

Zonya Foco, R.D.

by Lyle Hurd, editor

Nobody has more fun talking and writing about health, nutrition and exercise than Zonya Foco, R.D. She's vocal and visual about helping people "get it," giving them the information and tools to make healthy choices despite hectic lifestyles. Beans and broccoli, apples to zucchini, she's a bit of a fanatic (in a good way) about helping people "make their good intentions come true."

An expert on nutrition and wellness, author and professional speaker, Zonya earned her bachelor of science degree in dietetics and is a registered dietitian with the American Dietetics Association. She is also a certified health and fitness instructor with the American College of Sports Medicine.

Zonya's goal is to help people achieve their maximum energy and health potential by providing them with the information and resources they need to be fully successful. Her approach is not about strict eating plans or fanatic exercise. It is about manageable change, substitutions and choices. It is for people who want to be strong, vigorous and energetic. It is for people who want to create balance in their lives and avoid health problems as well as those who are currently choosing to correct or counter problems with weight, cholesterol, blood pressure or diabetes. Her favorite motto is "Knowledge is power and you have choices."

Before founding her speaking, writing and publishing business in 1994, Zonya worked for eight years as a clinical nutritionist for the Michigan Heart and Vascular Institute of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She led the work-site nutrition wellness programs, performed individual nutrition counseling for weight and cholesterol control and taught weekly weight and cholesterol workshops.

With clients telling her everything they needed in order to succeed at a healthy lifestyle, she created her 400-page *Lickety-Split Meals For Health Conscious People*

on the Go! It includes all the recipes and tips people need to make lifestyle changes with ease. After 10 years of listening to her clients and writing and compiling all the information for her unique book, Zonya has calculated that those who use the book to its capacity can save five hours and lose one to two pounds per week and lower blood pressure and cholesterol, all while the family enjoys delicious dinners at home.

Zonya is also the author of *The Power of Positive Eating*, an informative guide to simple changes you can make to emphasize more positive foods, maximizing your health and energy. With chapters titled "Ten Steps For Positive Eating," "The Scoop on Sugar," "The Big Fat Difference," "Carbohydrates: Friend or Foe?," "The Fact on Fiber," "To Salt or Not to Salt," "Positive Eating Musts for Every Women," "Positive Eating Musts for Every Man" and "The Top Four Nutrition Problems Facing Our Kids Today," *The Power of Positive Eating* is a valuable asset to every nutrition conscious family.

TH: Welcome Zonya. Our staff enjoyed the opportunity to become familiar with *Lickety-Split Meals* and *The Power of Positive Eating*. Please share with us your journey to creating *Lickety-Split Meals*.

ZF: Initially my passion for healthy eating and physical fitness was inspired by my own struggle. I'd been a trim kid keeping up with two very active brothers and a physically fit mom until my junior year in high school. Then somehow over that summer I packed on 20 pounds.

As a cheerleader this was definitely a no-no since I was in the middle of the "human pyramid" (also known as "the mount"). In the first practice of the season I heard my fellow teammates loud and clear—"Go on a diet!"

I took the problem in confidence to my

mother. "Mom, I have to lose 20 pounds and I have to lose it by Friday's game." Together we concocted our own crazy weight loss combination of fasting and liquid diet. This, we thought like so many other people did, would get the most weight off as fast as humanly possible by Friday's game. I quickly learned (as many of us have) that this is actually a very effective weight gain diet.

What we really needed to do was find out what was causing the problem. Like most teenagers I was skipping breakfast, ate junk food for lunch then came home and ate a half a bag of cookies or Ritz crackers and peanut butter. After dad came home we would have dinner and I was eating again. No fruits, no vegetables. Starchy, fattening, greasy and sugary foods? You bet. What I needed to do was fix what I was eating.

I became fascinated with nutrition and learning how to control my weight. However, over the next few years my weight kept yo-yoing and each time I would end up being heavier than when I had started. Then shortly after entering college I took my first nutrition class and dedicated myself to mastering my weight problem the healthy and permanent way. The more I became involved the more I realized my mission was greater than just conquering my own problems but to dedicate my career to inspiring and helping others learn about healthy lifestyle changes that affect everything from weight to cholesterol control, heart health and diabetes management. Four years later I graduated with a degree in dietetics. However I was at my heaviest weight ever. So while the book learning was great, I still had not found the answer to my own problem.

