

Lighten Up Forever!



**How to incorporate
a faith-based
approach to
lifestyle change
into your church,
community center,
or worksite.**

By Mary Joan Oexmann, MS, RD

What Is Lighten Up?

Lighten Up is a faith-based approach to lifestyle change. It was developed in collaboration with the Christian community to help people decrease cardiovascular risk through lifestyle modification. Our mission is to inspire, teach, and encourage all people to improve health through nutrition, exercise, and spiritual growth. Programs are biblically based and incorporate current medical recommendations.

The physical, economic, and spiritual consequences of the way we live are enormous. Despite tremendous medical advances, diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, cancer, and many other preventable diseases are on the rise. Medical costs paid through insurance premiums and taxes are increasing by double digits. The greatest tragedy is that people are more anxious than ever about their future.

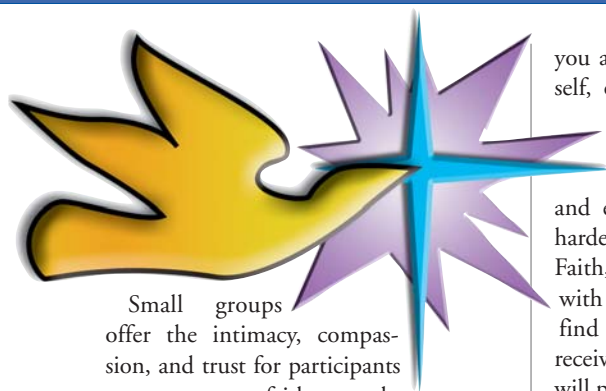
Using the 10-week program guide, offered through Lighten Up, small groups are reducing risk for stroke by 30 percent. Over a thousand people in 90 churches, community centers, and worksites have led the way. Many denominations throughout South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia have implemented the program. Lighten Up is a research-driven health ministry. This has led to peer reviewed publications, international recognition, and endorsements. The tools are ready for you and for the people you care about. So Lighten Up!

What Can You Do?

Identify a leader, assess your needs, roll up your sleeves, and get started. I will guide you through the nuts and bolts of a health check and leading small groups through the 10-week program guide and videos. It doesn't end there. As participants change, they become leaders. Mutual interdependence provides opportunities for everyone to improve health.

How Does It Work?

The health check includes measurements of height, weight, body fat, and blood pressure. When possible, a fasting blood test for triglycerides, cholesterol, HDL, LDL, VLDL, and glucose is obtained. It only takes a finger stick, 10 minutes, and the Cholestech LDX system for accurate results. Metabolic Syndrome is diagnosed through the combination of these numbers. It is the motivating starting point.



Small groups offer the intimacy, compassion, and trust for participants to step out on faith to make changes. A study of the spiritual fruits is combined with health information to empower people to confidently break through the barriers to living life to the fullest. The spiritual fruits of love, knowledge, peace, faith, and joy are easy. In truth, life is filled with the “sour grapes” of indifference, ignorance, chaos, doubt, and sorrow. Forgiveness and grace set people free and allow healing to begin. Lifestyle change is a process, which needs the encouragement and support of a small group for long-term success.

Lighten Up and the Word, the program text, provides the week-by-week structure you need. You begin with selected scriptures to inspire, followed by the simple steps you can take which lead to both spiritual and physical health. The book contains extensive health information. People learn their cardiovascular risk and set priorities for change. The nutrition basics of energy balance are included with food composition tables and recipes. The book is packed with inspirational stories to encourage. There are optional 10-minute videos for each week, which include topics such as reading food labels, exercise, and the behavior change checklist. These tools fulfill our mission to inspire, teach, and encourage!

Depending on your goals and resources, leaders may attend training programs at Saint James in Charleston, a consultant may come to you, or you may simply choose to begin with the program guide. My goal is to meet you at your starting point, remove your head from the sand, and become part of the momentum to bring health to all people.

Why Does Lighten Up Work?

Emphasis is placed on relationships. Health is not just about you. It is about

you and your relationship to God, yourself, other people, and food. Today, 65 percent of adults in America are either overweight or obese. By logic, all we need to do is eat less and exercise more. Why is it so much harder to move our feet than our fork? Faith, the place where logic ends, is filled with paradox. It is in weakness that we find strength. It is in giving that we receive. Health is not just about personal will power, which fails. It is in the faith or spiritual realm that people begin to rely on God and relationships. People learn how they fit into families, communities, and the world.

Too often we miss the boat by focusing on making food behave. Our creative food industry has changed food to be low fat, low sugar, low salt, or whatever—missing the point that we need to change the way we think and act.

One year, my husband and I went on a cruise. It was teatime, about 4 pm. In the time it took for us to have a relaxed cup of tea on deck, a young woman consumed a pizza and four deserts. She certainly was not responding to hunger. I believe she was trying to fill a spiritual hole with food, which will never satisfy. With *Lighten Up*, people are giving up the futile attempt to make food behave and replacing it with a thirst for spiritual food. Truly, we do not live by bread alone. When the spirit is healed, health returns to the body.

Biblically, we're talking about the battle between the Spirit and the flesh. In our humanism, the flesh usually wins until we hand the battle over to a higher power. Living a life of variety and moderation within the context of loving one another encourages both physical and spiritual well being. It's not about quick fixes, diets, or fads. It's not glitzy but, like the tortoise winning the race, it works. Give up the food fight and *Lighten Up*!

History Of Lighten Up

Lighten Up began in 1998 with funding from the Healthy South Carolina Initiative at the Medical University of South Carolina with the goal of reaching the medically underserved through partnerships with communities of faith. Research demonstrating safety and effectiveness led to success in funding from The Duke

Endowment in 2000. Continued research has led to peer-reviewed scientific publications (see reading list), endorsements and recognition. *Lighten Up* received the Outstanding Community Service Award from the International Society on Hypertension In Blacks, has been endorsed by the South Carolina United Methodist Church, and recognized by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. The program is now supported through program fees and donations.

Contact Information

I am ready to help you get started. My 30 years of experience in clinical research convince me beyond any doubt that spiritual health and physical health are intimately related. My analytical and teaching skills as a research nutritionist for the General Clinical Research Center at the Medical University of South Carolina have been combined with my spiritual walk to design, implement, and evaluate this compassionate program. *Lighten Up* is now under the umbrella of Saint James Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The tools are prepared and tested to match your needs for implementation in your church, community center, or worksite. ★

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Reading List

- Oexmann MJ, Thomas JC, Taylor KB, Garvey WT, O'Neil PM, Lackland DT, and Egan BM. *Short-term impact of a church-based approach to lifestyle change on cardiovascular risk in African Americans*. *Ethnicity and Disease* 10:1:17-23, 2000
- Oexmann MJ, Ascanio R, and Egan BM. *Efficacy of a church-based intervention on cardiovascular risk reduction*. *Ethnicity and Disease Suppl* 11:817-822, 2001



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