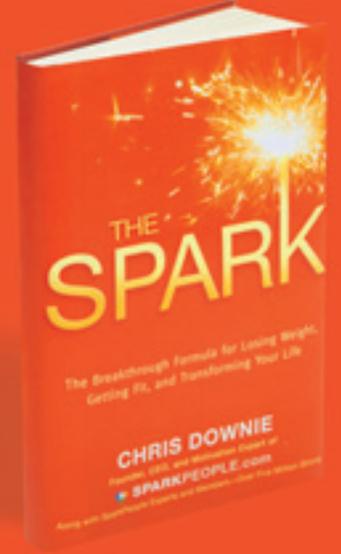


Get The Best of What Works at



America's most Active Weight-Loss and Fitness Website, in an all New **28-Day Plan** in *The Spark!*

Get your copy today at
www.sparkpeoplebook.com
or anywhere books are sold!



Introduction Chapter of The Spark The Spark Promise: More Than a Diet

A revolution is taking place—a community movement of millions of people discovering a new way of living and thinking about their weight, their health, and their lives. They are embarking on a journey with a proven system that builds confidence, supports personal growth, and inspires weight loss. And they are reaping great benefits, such as higher levels of happiness, more energy, improved health, the desire and ability to reach new goals, and increased connections with other people.

The old method of punitive dieting simply does not work. Complicated fads, rigid protocols, and a focus on deprivation lead to failure, as millions of yo-yo dieters can attest. But at SparkPeople the revolution is building. People are living better lives, making healthy choices, feeling great, losing weight, and keeping it off.

And their numbers are growing at an astounding rate. Every month, over four million people visit the SparkPeople Websites. And they are so passionate about their experiences that they are spreading the word, recommending the program to friends and family. In fact, 175,000 new members join SparkPeople each month—that's almost 6,000 per day, or 4 people every single minute of every single day.

The core of the program is an effective combination of nutrition and fitness with goal-setting techniques. But what makes this system so potent is the infusion of our own special magic—elements of a secret formula that make it accessible and profound as well as fun and rewarding. Our program radiates a joyous team spirit and the knowledge that people are nourished by each other as much as by food. We have created a system that promotes the interconnectedness of an extended family—mutual support and a sense of belonging that is healthy for both body and spirit.

To understand why SparkPeople is so potent and effective, and why The Spark will have the same powerful impact, just take a look at the animal kingdom. Elephant trainers tether a baby elephant by a thick rope to a stake hammered into the ground in order to limit his range. Whenever the elephant tries to escape, he is quickly restrained by the bond, and he learns that he does not have the strength to break away. As the baby matures, the trainers reinforce the boundary set by this rope. By the time the elephant is an adult, he is massive, weighing several tons and capable of enormous feats of strength. But now the trainer could tether him by a slender thread and he still would not try to escape. The elephant has grown so accustomed to being restrained that he has no idea of the strength he possesses to free himself.

All of us are conditioned to live within a limited perception of our own power to transform our lives—moving through our days with invisible tethers that hold us back from becoming who we really are. But while the elephant submits to its restricted boundaries, we possess the freedom to set the scope of our own dreams. We're free to move out of the dusty circle where we've stood, stuck and discouraged, and into a new terrain that offers a landscape of vast potential. We can awaken that smoldering spark inside ourselves and become our best and truest selves. I know because I have done it myself and so have millions of others.

WHY SPARK, WHY NOW?

There is a positive force that flows through you that is unique. At SparkPeople, we help you tap into it to envision your best life and then achieve it.

Take the time to do this now, wherever you are.

Focus on the core of strength and promise that resides within you, underneath whatever chaos your life may be in or whatever shape your body.

Give yourself up to this moment. Dare to see it.

Now look down at your feet; slip out of those invisible tethers.

Then ask: Where would you take yourself right this moment if you walked toward your most heartfelt dream?

What would your life look like? What would your body look and feel like? What level of energy would you have?

What might be your favorite activity? What would your daily life include?

