Clarion Review

Self-Help

Lighten up America: Odds and Not So Fat Ends of Weight Management
Lisa Clark
iUniverse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Straightforward and humorous, this medical perspective on weight loss brings a no-nonsense attitude to personal betterment.

Part cheerleader, part drill sergeant, Dr. Lisa Clark is shouting out a message to overweight Americans: manage your weight to manage your health. In the first book in her Family Practice Diaries series, Clark frankly and humorously distills lessons learned from fourteen years of treating patients in private practice. *Lighten Up America: Odds and Not So Fat Ends of Weight Management* offers a doctor's-eye view of the obesity epidemic, along with tools for overcoming it.

"This book is not a diet book," writes Clark, and although the pages contain information on calorie counting and exercise regimens, it's true. You won't find prescribed meal plans here. Instead, Clark writes about the reasons managing weight should be a priority and how to do it on a daily basis for the rest of our lives. "There's no secret," she says, just hard work.

Writing in a straightforward, conversational voice, Clark candidly outlines the risks of being overweight. She combines short personal stories, composite anecdotes from her practice, and specific patient case studies to shed light on obesity-related diseases like heart disease, osteoarthritis, and diabetes. The interwoven stories have the potential to create a rich picture of the medical side of obesity, but due to their brevity and some missing detail, they skim the surface rather than delve into the topic thoroughly. For instance, the section on heart disease carries the caveat that women's heart attack symptoms are different from men's, but the book does not offer a list of those symptoms.

Arranged in three sections—"Education is the Key," "Age and Weight," and "Motivate Thyself"—*Lighten Up America* covers a lot of ground in under a hundred pages. Some topics

are unique to weight-loss books, such as a cautionary section on adequate nutrition for infants, but much of the book is familiar material presented in a new way.

Clark captures attention with blunt assessments that will seem funny to some, but may be troubling to others. Things like the “Calendar of Excuses” that outlines rationalizations common among the chronically overweight, for example, can seem a bit harsh. On the other end of the spectrum, her suggestion to hang a Hooters poster on the wall to motivate male exercisers, although clearly a joke, lessens the impact of Clark’s actual recommendations for men.

The author’s use of humor to motivate is most successful when she steps away from her apparent frustration with her patients and instead shares personal stories that show her own imperfections. She recommends against using food as a reward for children, for instance, but then admits to owning a couple of purses with melted chocolate lining the bottom from her stash of emergency, kid-silencing M&Ms. Her ability to laugh at herself makes the rest of her message more palatable to the average person struggling with weight issues.

A quick read, *Lighten Up America* is a reminder that body weight affects our health and that we can affect our body weight. Readers who follow Clark’s suggestions will likely see improved health, but as she says, “there’s no secret” to weight loss; you just have to do it.

Sheila M. Trask