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**SHE'S HALF
HER SIZE!**

CINDY ROSS, who has
rheumatoid arthritis,
lost over 100 lbs. Read
more weight-loss
success stories,
page 64.

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BIG WEIGHT LOSS Better LIVES

BY JUDY ALEXANDRA DIEDWARDO

PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS KNOW TOO WELL HOW EXTRA WEIGHT CAN INCREASE JOINT PAIN.

It's little wonder that even the smallest weight loss can bring relief. But when the weight loss is in the triple digits, the effects – both physical and mental – are truly life-altering. Meet three extraordinary people who have each lost more than 100 pounds – and are inspiring others to get healthy.

COMMITTED TO CHANGE

Cindy Lane Ross was a pudgy kid who grew up eating fattening and processed foods in her hometown of Mobile, Ala. “I

was never taught to eat right,” she says.

But, as a young tennis prodigy with hopes of going pro, she desperately wanted to be thin. Cindy exercised intensely and became bulimic, rather than learning healthy eating habits. So, when she was diagnosed with severe rheumatoid arthritis (RA) at age 22 and had to slow down, the pounds crept on.

Her weight again accelerated when she became a caretaker for her mother, who had scleroderma and congestive heart failure. Cindy coped with her mother's illness – as well as her own – by eating, despite the joint pain that got worse with every extra pound.

In 2006, at the time her mother died, Cindy's weight had ballooned to 220 pounds. “I looked in the mirror and knew that my being overweight was self-induced, and I committed myself then

and there to do everything my mom was unable to do,” she says.

Cindy replaced gummy bears, fried food and pizza with salads, fruits and vegetables. She rededicated herself to fitness, starting slowly and then pushing herself until the pounds melted off.

Today, the 32-year-old weighs 110 pounds – as much as she lost – and wants others to follow her lead. Last year Cindy started Bodies by Cindy Outdoor Boot Camp, a daily fitness program that includes nutritional counseling; it has already grown to three locations in Alabama and Mississippi.

She is also committed to helping people with arthritis as a board member of the Gulf Coast office of the Arthritis Foundation and as a counselor at camp MASH (Make Arthritis Stop Hurting), a summer camp in Mobile for kids with arthritis.

THREE PEOPLE
WITH ARTHRITIS
SHARE THEIR
SECRETS TO
LOSING MORE
THAN 100
POUNDS.



CINDY'S TIPS:

1 BUY A SCALE. Most people find stepping onto a scale frightening, but it's actually your best friend. Weigh yourself first thing every morning as a tool to keep yourself on track.

2 CHANGE YOUR FOOD ATTITUDE. People with weight issues must change their perception of food. Think of food as fuel and eat to feed your body what it needs.

3 DON'T SKIMP ON EXERCISE. You need a good exercise program that will keep your heart rate up. I do cardio 30 to 45 minutes a day, as well as exercises that use my body weight.

[CINDY BEFORE]



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DOUG'S TIPS

- 1 CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE.** Remove the word diet from your vocabulary. It's about a lifetime of exercise and making good food choices.
- 2 SET SMALL GOALS.** Make small but attainable exercise and weight-loss goals to avoid injury, burnout and boredom.
- 3 GET SUPPORT.** Have a good support group and celebrate together when you reach a milestone. My group is my marathon team.



Cindy says her healthy lifestyle helps her RA tremendously. She is also controlling the disease, which has led to nearly 20 surgeries – three on her wrist alone – with traditional disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs), a biologic agent and pure fortitude. “To succumb to one’s demons or to prevail over them will hurt either way,” she laughs. “And I say, forget the pity party.”

Cindy’s rheumatologist in Mobile, Thomas C. Myers, MD, says: “Her coping abilities are excellent and, in part, related to mental toughness and determination that border on stubbornness! It [is] a pleasure to see what an inspiration she is to others.”

MARATHON MAN

With aching joints from psoriatic arthritis, 51-year-old Doug Young used to treat himself to simple pleasures: potato chips, marshmallows, hours on the couch. The photos from his daughter Sabrina’s 2007 wedding were his wake-up call.