Imagine happiness—the sweet glow of inner contentment, the way it tastes and smells and feels. It may feel odd, even uncomfortable at first. As adults, we have grown unaccustomed to dreaming. We believe it's the domain of children or fools, of birthday cakes and wishing wells.

But our brains respond to wishing. Envisioning our hopes provides a path, as luminous as a beam of moonlight. Once you've visualized what you wish, an inner road is being cobbled for you to follow. Maybe you see yourself on a Hawaiian beach, slim and active. Or maybe you envision something more specific, like our member who dreamed of becoming a police officer, but was so heavy he had trouble getting off of his couch. A hundred pounds lighter after joining SparkPeople, he recently passed the agility exam for the Bakersfield, California, police department.

Or maybe, like our member Linda, you wish for increased mobility and health. She wrote: I am the lowest weight I have been in nine years and I am proud of the fact I did it from a wheelchair. I have lost over 50 pounds with my limitations. I was born with a disability and needed spinal surgery. I lost the use of my legs through the surgery and had given up. I ballooned up over 300 pounds . . . I was homebound because of the wheelchair and had no access to a wheelchair van. I found SparkPeople and it changed my whole outlook on life. I saw there was hope for me to be healthier.

Although many people first come to SparkPeople for weight loss, our program is actually a way of life. A state of mind. It is a road map that will take you to a destination all your own: a place where you have confidence in who you are and what you can become.

As founder and CEO of SparkPeople, I've watched millions of others "spark" their lives to not only lose a tremendous amount of weight and achieve levels of fitness they never thought possible, but reach astonishing life goals as well—from healthier kids and family to improved career and financial well-being.

Our program inspires an inner power that not only connects you with others but makes you capable of performing feats beyond your dreams.

Take Dana, a 45-year-old mother of three and grandmother of two who proves the far-reaching power of our program in a post she wrote on her online SparkPage:

Last November I was driving behind a bus doing the speed limit when from out of nowhere a car whips around both me and the bus. Yes, double yellow lines, on a hill, going around a blind curve . . . I freaked out, and said to my son, "Oh my gosh, that person has a death wish!"

After that corner the road becomes an upward progression of hills and valleys, so there's no seeing what's ahead until you're actually there.

Well, sure enough, when we arrived there, it was a mess, a nightmare! I pulled over as quickly as I could and called 911. The car was in a ditch on the opposite side of the road about 50 yards from the car it had just hit head-on. Inside was a lady, probably in her early 50s; an airbag had punched her in the gut and chest pretty hard and she couldn't breathe. I was concerned she was having a heart attack because of the way she was grasping her chest. She was very much in shock and because of the enormous amount of smoke pouring in through the vents she thought the car was going to blow up, but there was no getting her out, so I got as much of myself as I could in through the busted-out window and held her.

Finally, after several minutes, when the paramedics arrived, I had to let go of her and get out of the way, but I have to say, it broke my heart to let go, I didn't want to. This lady and I had bonded . . . and during those terrifying moments I had lost all sense of myself . . . there was no "ME" in the picture, only us . . .

The reason I'm telling this story is because all of you are beautiful.

SparkPeople cause me to have that same feeling, the feeling that I'm a part of something so much bigger than myself . . . That it's just as important to me that all of you become healthy and happy as it is that I do.

We live in such a busy, isolated society, there is so much loneliness and sorrow . . . so much stress and need of THINGS . . . when I was in that car with that woman, every bit of that vanished . . . all I felt was a desperate need for her to live.

I want you all to LIVE in every aspect of the word . . . I don't need to know you (although I'd love to) or be your close friend to know that you are a part of me . . . that the healthier you are, the healthier I am . . . that the more success and goals you reach, the more likely I am to do the same.

These are the kinds of stories I hear every day.

My own journey of self-discovery led me to SparkPeople. And thanks to the Internet, the Spark message has spread to millions of people—many of whose lives have been changed. But this book can do even more, connecting the dots between diet, fitness, community, confidence, and feeling good. The Spark delivers on the promise that dieting can be transformative. Its visionary system of support, motivation, diet, and fitness has a proven track record—nearly 10 million pounds lost and thousands of personal goals reached—and still counting.

