

Lindsey's Story – Better Living Through Chemistry

I was really relying on the Suppers proscriptio against judging others the day I opened my mouth. Most of the people in our meeting had had trouble with depression on top of all they were juggling because of sugar issues. For the most part, they wanted to get off their antidepressants, or at least reduce the dose.

Not me. There are few things in my life that rival the gratitude I feel for the doctor and medications that brought normalcy into my life. My body gives me few options. There are several things I have to get right simultaneously in order to be OK. For example, I choose to walk on an absolute tightrope with diet. My fear that the cycle of compulsion might start all over again is much greater than any desire I have to eat a particular food. If there's a speck of sugar in the food, I won't touch it. I'm a recovering alcoholic too, and life is better when I'm as consistent about sugar as I am about alcohol. Zero is zero, the clearest, easiest amount for me to deal with. I went through withdrawal twice and I don't ever want to go there again. I know that if I waver, the committee in my head will start telling me it's OK to have just a little. The last time I used that logic, it was 10 years, 50 pounds and a diagnosis of pre-diabetes before I snapped out of it.

Among my health relatives are a mother and two siblings with serious mental health problems. One of my brothers developed schizophrenia as a young man. My mother was in denial until the day she died. My sister has never been diagnosed, but it is evident something is wrong. She moved to California and doesn't maintain contact. In the meantime, about 15 years ago a situation in my life caused me to experience severe depression. I was adamant about not taking medication. I was alcohol and drug free. The night I was seriously considering suicide in order to relieve the pain -- one look at my 11-year old daughter's face brought me back to reality. I saw my therapist the next morning and she referred me to a doctor who prescribed an antidepressant. Thinking over my life and recalling all the crying jags, I realized that I had been slightly depressed my whole life. Through therapy and a good shrink, I got through that horrible time. Because I finally felt freedom from those outbursts, I kept on the antidepressants. A few years later I got another blow. In between jobs and setting up my own business (my life dream) I suddenly couldn't get out of bed. It was an ordeal just driving my daughter to school every morning in my pajamas. I lay on the couch from 9 a.m. on wondering how in the world I would get enough energy to pick her up at 2 p.m. I couldn't muster the energy to go outside to feed my rabbit and clean her cage so I gave her away. My dog was very old and sickly and needed to go in and out all the time. Again no energy. I let the vet put her down and to this day I feel horrible. I was really scared. My doctor told me I was bi-polar. No way! My brother was the one with mental illness, my sister. But I had a successful career, was raising a great daughter, managed our household and was very active in my community. "Was" turned out to be the key word. I couldn't believe I ever lead the life I lived. I felt like an imposter.

Reluctantly I began medication. Slowly, very slowly I improved. I know that mental illness is not easily treated and it took almost two years of various medications until we arrived at my current "cocktail". I keep in close contact with my psychiatrist and have maintained good mental health for five years. I have learned since that mental illness is a disease of the brain and shouldn't be a disgrace. Until society accepts that, I only self disclose when I think someone can be helped and I'm in a safe environment for sharing my story. So my formula for success has four parts: absolute adherence to a whole food diet, abstinence from alcohol, my medications, and the support of family and friends who love me and never judge the path I've chosen.