

Nutritional Harm Reduction

Tips From Suppers Families Who Have Succeeded at Household Changes

Many of our Suppers members come to meetings as much for their families as for themselves. Following is a list compiled by members who have succeeded at making incremental changes in their households. Adults and children experienced good to excellent results. Their efforts to practice nutritional harm reduction – gentle, manageable changes over time – have led to:

- reduction of depression
- reduction of asthma
- increased energy
- better ability to concentrate
- better blood sugar levels
- less jitters
- better moods
- better bowel function
- reduction of ADHD symptoms
- reduced angry outburst
- increased impulse control
- reduction of anxiety, panic

Make Breakfast

The best results we have gotten have happened when people start eating the right breakfast *for them*, as determined by experiments. It usually involves a breakfast combining protein, complex carbohydrates and some high quality fat and NO sweet or artificially sweetened items. Here's why: higher intake of protein and high quality fats can be a therapeutic bridge to better mood chemistry in people who have eaten and drunk too much fuel (carbs) and not enough building blocks (fats and protein) for stable blood sugar and mood chemistry. For others, the experiments reveal that a vegan approach brings them the greatest energy. You can find out which type you are by trying our breakfast challenge and getting real data about your body,

http://www.thesuppersprograms.org/Documents/Activities/BreakfastChallenge_Jan10.pdf

Teach Them the Difference Between a Snack and Dessert

Snacks are the same food you would eat at a meal; they help children grow. They have nutritional value. They're healthy for adults too. Snacks include leftovers, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, etc. Desserts are everything else: they should only be eaten on a belly full of real food (high fiber vegetables and fruits, good fats, and lean protein). That means you don't have to totally vilify chips, candy, cookies, bagels, soft drinks, and other junk, which would cause rebellion. They just have to start looking like dessert instead of a snack. People who experience fatigue or mood swings after eating wheat, dairy, sugar or any food that causes an unwanted reaction may need to avoid these items entirely. Cravings are also a tip-off that your body doesn't tolerate a food.

Replace Favorite Foods with Healthier Versions

Keep the family in the discussion. Start with small changes like replacing big-name junk food items containing hydrogenated fats and high fructose corn syrup with the health food store varieties. Here's why: although they still contain too much blood sugar destabilizing processed ingredients, they eliminate the worst food poisons and are a step in the right direction. Our members have braved the objections and been happy to realize that as favorite junk foods are less available, healthier versions of junk food gain acceptance.

Introduce Water as a Beverage Option

Keep a fresh pitcher in the frig. Put the pitcher on the table at snacks and meals. At the same time, reduce purchases of sugared or artificially sweetened soft drinks. Expect sabotage and/or rebellion; that's fine.

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Beat Them to It

Have fresh fruit, cut up veggies, nuts, seeds, hummus, cheese (if they tolerate it) and leftovers ready when they are hungry. Let the salad or a plate of fruits and veggies be the first thing on the table while you prepare the rest of the meal. If no adult is there and they are regularly feeding themselves, this is part of the problem. This is not to make anybody feel guilty; it's just to acknowledge that without an adult taking charge, most kids will gravitate to the drug-like food. The same goes for adults. If a food causes cravings and unwanted eating, it will probably be easier to not keep it in the house.

Buy Mostly Food That Has No Label

The trouble starts when there is a list of ingredients. The food that will turn your health around doesn't need a label because it contains only one, readily obvious thing: one chicken, two apples, three yams, etc. Of particular concern are flavor enhancers like MSG and artificial sweeteners which are particularly toxic to brain cells when blood sugar is low. <http://www.thesuppersprograms.org/Documents/Information/FoodAdditives.pdf>

Exercise Control at the Grocery Store and You Won't Have to at Home

The most important time to exercise control is before junk comes into the house. If you buy it and try to control it at home, it's a lot harder. One couple started using the babysitting service at the grocery store so they could take the time to read labels and make selections without the children's input. In general, the whole food is in the periphery of the store, and the junk is in the aisles. Avoid aisles.

Take Them Out for the Treats

Head in the direction of letting the home pantry contain only healthy foods. Set a clear boundary. Let a trip to the ice cream store or bakery (if they tolerate some dairy, wheat and sugar) be a real treat because it doesn't take place every day. If something takes place every day, it's not a treat; it's the expected norm.

Pay Attention to Digestion

How you digest is data. Bloating, diarrhea, constipation, excessive farting, foul smelling gas, and belching are all indications that a body is not digesting well. Good digestion is important because you are NOT what you eat. You are only what you absorb of what you eat. If digestive problems don't clear up with an improved diet, a consultation with a nutritionist may be in order.

Do Not Ask Your Kids or Yourself "Does It Taste Good?"