SECRETS OF SUCCESS SURVEY

We recently sent a 64-question survey to a random sample of our millions of active members and received over 5,500 responses. The survey reinforces our program's core belief that the old, punitive dieting model is both outdated and ineffective.

This survey's compelling findings include dozens of practical ways to get results. We segmented the respondents into groups: people who reached their weight-loss goals, people who lost 100 pounds or more, people who called themselves "dieters," people who described themselves as "pursuing a healthy lifestyle," and people who reported being "stuck." The secrets of the most successful—those who either had met their goals or had lost 100 pounds and were on track to reach their final goals—are found throughout the rest of the book:

- How our members have lost between 2 and 200 pounds—or more
- How so many of our members have gone from being winded walking to the mailbox to learning to jog, even run marathons
- How the majority of our members report increased levels of confidence, energy, health, fitness, happiness, and goal achievement

But perhaps the most striking result of our survey was the answer to the following question: "If you are trying to lose weight or maintain your weight loss, which of the following best describes your efforts: I am on a diet or I am following a healthy lifestyle?"

Fully 90 percent of all SparkPeople members stated they were following a healthy lifestyle rather than dieting. Moreover, those on diets were much less likely to have reached their weight-loss goals than those living healthy lifestyles. People "on a diet" simply lost less weight.

Dieters tended to use tools that were centered on deprivation and willpower and focused on the scale. Healthy-lifestyle members, on the other hand, used strategies that were focused on positives, eating more fruits and vegetables, cooking more healthy foods, eating substantial, healthy breakfasts, and drinking much more water. They had a major philosophical difference from dieters who viewed their plates as half empty, while they

viewed their plates half full.

The old diet model that you need to grit your teeth and suffer is not only antiquated, it doesn't work. This is the crux of why our members finally achieve lasting weight loss, improved fitness, and better health as well as greater levels of personal happiness.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SPARK PEOPLE

SparkPeople has become a veritable village green of motivation and participation where your journey becomes energized by the powerful support and community of other people who are "sparking their lives"—both online and offline. Members regularly e-mail, talk, and get together; they inspire, encourage, and challenge one another, and even hold one another accountable. Throughout the book, you'll meet many of our members and hear how joining the SparkPeople community has changed their lives. You'll see them mentioned by their SparkPeople username, which is how they are identified on the site and to their friends in the online community.

In a recent poll of our members, the majority of respondents reported a dramatic increase in happiness after joining SparkPeople. A full 30 percent went from reporting the lowest level of happiness (1 on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being least happy and 5 being happiest) to near the highest (a 4 or 5). And fully 90 percent of all respondents reported that they were somewhere at the top of the happiness scale.

The SparkPeople team includes health and technology experts who are passionate about helping people reach their goals. Our community consists of millions of people who have helped us continually improve the program and Website so we can keep helping more people. So many people with big goals to reach have shouted out on our message boards after they did reach their big goals, "If I can do this, please believe me that you can too."

This book is really about you. Your goals and dreams. What's most important to you? What goals would you like to start reaching today? What life do you really want to live? It's all possible when you learn the secret formula for the Spark.

The Spark is a completely different way of thinking about diet, fitness, reaching your goals, and living your life. Where most diets are compartmentalized programs separate from the rest of your life, with many rules and restrictions, the Spark is about your whole life. It's about what you can do, not what you can't do. It's about celebrating and building on your victories and learning from your missteps, not about focusing on a quick fix that so often leads to a "quick ditch." It's an innovative way of discovering that losing weight is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. The larger rewards of losing weight and being fit are:

- Gaining confidence by setting and reaching small goals
- Building, nurturing, and belonging to a community
- Gaining inspiration, encouragement, and connection
- Igniting passion, fire, and an adventurous spirit
- Sharing the spark with others—and seeing it grow
- Living a better, brighter, bigger life

