

# POST-POLIO HEALTH

Summer 2016  
Volume 32  
Number 3

[www.post-polio.org](http://www.post-polio.org)  
[www.polioplace.org](http://www.polioplace.org)

PHI's mission is supported by its Membership.

## Why the weight? Losing a few pounds is possible ... right now. Why wait?

Sunny Roller, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Even if one uses a wheelchair full time and has a metabolism that is a bit slower due to aging, losing weight is possible. I had almost given up, but then 14 months ago, my doctor fiercely demanded that I lose 10 pounds. If I did not, she threatened to infuse me with some creepy medication. How terrifying!

At that time, since I had quit walking with braces and crutches two years before, I was close to 50 pounds overweight. And I knew that the extra weight was not only undesirable; it also made my abilities to transfer and move about so much more strenuous and dangerous. As I pushed, twisted and lifted my body around every day, my hands, arms and shoulders were at imminent risk for injury and worsening carpal tunnel syndrome.

Looking back, I started to struggle with overweight issues at the age of 11. As I grew into womanhood with an obvious physical disability and a polio survivor's drive to succeed, losing weight was usually on my mind. It plagued me like a whispering snake, reminding me that I was too fat, which magnified my shame.

I sincerely wanted to shed the pounds, but could never figure out how to do it. Or maybe

I wasn't scared enough to do it. My thoughts ranged along a scale from "why this weight?" to "oh, why not wait?" Throughout my busy adult life, I ate when the other girls were out dancing or flirting. I ate at social events with friends. It was easier to meet for dinner than to go roller skating together. I also ate poorly; grabbing fast food when I was super-achieving to meet my latest professional work deadline.

But now, in my retirement years, "why not wait" had abruptly turned into "don't wait; too much weight!" For 58 long years, I had not been caring for my body properly. I didn't know how. My half-hearted attempts had always failed.

Somehow, though, I had actually hung onto hope. A spirited twinkle inside me knew that, "All things are possible." I did believe that for me there had to be a key to success. Other people lose weight, why can't I? I wasn't born overweight nor was I overweight as a little girl with a disability from polio. I wanted to get back to who I really am — innocent and unburdened — free from obesity and that incessant snake murmuring in my ear.

So, optimism in hand, with the ironically "blessed threat" of some freaky new medication propelling me forward, I began arduously searching. My deep inner resolve arose. I hunted for a logical strategy and a little magic to help guide me on a new path to weight loss. One that was feasible and effective. Delightfully,



Sunny Roller

continued on page 3

continued from page 1

I found both — the strategy and the touch of magic.

The first step was to pay attention to the process of caring for myself. Really taking good care. What a lovely goal. Polio survivors do know how to set a goal and achieve it and I was now adamant. Focus, focus, focus. Then re-focus when focus wanes. The next step was to choose a strategy that involved a comprehensive set of tactics. I needed to go at it from all angles — exercise, healthful eating and cognitive/emotional support.

The exercise opportunity already existed. I just had to tweak it a little. I had found a gym program at our local rehabilitation center that would help me. After a time of physical therapy for an arm injury a year before, I attended what was called a “post-rehabilitation gym clinic.” For a monthly fee, former patients could work out at the gym with the assistance and support of enthusiastic rehabilitation technicians. I could go every day of the week and work out on the NuStep machine or stand and walk at the parallel bars. They also would help me weigh myself to track weight loss.

Here’s where the magic of kindness appeared first. When they found out I was working to lose weight, they lifted their established rule of short-term membership. They agreed to let me work out for as many months as I wished; knowing that my goal had moved from rehabilitation to weight loss. So, I keep working out at the gym.

(For more details on the reasonable high intensity interval training that my post-polio specialist, Frederick M. Maynard, MD, recommended, refer to [www.sunnyrollerblog.com](http://www.sunnyrollerblog.com) and search for the post of May 15, 2015 titled “Recipes for Regeneration.”)

