

Alley's Story – Health Relatives

The first thing that flashed on my screen when I was checking out Suppers was the quote, "The diagnosis or name of the disease is inconsequential compared to identification of the biochemical and environmental causes." This was followed by a list of all the problems you can have extending from poor blood sugar and mood chemistry regulation. Several of the medical conditions mentioned pose a threat to me, and all -- every single one -- of them occur in my family. We have alcohol intolerance, obesity, ADHD, depression, anxiety, PCOS, diabetes (both types I and II), and finally Alzheimer's, which our facilitator said is now being called "type 3 diabetes" by some nutritionists. I'm feeling all of those conditions lurking just over my shoulder. Additionally, I feel that my job and my culture encourage me to live an unhealthy lifestyle. It is just a matter of time before some diagnosis grabs me. (By the way, paranoia ought to be on the list too).

When I started the program I weighed more than I wanted (thanks to the PCOS). I was a little anxious, often depressed, and I slept badly. With age, I had become increasingly aware of a sensitivity to sugar and alcohol and I felt the threat of impending type II diabetes. Finally, my skin was a constant source of irritation, it almost always hurt!

That being said, I attended a Suppers meeting and immediately loved it. I loved it that we all cook together. It is just plain fun to be with all those people cooking up...whatever is in season. I also liked covering just one principle each session. That gives me one specific thing to think about for the whole week. The week we talked about "health relatives" was particularly relevant. This refers to the blood sugar and mood chemistry problems that tend to cluster within individuals and in families, just like mine. I was frightened to know that there are so many impending conditions lurking in my genetic makeup, and it gave me some comfort to hear that they all might be helped in the same way...by eating better. It seemed too easy! But look what I was up against.

I love to cook. As much as I love the program and want to get this right, that ADHD part of me and that "food-is-art" part of me conspire against my self-control. I demand creative freedom, and won't be denied cooking with a particular ingredient. That's like telling an artist not to paint with blue! My lifelong devotion to sugar, wheat and dairy was not to be toyed with. While I am willing to try anything, I am not charmed by tricky substitutions. I can spot artificial sweeteners in a heartbeat. And when butter or wheat is called for in a time-honored classic, that is precisely what is needed and nothing else will do!

Another problem: I just don't have the discipline to endure the pain of denial and regimens, and I don't stick at anything for long. The petulant part of me would stomp her foot, and resist the changes I knew I needed to make. If change was going to be made, I had to find strategies that I was willing to try and would always feel fresh.

Cashing in on My Flaws:

The strategies that work for me have mostly to do with disrupting patterns. My well-honed ADHD skills make me very good at disrupting things! Rather than denying myself the old foods I love, I began eating the healthier foods first. (God bless that beet slaw that I always keep in my refrigerator!) I could eat the old favorites later if I still wanted them—and I wanted them less and less.

I began looking for foods that I tended to abuse in combination—like bread and cheese, or sugar and cream. (I called them 'bad company'.) I would avoid eating them together which helped them to become less interesting. And finally, I worked on discovering new foods, often buying things I'd never tried. (This is where my impulsive behavior skills came in handy.) I found that the rules for the produce section are not the same as the rules for the

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woods—you're allowed to eat things you can't identify! This totally changed the meaning for me of 'keeping things fresh'.

As time went on, I didn't even notice that I wasn't eating so much sugar, gluten and dairy. I also didn't notice that my skin had stopped hurting until I had a good hit of sugar in a very sweet sorbet one day. Wow. Suddenly I had an explanation for what I had been living with most of my life! I felt all zingy and dizzy and my skin had that old prickly ache that used to keep me awake at night. Other sensations arose when I tried eating white flour and larger amounts of dairy again. I won't go into details, but it wasn't pretty. Just last night I had some wine (which I don't drink much anymore). It didn't taste like wine at all—but a sour glass of nausea! I had lived with these discomforts for years, maybe my whole life, when all I needed to do was eliminate a few things from my diet and really listen to my body. What guides me now is not martyrdom. Increasingly when I look at these foods I find myself thinking, *'Oh, I soooooo don't want to go there!'*

Working with the Suppers group is definitely where I want to be. I've lost a few pounds, and hope to lose more. I don't yet say that I've gained the discipline to avoid certain foods; I just happen to eat less of them...and less... I'm not feeling in much of a hurry about changes; it's just that my taste buds are starting to make the connection between what I eat and the real pain.