

Weight Maintenance

Healthy Lifestyle is



Take off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) has been a strong support and place to turn for those who are seeking to address their weight. They not only focus on helping individuals lose weight, but also emphasize the importance of weight maintenance.

Though difficult to imagine, there was a time when people did not have organizations to help them lose unwanted weight and strive to live a healthier lifestyle. Physical activity was commonplace in everyday efforts and was at a high enough level to burn off what was eaten. Eating didn't take on the appearance of a recreational sport with sites available for participation at every corner. Then things began to change.

Obesity is now spiraling toward epidemic status. The need to deal with this problem has spawned a host of groups, many for-profit offering help. TOPS Club, Inc. was the first weight-loss organization. It has been going strong for 60 years and remains nonprofit.

Humble Beginnings for Big Impact

In 1948, a Milwaukee housewife named Esther S. Manz was sitting at the kitchen table with three of her friends, all grumbling about the extra pounds they gained over the holiday season. She suggested that – rather than go to a costly “fat farm” – they should commit to meeting regularly to provide support and encouragement to help each other lose weight.

Esther witnessed the power of mutual support while participating in group sessions designed to prepare women for childbirth. She discussed the idea of group support for weight control with her personal physician who encouraged her to try it.

Their first meeting was held at a local community center in Milwaukee, WI. Verna Konings (one of the original three friends) suggested they call their new group TOP, for “Take Off Pounds.” They soon had proof that a supportive environment was a crucial ingredient to helping them lose weight and achieve better health – by the second meeting, the four recorded losses totaling 28 pounds.

Word began to spread after an article appeared in the local newspaper about this young, innovative group. So many people showed up for the next meeting that there was barely enough room for them all. In this same article, the reporter inadvertently pluralized TOPS. The ladies decided to keep the

“S,” which would stand for “Sensibly.” The word, “Sensibly,” cemented the philosophy upon which TOPS would operate – the involvement of a personal physician and supportive community-minded sensibilities.

TOPS Chapters

By the end of the second year, TOPS was so popular that new chapters were formed throughout the city. Esther found herself riding the bus all over Milwaukee, carrying the TOPS scale and records and helping to launch new chapters. In an amazingly short period of time, this grassroots effort snowballed into an international network of support groups dedicated to helping people live healthier lives.

What is, perhaps, most special about TOPS Club, Inc. is the fact that, in spite of its success and tremendous growth, the same principles hold true today that Esther Manz recognized in 1948:

*Obesity is a disease that requires a lifelong vigilance.
A warm hand of friendship, a caring group of friends,
a little recognition and some fun add up to successful
behavior changes.*

Her unwavering commitment to providing affordable, effective, accessible support has touched hundreds of thousands of loyal and grateful TOPS members throughout the world. Esther Manz was ahead of her time, and every TOPS member benefits from her vision.

TOPS Provides Weight Management Support

TOPS Club, Inc. is a nonprofit, weight-loss support organization based in Milwaukee, WI. Their two-fold objective is to encourage healthy lifestyles through weight management support groups and to sponsor obesity research. Throughout the years, as additional weight management problems, such as bulimia and anorexia, became widely recognized by the medical community, TOPS expanded their scope to include all people with weight problems, including those who require surgical assistance with their weight-loss efforts.

A Quick Look at TOPS

Nearly 180,000 TOPS members comprise about 9,000 chapters in the United States, Canada and various countries throughout the world. Local weekly meetings emphasize nutrition, wellness and exercise education focused on supplementing a member's effort to manage their weight and benefit from a healthy lifestyle. Membership is open to everyone: women, men and teens and children ages seven and older.

They also created an incentive for members who reach and maintain their weight at their goal level to graduate to KOPS (Keeps Off Pounds Sensibly) status, giving them extra recognition to help encourage other members to achieve the same type of success with their efforts.

How TOPS Club, Inc. Works

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A system of competition, rewards and recognition encourages additional emphasis on the support necessary to achieve and maintain healthy weight. TOPS also publishes a wealth of educational materials for their members.

New TOPS members are requested to consult with their licensed healthcare professional to obtain a goal weight for themselves, and then report it to their chapter "weight recorder." Members meet weekly in their local chapters. A private weigh-in is followed by a program. Programs vary, but all serve to provide members with positive reinforcement and motivation in adhering to their healthy lifestyle plans. Chapters elect their volunteer leaders from among their membership. Professional field staff provide direction and support for those efforts.

TOPS started financially supporting medically-oriented activities in 1966 with the funding of an obesity and metabolic research program at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. To date, more than \$6.5 million from TOPS'

earnings and members' contributions have funded this research. Findings from the program have been published in more than 140 papers in medical journals. Volunteer TOPS members are currently part of a landmark research project overseen by Dr. Ahmed Kissebah, medical advisor to TOPS Club, Inc.

TOPS Encourages and Recognizes Success

In keeping with Esther Manz's original desire to treat members like royalty, reward their successes and recognize the efforts they took to manage their weight, TOPS has a fully-developed system of awards and recognition, starting at the chapter level, advancing to the state/province level, and culminating with international recognition.

Each year, TOPS hosts their International Recognition Days event. During this celebration of members' success, awards are announced and shared for the greatest weight-loss winners in various categories based on such criteria as starting weight, age and surgical assistance. Recognition is also given to KOPS (Keep Off Pounds Sensibly) members and a graduation ceremony is held to highlight those members' ability to maintain their goal weight for at least one year. Attending KOPS of all levels (up to 51 years at this writing) are honored. The three-day event culminates in the coronation of the International King and Queen – the man and woman, from among all members, who lost the most weight to goal in the previous year.

Experience TOPS Yourself

Visitors are always welcome to attend their first TOPS meeting free-of-charge. To find a local chapter, visit the TOPS Web site at www.tops.org or call TOPS Headquarters at (800) 932-8677.

Article provided by TOPS Club, Inc.



TOPS was a proud partner in this past June's "Walk from Obesity – Walk on the Capitol," where many of their members were a part of this important advocacy event.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

info@obesityaction.org

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



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