“I was disgusted by what I saw,” says the Knoxville, Tenn., native who, at 5’8” and 257 pounds, was the heaviest he had ever been. “They made me sick. I knew I had to do something.”

Doug, the engineering team leader at Fort Sanders Medical Center in Knoxville, started eating fruit and yogurt for breakfast, Healthy Choice meals for lunch and dinner, and snacks of fruit and pretzels in lieu of his daily bag of potato chips. After losing some weight, he added exercise to the mix.

“I ran 250 feet and I thought I was going to die,” laughs Doug. It took five weeks of daily walking to reach the one-mile mark. Within months he ran a 5K race in 33 minutes.

By March 2009, he had lost 100 pounds – and has kept it off. “I spent 22 years of my life trying to lose weight, but I wasn’t successful until I changed my whole lifestyle, not just my diet,” he says.

His joints occasionally feel stiff, but a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, a biologic and a traditional DMARD

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PAUL'S TIPS

1 KEEP A FOOD JOURNAL. Write it all down, even those two crackers. When you see it in black and white, it becomes real and you make better choices.

2 MAKE IT EASIER TO CONTROL YOUR CALORIES. Beware of people and places that challenge your food choices. Put food out of easy reach. Use a smaller plate. Dip your fork into salad dressing, rather than pouring the dressing on your salad.

3 DON'T PUNISH YOURSELF. On a day where I eat poorly or not enough, I remind myself that every day is a new day.

keep him on track – literally. The svelter runner joined a local marathon team last year and has since run a slew of races – one of which he finished in three hours, 34 minutes and 44 seconds. He plans on joining the elite field of the Boston Marathon in April 2011.

Doug's success has been contagious. His other daughter, Jennifer, plans to run a half-marathon next year, and his wife ran her first 5K race in February. Several of his neighbors even come out to walk with him during his cool-down.

"Doug is a great example of how a committed program of exercise and good nutrition can drastically alter the course of arthritis," says rheumatologist Donna Winn, MD, who has been treating Doug at her Knoxville practice for the past decade.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

"It takes a lot of denial and food to weigh 330 pounds," laughs 67-year-old insurance salesman Paul Butler of Itasca, Ill., who has been overweight since childhood.

But it wasn't until after he had a hip replacement for osteoarthritis in 2002, ironically, that he really let his health slip. "I had fine-tuned the art of becom-

[PAUL BEFORE]



ing a better couch potato," says Paul. By 2005, he was sedentary, sleeping up to 16 hours a day and, with sky-high blood pressure and cholesterol, at high risk of a heart attack – which killed his father at age 57.

Fortunately, a weight-loss article in *Arthritis Today* and an ad for a special diet in the local paper prompted him to take action.

He underwent a medically supervised liquid fast for four months, followed by the gradual introduction of food, which was all monitored with weekly medical exams and group meetings. Within a year Paul had lost 115 pounds, during which time he joined his local Arthritis Foundation chapter's annual Joints in Motion marathon running/walking program, where he found much needed support and camaraderie.

"I made a decision that losing weight, feeling better, and helping to raise funds to fight arthritis were my top priorities," says Paul.




Paul has maintained his weight of 180 pounds since then, thanks to using regular exercise, three healthy meals a day, plus an hour-long walk five days a week on a treadmill.

Since 2006 he has walked in nearly 20 marathons with an average walking speed of up to five miles per hour. In July 2007, *Chicago Athlete* magazine named him Athlete of the Month, and Athlete of the Year the following February.

"Today life is all about what I can do, not what I can't do," he says.

Eugene Lopez, MD, his orthopaedic surgeon in Elk Grove Village, Ill., says, "Paul is a unique case and has covered distances I never thought possible. Anyone would be well served to follow in his footsteps." ^{AT}

Judy Alexandra DiEdwardo is a freelance writer in Palm Beach, Fla.

 For ways to track your weight loss and stay motivated, go to www.ArthritisToday.org/SO10.