If you've never heard of SparkPeople before, or if you don't spend time online, this book will deliver everything you need to discover this new way of thinking and to put it into practice. If you are already a SparkPeople member, this book provides a simple yet powerful 28-day program that, for the first time, distills the most beneficial aspects of SparkPeople into an accessible, easy-to-follow format. Even if you've been involved in a healthy lifestyle for some time, this 4-week program can be a great way to refresh or jumpstart your efforts.. And as you

go, if you ever need a “fallback” program to restart your momentum, this will work well for that, too. No matter where you fall, this is a great way to return to the basics of what really works, build a strong foundation, and sustain your momentum so you can get the most out of your new lifestyle.

This book will also deepen your connection to the program, providing for the first time the history and framework that are at its foundation, as well as exciting new content—including a deeper exploration of our philosophy. And The Spark will give you a more portable and tangible source of ongoing inspiration, to place by your bedside or take along on your daily commute. This will dramatically increase your chances to reach your most important goals.

THE SPARK PEOPLE MAGIC FORMULA

We’ve distilled the best of a medically accepted, common-sense nutrition and fitness program and infused it with our own magic in order to make it accessible, profound, and far-reaching in its scope and effectiveness.

Our secret formula combines such innovative elements as:

- Goal-setting: A system of visualizing your larger goals that gives more meaning to your daily actions, and a way to create and build confidence and momentum that fuels results
- Behavior change: Using wisdom from the science of behavior change to help you turn the tide on negative behaviors and effectively replace those unhealthy habits with healthy ones that then become a natural, even enjoyable, part of your life
- Community support: Inspiring real-life stories of ordinary people who’ve transformed their lives, and a 24/7 source of help and encouragement
- Positive motivation: Points, trophies, and awards that transform dieting into a fun and exciting adventure
- Team-building: Affiliations with other members based on geography, hobbies, interests, and amount of weight to lose
- Accessibility: A program that easily fits into the most hectic life, building momentum while remaining entertaining and fun
- World-class technology: Tools, content, and community, continuously updated, often from suggestions by SparkPeople members

The core of the book and the underlying philosophy of the SparkPeople lifestyle is an innovative program of personal empowerment. It includes four cornerstones that make up the building blocks of living a “sparked” life:

1. Focus is the ability to set priorities, live a life according to your values, and become clear about your vision and goals.
2. Fitness is a physical and mental springboard that provides you the energy to reach your goals and trains you to think on your feet.

3. Fire is the passion that is created by your actions and momentum. When you live with fire, you see possibilities, not problems.

4. Positive force is what happens when you share your energy and success with others. The more you give, the more you get in return.

The second component, the four-stage SparkDiet, is a customizable, step-by-step journey that offers the tools, confidence, and motivation to jump from simple dieting to a healthy way of life so you can reach not only your weight-loss goals but much more.

An important element that makes the Spark authentically different from other diets is that it includes the positive community support that can be the key to sticking with any program.

Changing your life in a vacuum can be very lonely; human beings are communal creatures who need each other. Like the SparkPeople Website community, this book will offer a method for creating community and connection online, offline, or both.

And, perhaps best of all, the program is fun. It is built on a system of positive rewards in which people can earn points for every positive step they take toward a healthier lifestyle. And it is imbued with a sense of playfulness and adventure that our members tell us they've never before found in a weight-loss program. We believe strongly in making health and fitness fun—how else can we be expected to make and stick with healthy changes? The Spark does not focus on punitive restrictions and rigid regimens. It is about what will really work in your life, and how you can maintain these healthy changes and live with a sense of adventure and happiness.

THE SPARK PROMISE: SPARK PEOPLE UNITE

I know the Spark program works because it has been carved directly from my life. But if I couldn't spread the word to others, it wouldn't be the success it is today. The stories of SparkPeople are nothing short of inspirational.

Take Ann, the wife of a sailor stationed in Japan.

