

# TO DIET FOR

## *Overcoming Impulsive Overeating*

Like many people who struggle with a weight problem, 45-year-old New Yorker Joanne Devlin\* knew more about healthy eating than all of her skinny friends - combined. For Joanne, being overweight wasn't a matter of knowing the number of calories in a handful of potato chips. It was about being unable to control impulsive eating, a symptom of her AD/HD.

"I would go to a buffet or a party where they set out all kinds of different foods and I would want everything. I remember at a friend's barbecue last summer, there was every sort of food you could imagine," remembers Joanne. "After it was over, I felt like the roasted pig."

Food is a frequent problem for people with AD/HD, according to **ADDitude's Coach on Call**, Sandy Maynard. Many use food to soothe their symptoms. Others eat impulsively without even realizing it. And eating is great for immediate gratification. "You see it, you want it, you eat it," says Maynard.

Losing the weight is more difficult for AD/HD people than most because they want it to happen yesterday, and weight loss involves long-term commitment. That's why AD/HDers usually need extra help.

**ADDitude** arranged for Maynard to help when Joanne finally "hit rock bottom" with her weight problem and joined Weight Watchers two months ago. In addition to the program and meetings offered by Weight Watchers, Maynard regularly counseled Joanne, helping her refocus her thoughts about food and her relationship with it.

Here's what Maynard helped Joanne do:

**Get a handle on the impulsive eating habits that were keeping her from reaching her fitness goals.** At a buffet or party, rather than jumping in and eating everything offered, Maynard suggested that Joanne take a few minutes to look over the spread and pick out only the items that she really liked.

**Address her specific diet "pitfalls,"** namely, Chinese food. "I got to the point where I was eating Chinese food for lunch every

day," says Joanne. Maynard helped Joanne learn to satisfy her craving - sensibly. "I still eat Chinese food, but now I've discovered that I love steamed dumplings with lots of vegetables," Joanne reports.

**Establish a routine that replaces bad habits with good ones..**

Like most AD/HD people, Joanne disdains boring, repetitive tasks like keeping track of every morsel of food she eats. Yet the Weight Watchers program advises new members to write down everything they eat or drink and see that it corresponds to the program's "point system" for daily caloric totals. In the beginning, Joanne did write down every thing that passed her lips, but now, she says, she able to do the work in her head quickly and easily. It has become a *good* habit.

**Enlist the support of trusted friends, family or a coach.** "Sandy checked in with me a couple of times a week and it really helped," says Joanne. "She was so encouraging and supportive. I need a lot of encouragement."

**Establish a series of short term weight loss goals — instead of one long, protracted one – to keep from feeling overwhelmed.**

Stop every now and then to pat yourself on the back. Appreciating how far you've come in achieving your goals is important to maintaining the momentum you need to fulfill them, says Maynard. "Often we set the goals out and stretch them farther and farther without stopping to appreciate how much we've already accomplished."

And how is Joanne doing?

So far she's lost 16 pounds, her most successful dieting effort ever. In fact, she's so confident that last week she rid her closet of all her old "fat clothes."

"It was really a question of rethinking things and learning new habits," she says, smiling serenely. "I know this is going to be the time that works for me."