The second part of my strategy was to eat properly. This was a huge challenge because my kitchen is not very accessible and I don’t like to cook. But I knew I needed to start eating clean. Eating clean is the latest buzzword young people

use to mean “include whole foods like vegetables, fruits and whole grains, plus healthy proteins and fats; and exclude refined sugar and processed food.”

I had been to WeightWatchers numerous times throughout my life and knew they had the most widely acclaimed sensible eating program. So for \$20.00 per month, I signed up this time for WeightWatchers Online. It was convenient and I found a huge selection of recipes that were “clean!”

Not liking to cook was a problem. One day a friend was listening to me trying to solve the challenge of not cooking, when she suggested that I ask my current housekeeper, whose contract was only for cleaning, to prepare three WeightWatcher meals for me each week.

***“I needed to go at it from all angles — exercise, healthful eating and cognitive/emotional support.”***

Here’s where the magic of kindness appeared once more. My housekeeper agreed to stretch her skills. She genuinely wanted to help and encourage me in my weight loss effort. The magic of her generosity and kindness made this part of the strategy work. And my world of “clean eating” joyfully became a reality. I choose the recipes, shop for the food and she cooks them up in my inaccessible kitchen.

I had found a way to exercise and eat healthful foods, but I knew I needed a third tactic — the psychological support to keep going and learn about my weight problem in greater depth. I asked my physician for a referral to a program at the University of Michigan called “The Hunger Within.” She said, “Oh, you don’t need that, but if you want to, I will.”

With resolve and referral in hand, I joined the 12-week support/counseling group. It involved a therapeutic technique called cognitive restructuring, which refers to any method that helps people think differently about a situation, event, thought or belief. Cognitive restructuring

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

shifts a person from irrational destructive thought to positive and healthy thinking about any given idea.

For class members, it was all about how we see food and the meaning of food in our lives. When are we REALLY hungry, versus when do we simply WANT FOOD? We learned that with practice, we could change our thoughts about food.

I discovered that I often automatically eat when I am bored or lonely. That kind of emotional eating alone can lead to unwanted obesity. Did you know that some people want to eat a lot of bread because it brings them closer to an important person in their past lives — like a mother or grandmother, whose homemade bread was irresistible and symbolized love and nurturing? Or that some people crave a lot of sugary products because there has not been enough sweetness in their lives; but perhaps abuse or harshness from those around them?

***“The kindness demonstrated by those around me has added the magical power that completes the equation.”***

So I have learned that I can change my distorted thinking and practice more constructive ways to alleviate boredom or loneliness as I develop exciting new interests, and build deeper and more active friendships.

The magic of kindness also emerged from the class in a powerfully different way, as I continued my weight loss journey. “The Hunger Within” ultimately teaches that we must practice being kind to ourselves. If we want to become physically healthier, it’s our job to replace any self-criticism with self-compassion. As we forgive our mistakes, and nurture the inner joy and goodness that shone in our faces as little children, our thoughts about other people become kinder and more compassionate, too.

This class is only conducted at the University of Michigan, but Marilyn Migliore, the workshop’s creator and leader for 20 years, relays that there is a website ([www.autochair.com](http://www.autochair.com)) associated with it. This site describes the program in detail and provides an opportunity to purchase the book. She reports that many people across the country have formed monthly reading/discussion groups with weight loss in mind. They study the book, chapter by chapter and apply its premises.

Before my physician’s warning, I had nearly given up. Then I changed my mind. With fierce focus and fresh hope, I worked to adapt that three-part strategy to my unique situation. The kindness demonstrated by those around me has added the magical power that completes the equation. As others continue to teach me how to be kinder and more nurturing of myself, I believe the adipose tissue will continue to fade away. Funny how that works.

Since my physician’s warning in May of 2015, I have lost 15.5 pounds. Not dramatic. Not perfect. But moving in the right direction — about a pound a month. I slowed down during the cold, winter months, but continued to lose a little. Now I am focused on shedding ten more pounds by Thanksgiving.

Losing weight is a feasible goal, even if one is a polio survivor in later life who uses a wheelchair full time. Why the weight? Who needs it? Why wait? From this experience, I can earnestly say — losing a few pounds is possible ... right now. ■