to a healthier lifestyle especially if you are leaving behind people who encouraged the unhealthier way of life. But often it means leaving behind a support system that is essential for our success. Do you have a new support system in place?

Changing the way you chose to eat, exercise, or even the way you think about your goals can be initially stressful if you try to make too many changes at one time. If you are currently going through some stressful situations, you'll need to be very realistic about your expectations.

Don't focus on revamping your diet and exercise program. Instead, attend a stress management or time management program. Handling stress in a healthier manner or managing your time more effectively will help your present situation and is bound to, indirectly, make you healthier. Sure, the weight loss will be slower, but people who have been successful at losing weight also took the changes very slowly and made only the changes that were the easiest. This, you'll discover, is what I refer to as the "No Big Deal" approach to weight loss.

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3. *What kind of affect will losing weight have on your relationship with your friends, family, or significant other? Losing weight often has profound effects on every relationship - how will you handle this?*

Losing weight can have a profound effect on the dynamics of your relationship. It can mean spending more time on *your* needs and subsequently less time on *others* needs. For example, if you live with other people, they may not appreciate if you change the way you cook or the food products you buy. (Don't worry, this doesn't mean you won't be able to lose weight. It's just important to recognize these difficulties and come up with workable solutions). You may decide to eat out less often or chose foods or drinks that are considered to be less *fun* in the eyes of another person. Or perhaps you'll decide not to change your eating habits at all - and, instead, burn more calories. Will these people have a hard time accepting your time away from them when you go for a walk?

Losing weight often means that you will get more attention from other people including people of the opposite sex. Can you handle this additional attention or will you protect yourself by putting the weight back on? For some people, keeping on extra weight insulates them from unwanted attention or keeps them from addressing other issues in their life.

If you lose weight, will this additional attention make your significant other jealous? If your significant other has some added pounds, will he or she feel guilty that they too aren't losing weight? Will they sabotage you to put the weight back on so they won't feel so guilty? Or will you nag them to change as well?

It's best to think about the consequences of your weight loss prior to making these changes. Instead of using these as "excuses," be proactive. Ask yourself, "How can I best handle these possible scenarios?" You'll read more about this under *Skill #1: No More Excuses*.

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4. *Do you ever binge on food to the point where you feel out of control and/or purge by self-induced vomiting; taking laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications; fasting; or excessive exercise?*

If so, seek professional help because eating disorders are serious. The National Institute of Mental Health claims that five million Americans suffer from eating disorders. An estimated one thousand women die of anorexia each year (National Eating Disorder Screening Program). There was not much help available more than 30 years ago when I had an eating disorder, but there is now. Taking care of eating disorders is beyond the scope of this book. Two nonprofit organizations that can help you get started include:

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
PO Box 7
Highland Park, Illinois 60035
(847) 831-3438
www.anad.org

The National Eating Disorders Organization
603 Stewart St., Suite 803
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 382-3587
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

So, is this the right time to lose weight? If it is, read on. Take it at your own pace and complete all the activities so you can find the perfect lifestyle that will help you get to and maintain your ideal weight.

If this isn't the right time, take it even slower. Go through the program slowly and thoroughly reflect on each of the activities. Many of my research subjects reported that they gathered information for years before instituting their final weight loss attempt. Not just information about calories and fat grams, but different

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ways to fit in exercise, and ways to change their thinking patterns. When it all came together they spoke of a light that came on in their head or they said, “It finally clicked.” It was then that they actually instituted the changes.

As with any lifestyle change program, you won’t succeed long term until you are ready to do it for yourself, not just for others. Prematurely jumping into another diet program, and then failing, will only further lower your self-esteem, making you far less likely to succeed in the future.

Dr. Jo's No Big Deal Tips for Getting Starting:

1. Recognize that you *can* lose weight and keep it off. Other people have done so successfully, and so can you.
2. Don't rely on *will*power to get you to your goals. Be ready to learn and practice each of the skills that will give you *skill*power over your weight.
3. Take "ownership" of your excess weight. For whatever reason you have more weight on your body than you'd like, you're the only one who can do something about it. It's time to take personal responsibility for your actions or lack of actions.
4. Don't lose weight for other people - decide to do it for yourself. That commitment is the only way you'll be able to keep the weight off forever!

My Notes: