

Tory's Story – Relapse is the Logical Conclusion

I am so lucky I didn't have to quit everything before I got to Suppers. I am an expert quitter and an accomplished relapser. So it really helped me out to learn that there's a program that embraces you *while* you're in the process of quitting and relapsing and supports you while you spiral up towards better health. One day we went around the table and shared on what had grabbed us about the Suppers program. For me, it was the line that said "With food, abstinence is not an option. That leaves harm reduction."

Abstinence is very clear. It's black and white. Either I smoked a cigarette today or I didn't. I either took a pill or I didn't. Quitting is a categorical change and even if you smoked in your thoughts and dreams like me, you got full credit for not doing the behavior. It took me eight tries to quit and I have two years now.

Food is an entirely different matter. To get a handle on my food issues I got professional help. I examined emotional triggers. I designed a food plan. My doctor wanted me to take something to suppress my appetite, but somebody like me shouldn't take pills. So I became really aware of times when I ate for emotional reasons, and I had a plan for eating that looked great on paper. But nothing made me adhere to the changes. And there wasn't any support group. Every time I'd be good for a couple weeks, I'd relapse and hate myself. I've tried way more than eight times to get a handle on my eating. Quitting cigarettes was a piece of cake (did I say that?) compared to managing my diet.

So this whole idea of nutritional harm reduction brought me into Suppers. What kept me coming back was the desire to make good matches between my problems and solutions. If I accepted that relapse is the logical conclusion of making poor matches, then I had some investigating to do to find mine. It did me no harm to go into therapy and design a meal plan, but these things were not good enough matches for me. It resonated for me that there must be some very intense forces disabling all my good intentions.

I got my first clue when I did the breakfast challenge. A bowl of chicken and vegetable soup, or chili, or scrambled eggs with lots of veggies kept me free of hunger for three hours, pretty good for me. But after lunch, the insanity started again. I'd get irritable, drowsy, and hungry every afternoon, and it always led me to food. So for a few days I ate breakfast challenge food for breakfast, lunch and dinner and journaled the experience. I didn't know what else to do. In my notes I wrote "feeling very sorry for myself," "dying for a slice of pizza," "mind is wandering to grilled cheese sandwiches". But I stayed my course knowing I'd be reporting on the experience at a meeting.

What was revealed after continued experiments was that my biggest food triggers are chocolate and anything with wheat in it. If they serve me bread, the basket is empty before the dinner arrives. And even if I eat a big meal, I'll be looking for food again in a little while. I'm also really vulnerable to food if I see it and smell it. It makes me want it because it's there, not because I'm hungry. So based on my journaling experience, two things had to happen right away to match my solutions to my problem. One, I had to totally give up chocolate and wheat, which made life easier once I got over feeling sorry for myself. There were plenty of foods left that I enjoy, although none that made me gleeful. Two, I had to avoid parties and certain friends' houses to stay away from temptation. And I had to let my friends know I felt it an act of hostility to leave a bowl of chocolate out when I come.

The experiments and journaling will continue. And I am benefitting a lot more from therapy now that I'm not experiencing false emotions from food all the time. I'm really glad I didn't know ahead of time that giving up bread was my good match because I might not have done the program.