Nutritional harm reduction facilitates transition. If it were easy to switch from our favorite junk foods to a diet of whole foods, we would have done it by now. Here's a promise: As you eat healthier, whole foods, your body will transition from "Yuck" and disappointment to acceptance to enjoyment. This is a leap of faith. In Suppers terms, once the brain makes the association between whole foods and better mood chemistry, tastes develop for the healthy foods. It took one of our members a few months to develop a taste for vegetables, most others started feeling the effects and desiring more salads immediately. Members who were not getting enough protein felt less anxious and depressed as soon as they started eating enough to meet their individual needs.

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Talk to Them

Let spouses, friends, and children know how important it is to make these changes and why. This is not a democracy. Parents determine the boundaries about what comes into the house. Friends don't get a vote in what you eat.

Learn Which Jobs are Yours and Which Belong to the Kids

When it comes to feeding and eating, the division of labor can get pretty confusing. Here are the recommendations for people who need to stabilize blood sugar and mood chemistry:

The Parents' job is to:

1. Bring into the house only the healthy foods you want the family to eat.
2. Exclude foods that act like bargaining chips (you know they are more drug-like if people lobby to get them).
3. Model the eating behavior you want from your children.
4. Provide meals and appropriate snacks. If you aren't home to monitor controversial items, it's easier for everybody if you do not keep them in the house.
5. Include the family in as many steps as possible: eating together at a table, preparing the food, picking the food, even growing the food.
6. Avoid hovering, micromanaging, prodding, bargaining. None of these is necessary if you have only healthy whole food in the house.
7. Observe how they react/respond to foods and drinks. Take charge of food elimination and challenge experiments if a dietary culprit is suspected.
8. Don't worry yet about a "balanced diet". Balance comes *after* they acquire the taste for whole food.

The Child's job is to:

1. Decide what they want to eat from the healthy foods available.
2. Decide how much to eat.
3. Participate in as many steps as possible: eating together at a table, preparing the food, picking the food, even growing the food.

Expect Sabotage and/or Rebellion

These changes are not going to be greeted favorably by anyone who is stuck on junk food's hook. Once you have determined what the boundaries will be, parents are the keepers of the family health. Resistance, hostility, rebellion and spousal or friend sabotage are normal points on the trajectory of change.

Schedule a Clean-Out-the-Pantry Day

This is a family event. Once you have started making changes and the family is accepting some healthier alternatives, make a project of reading all the labels in the pantry and throwing out whatever does not meet the new family standard. One mom gave her kids the choice of keeping all their favorite breads, salad dressings, and canned soup and never having dessert OR switching to the healthier versions of staples and enjoy (health food store) desserts. The kids got on board in spite of the obvious manipulation.

Cook With Each Others' Kids

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They often handle the information better if it comes from somebody other than Mom or Dad. Two moms in our group asked their sons to give them the present of attending Suppers for Teens as their Christmas or birthday present to Mom. The boys had control over the ingredients in the pots of soup and stew they took home. Pride in the process, greater interest in cooking, and curiosity about the food channel followed.

Observe Reactions

Everybody reacts differently to foods. There is no sense being a control freak about sugar if gluten grains are the big problem. It can get complicated to sort out food sensitivities, but here is a good rule of thumb: The more wedded someone is to a particular food or drink, the more likely it is to be acting like a drug *in that individual*. Treating oneself to a bit of chocolate if one feels like an addict around chocolate is like giving a recovering alcoholic the reward of just one drink. Whining, craving, and lobbying for specific foods are clear signs that it's time to check for food sensitivities.

70 – 85% of the Whole Food Ideal is a Good Goal

70 – 85% of what's ideal for you is a good goal *except* for foods that are like drugs *for you*, the items from which you must abstain. That leaves plenty of room for treats as long as they don't trigger undesired eating or brain symptoms.

The Clear Solution: Return – as Much as Possible – to the Behaviors that Pre-date these Epidemics.

Diet and lifestyle changes can help you delay, reverse, and even heal the problem. The way in to the problem suggests the way out: If eating and drinking processed foods and beverages got you into this mess to begin with, then changing to whole foods is the way out. At very least, you can mitigate the damage by thoughtfully addressing the content, timing, digestion, and circumstances under which you eat food. We know that returning to the foods and behaviors that pre-date the epidemics is safe; for everything else we are lab rats.

Conclusion

Our number one national addiction is not alcohol, drugs or cigarettes. It's food. Poor quality food is responsible for more preventable health and mental health problems than any other source. And the national menu of processed foods is so drug-like that many of us have lost the ability to enjoy the taste of real food, food that supports life. This makes the standard American diet a gateway to obesity and diabetes, addictions, and many mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and learning issues. We cannot abstain from eating. That leaves us with nutritional harm reduction.

To determine if you or someone you know is a good candidate for a Suppers program, ask yourself the following question: Do I believe that the food I eat has a significant influence on my health, cravings, mood, behavior, and/or mental function? If yes, it is time to examine how much of a role is played by food. The early signs of being in the process that is leading one out of three American children to a diagnosis of diabetes are often weight gain and brain symptoms: depression, anxiety, poor behavior, and learning issues. This is because the brain is very vulnerable to poor nutrition.