

Local doctor helps patients become healthier through weight loss

By Ruth Fields
Courier Advertising Writer

When Debra Swearingen looked at her daughter's wedding pictures, she was shocked.

"I took one look at them and said, 'I can't believe that's me,'" she said. "I knew I was going downhill and letting myself go, but I was just blown away."

Debra, a home care nurse, knew that she needed to lose weight for another reason, too.

"I couldn't walk from the parking lot to the front door without being out of breath," she said. Her primary care doctor had told her that she was pre-diabetic and had high blood pressure; he wanted her to take medications to control her high cholesterol.

So Debra resolved to lose weight. She put herself on a diet and lost 10 pounds, but still weighed 204.

"I couldn't lose any more no matter what I tried," she said.

Debra decided that she needed to seek medical advice to address the problem, so she called the offices of three local doctors who specialize in weight loss. She asked specific questions – such as whether they recommended injections, liquid diets or boxed meals – but got only vague answers.

When she called M.D.'s Weight and Wellness Center, she spoke with Jennifer Sherburne, a certified medical assistant, who explained in detail about the lab work that would be conducted before a weight loss program began. She also told Debra about Dr. Benton Baker's conservative approach to weight loss. Debra was impressed and made an appointment.

At her initial appointment, Debra was even more impressed. She liked Baker's engaging personality and sensed he genuinely cared about her health.

"I bet he spent an hour with me," Debra said. "He was awesome. That's when I decided this was my doctor."

Baker recommended that Debra increase her activity level by walking, with a goal of working up to five miles – or 10,000 steps as recorded by her pedometer. At first, she could only walk from her house to the end of her driveway, but gradually increased her stamina. When she got bored



Debra Swearingen lost 67 pounds in nine months with help from Benton Baker, M.D.



For Dr. Benton Baker III, who spent 34 years practicing obstetrics and gynecology and serving as a professor of Ob/Gyn at several universities, it's a matter of grave concern that two-thirds of Americans are at high risk of serious health problems – including cardiovascular disease and cancer – because they are overweight.

So, Baker and his wife, Joy, a registered nurse, founded M.D.'s Weight and Wellness Center in 2007. The practice is dedicated to helping patients achieve better health through weight loss.

Because his primary goal is to improve his patients' health, Baker examines his patients and conducts lab work before they begin weight-loss programs. Then, he develops individualized programs for each patient and personally sees them at every visit. When they reach their target weights, Baker helps patients create maintenance plans so that they won't regain the weight they lost.

with walking, she began doing water aerobics, used a stationary bike and worked out with an exercise DVD.

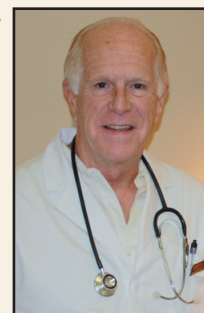
Baker also suggested that Debra keep track of what she ate by using an online food journal that supplies the caloric content of hundreds of foods, including entrees at popular restaurants. It was an eye-opening experience for Debra. She thought, for example, that salads at McDonald's were healthy choices until she found out how many calories they contain.

"There are 300 calories in just the dressing," she said, "and when you put everything together, it's 1,000 calories. It makes you very conscious about everything you put in your mouth."

Baker also educated Debra about healthy choices, such as avoiding simple carbohydrates by substituting whole grain bread for white bread and sweet potatoes for white potatoes.

Debra felt she couldn't live without chocolate, so Baker suggested that she treat herself with two miniature chocolate bars – a 75-calorie splurge – instead of eating a full-sized chocolate bar.

Baker recommended an FDA-approved drug to help control Debra's appetite, but she didn't like the idea of using a drug that might have side effects. She agreed to try, however, and discovered that the only side effect she experienced was a dry mouth. She compensated by drinking more water, which had positive effects.



Dr. Benton Baker

"What impressed me was that he took the time to discuss my situation, my challenges, my own personal goals – the things that were individual to me," one patient said. "He gave me good, solid, factual, medical information. He didn't just write me a prescription and say, 'See you next time.' He has the experience to know what really works and what doesn't."

While most of Baker's patients give him most of the credit for their weight loss, Baker is quick to compliment their dedication to achieving their weight loss goals.

"Their outstanding weight loss, spectacular change in appearance and marked improvement in health are due to their commitment and the personalized, direct physician care we provide for every patient," he said. "They have accomplished this without the use of fad diets, diuretics, deprivation, questionable dietary supplements or unapproved and potentially-dangerous injections."

As Debra began to lose weight, she found that Baker motivated her to stick to her weight loss program. At every visit, he talked with her about her challenges and successes.

"He asks how you've been, what's going on in your life and how you're coping with it," she said. "A lot of other doctors wouldn't even think to ask you that. He'll sit with you as long as you want."

With help from Baker, Debra lost 67 pounds in just nine months. Now at 130 pounds, just five pounds from her goal weight, Debra has thrown out her size 18 clothes and now wears size 6 or 7. Her body fat has gone from 41 percent (obese) to 27 percent (normal). Her blood sugar and cholesterol levels are now normal, too, as is her blood pressure. Walking no longer makes her short of breath. The best part, though, is that she feels better about herself.

"When you're heavy and you don't feel good about yourself, your self esteem and confidence go. You don't like yourself and you kind of show that same emotion to other people," she said. "Once you are feeling good about yourself, then you just want to share the love."

Debra often recommends Baker to others who need to lose weight.

"You've got to have the motivation, you have to exercise, you have to eat right and he'll give you medication to help you along the way," she tells them. "You have to retrain yourself about the way you think about eating. You're going to have to work hard, but he's going to motivate you."

M.D.'s Weight and Wellness Center
Benton Baker III, M.D., FACOG, FACS

200 River Pointe, Suite 115

936-756-THIN (8446)