When you're a woman who weighs nearly 280 pounds, a look at your goal weight on the charts can be an exercise in humiliation. The extra weight seems so enormous that the notion of losing it via the usual methods—the airy diets in women's magazines, stressing grapefruit and carrot sticks—feels nearly impossible. These plans seem to be designed for someone other than you—someone with a different character or life. They don't take into account the truth of your experience, the way people treat you as if your weight is a flaw reflective of your character, how the simplest social outing can be an occasion for the deepest self-consciousness—a trip to the beach in a vast, skirted swimsuit, the derisive look of a waitress when you order chocolate cake for dessert.

Then there are your doctor's warnings of how you're putting yourself at risk of type 2 diabetes, arthritis, and cardiovascular problems. Not that you need anyone to tell you this, because you already feel it—your knees hurt when you stand too long, and your heart pounds when you run up a flight of stairs after your child. You've tried other diet programs with their humiliating weigh-ins and punitive calorie tallies, where you end up eating your quota by noon. These programs seem drenched in deprivation and leave you feeling alienated and alone.

You only have to try and pick up a bag of mulch to realize how heavy 50 pounds is and

become discouraged all over again that you have this—and more—to shed.

It becomes easier to isolate yourself and open another bag of potato chips, to dream vaguely of gastric bypass surgeries or other miraculous interventions. It's easier to feel disillusioned, stuck, and ashamed. Being a serviceman's wife is stressful enough, moving from one base to another, acclimating to another culture, making new friends. But living in Japan, a slender society where even clothes are sized smaller, weighing over 250 pounds can make you feel like a giant.

The Japanese live by the maxim *hara hachibu*, eat only until you're 80 percent full—a practice from Okinawa, which may have the longest life expectancy in the world. But Okinawans live longer not just because they eat well, but because their culture also places a premium on community, meaningful activity, fitness, and engagement. Okinawans work throughout their lives, passing on their skills and providing encouragement to younger members of their society.

These components are also part of the SparkPeople program and are essential to its success compared with other diet programs, which have a dismal failure rate.

Ann's journey illustrates why our program is so successful. After a friend invited her to join, she thought about the core reasons why she wanted to lose weight in the first place—in order to preserve her health, to feel good about herself again, and to provide her son with a strong role model. She broke down her goals into what we call “streaks”—small, sustained activities that she committed to performing regularly—beginning with short aerobic workouts. She became aware of how and what she was eating, made small substitutions in her diet—mustard for mayonnaise, mineral water instead of soda—and added fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. She began to track her fitness activities and daily calories on our online tracker. These moves weren't drastic, but they were regular and powerful. Ann met new friends online who faced the same challenges, who shared their stories and congratulated her on her successes. Visiting message boards, she realized that her own experience could be an inspiration, and she eventually became a program motivator herself.

The benefits of the program spread throughout her life. When she went on vacation, she spent time exercising with her son. She didn't sabotage herself by trying to follow a drastic diet, centering on no carbs or no fats, but instead ate a gently modified version of what she really liked. When she went shopping, she rewarded herself with a beautiful dress that she would have been unable to button six months before. And her SparkPeople friends were always there, a click away, on her laptop.

She was able to do all this because the Spark plan was a pleasurable lifestyle that she had incorporated into her life through incremental steps over time. She had constructed a firm foundation, not the kind of sand castle her son built on the beach, which was swept away by the first strong wave.

Ann discovered the powerful satisfaction that arises when you change your own life. So far she has lost over 80 pounds—and gained so much more.

MY START

When I first started SparkPeople I had a simple goal: I wanted to help millions of people. To anyone who knew the shy, quiet boy I once was, this might have sounded like a ludicrous proposition. I may now live in a house near Silicon Valley with a view of the Pacific and a wife and two young sons who are my chief motivation for staying healthy and goal-oriented.

But it wasn't always like this for me.

Thanks for taking the time to read the introduction chapter!

If you're ready to keep the positive momentum moving forward and get access to The 28-Day Breakthrough Plan for Losing Weight, Getting Fit, and Transforming Your Life, then **ORDER THE SPARK TODAY!** www.sparkpeoplebook.com