

Phyllis's Story - ANTS

I can go for days without getting snared by some trigger that pulls me into thoughts of candy bars. But then something will set me off and I'm not just thinking, I'm filled with ANTS (allowing negative thought space) in my head.

Before, during and after Halloween each year, my typical pattern has been to become flooded with thoughts of all the different candy bars I'd be handing out and all the different candy bars I'd be eating when the door bell stopped ringing. Over the years, I've gotten much better about what I eat, but I can't say it's gotten easy to avoid what I know I have to avoid. I have been attending Suppers for nearly a year and in spite of the fact that I've reduced my intake of corn syrup and candy, I find I am still interrupted by thoughts of peanut butter filling and thin layers of dark chocolate coating layers of nuts and caramel.

This isn't funny. I needed to take a hard look at what, precisely, was pulling me into all these thoughts I don't want to have. Of course, once I asked myself the right question, the answers appeared in the pages of my journal: Thoughts of candy come to me when I'm hungry. They come to me when I'm tired. They come to me when I'm thinking about my mother's terminal illness. And the power they have over me is that when the thoughts come there is also a projection that the candy will lift me out of my feelings.

I have tended to keep my thoughts on the addictive nature of sweets to myself because I don't want to subject myself to comments from people who don't understand this problem. People who don't feel the force inside a candy bar can't stay in the conversation with me. Also, I don't want to let on to the people around me that there is so much turmoil inside my head over 50 cents worth of chocolate and corn syrup. But there it is.

We had a guest speaker at Suppers who does experiments with lab rats to study how sugar works in the brain. When he said they had found that sugar works on the same pathways as cocaine, I felt better. It didn't do anything for the ANTS in my head, but it sure helped me feel like my problem is real. And not just mine, but many of the people at my meeting. We all have bad diagnoses related to our sugar intake, and we all know exactly how we need to eat and don't always do so because sugar really does work like drugs. For me, food is the first addiction. I don't ever want to minimize what people go through to get off cigarettes, alcohol or drugs, but the one thing they have going for them is that it's possible to be abstinent. You can't be abstinent from food.

I am going through a really rough time now. I can't promise myself I'll stay away from the quick fix foods that medicate away the unmanageable emotions. What I can say is that in the broad scope of things, I'm eating much better now than I would be if I weren't committed to this process of overall harm reduction.