I spent the next 10 years at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in the outpatient nutrition counseling unit working with individuals who were overweight. During that period I was also struggling with my own weight—I was still about 25 pounds overweight. Then I realized that everything I had learned in college, through my own problems, my counseling and interaction with other counselors, really came down to how we use our grocery cart each week. The core issues are what is in your kitchen and what are your snacking and exercise styles.

TH: How did you come up with the idea to combine the elements of your program, recipes, grocery guides and health and fitness advice into one concept, *Lickety-Split Meals For Healthy Conscious People On The Go*?

ZF: Actually I have had this idea for the book since I was 16. That summer my mother offered to assume the task of doing the dishes and pay me \$40.00 a week if I would take over the responsibility of doing the grocery shopping and making the family meals. I quickly figured it would take 25 hours to bring home that much money from my summer part-time job and we shook hands on it right then and there. What a great education. I had to learn how to plan meals and buy groceries for a week at a time so I wouldn't run out of one or two necessary ingredients each night. The first week we agreed I would make dinners I could already prepare. The second week was all new recipes and I really struggled getting a whole meal on the table at the same time. Why is it that after slaving through a recipe I would read, "serve with hot cooked noodles and a tossed salad?" So when were you supposed to boil those darn noodles and make that tossed salad? I turned to books for help. Shouldn't there be a book out there that instructs people on how to put an entire meal on the table? The only one I found was too gourmet and definitely over my head. I wanted simple, everyday meals that my family would eat. I wanted recipes that were fast and easy to follow. I also needed a list of groceries to buy. And thus, the seed for *Lickety-Split Meals* was planted. After six years of college, nine years of marriage and hundreds of ideas from clients, the seed blossomed. The fast, easy-to-follow recipes, including how to get a whole meal on the table, plus a complete grocery list, would be right there.

Then I got to thinking . . . what about all the helpful tips I've collected from and for clients along the way? All the simple nuggets of wisdom to help win the battle with weight, cholesterol and finding time to exercise? They, too, are included. The reader will appreciate these inspiring tips about nutrition, exercise, time management and positive living, sprinkled page by page throughout the book.

TH: Sharing dinner and family interaction are a strong themes of your message.

ZF: I have always been committed to the whole family experience but particularly now that I have a three-year-old. My mission is to encourage Americans to sit down at the table together once again, to sit down to a healthy meal instead of our national trend toward dashboard dining. How do you talk to your children about their grades when your dinner table is a dashboard? How can you know what

is going on in their lives, talk about drugs, share experiences or make plans when everyone is on the go all the time?

Sharing a meal at home is a unique opportunity to connect and grow together day by day. It is also a great opportunity to get everyone involved in the process. Dad or mom, depending on who the major meal preparer is, could take over one or two nights a week. There are a variety of great meals in the book that most young people over 12 can prepare for the family. You might be surprised at how willing other family members are to participate and how fulfilling the experience is for them.

TH: I understand you also are involved in a good deal of outreach as a keynote speaker, conducting seminars and presenting cooking demonstrations.

ZF: I appear at about 50 speaking engagements a year in the U.S. and Canada. The audiences vary from 200–2,000 people. It is really a pleasure to talk to people about the power of positive eating, eating right on the run, the power of one good habit and other relevant topics. My goal is to engage the audience, to get them to laugh and become involved. For instance, I have a gastrointestinal tract made of stuffed cloth which starts at fake red lips going through to the esophagus, the stomach, then 24 feet of intestines and three feet of colon. Two members of the audience join me and as they spread this out across the room, lip to the other end, I explain that we eat an average of 11 grams of fiber a day and we need at least 30. Then I ask them to consider what this deficiency can do to our bodies over a month, year or decade. My goal and inspiration is to motivate people to do what they know they should be doing to establish and maintain their health.

TH: I understand you have a new product coming out, the Power Pack, which incorporates *The Power of Positive Eating* booklet, a 90-minute tape of presentation highlights and eight hours of audio CDs. How can our audience learn more about the Power Pack, *Lickety-Split Meals*, other products and what's new with Zonya Foco?

ZF: Just visit www.zonya.com, e-mail me at zonya@zonya.com or call toll-free 1-888-884-LEAN.

TH: Thank you, Zonya.

ZF: You're welcome. Stay healthy. ♡