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What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

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Mullen's Philosophy of Food

Our number one national addiction is not cigarettes or alcohol. It's food. And the national menu of processed foods is so addictive; many of us have lost the taste for foods that support life. They also sap our strength and rob us of mental and physical energy. That makes the standard American diet a gateway to obesity, diabetes, drinking problems, and numerous mental health issues.

About food and psychotherapy:

There is a relatively new branch of psychology called "nutritional psychology." Its basic message is that malnourished brains produce different kinds of thoughts and emotions compared with those produced by well nourished brains. My understanding is that much of what we have identified as depression, anxiety, learning issues, alcoholic drinking, and other addictive behavior is the natural consequence of having brains made out of processed food.

In other words, we are throwing educational and counseling strategies at problems that are inherently metabolic and nutritional in origin. So the ADD child, or the neurotic low blood sugar mom, or the aggressive guy loaded with chemicals from the food supply may receive medication and counseling and not get better because the real, underlying cause — a hungry brain — hasn't been addressed.

The original Suppers program was designed to address the cluster of issues that form around poor blood sugar regulation and faulty mood chemistry: depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes and

problems with alcohol. These seemingly far-flung issues are actually very closely related and cluster not only within families, but within individuals as well. So in a family where processed foods are eaten and we see obesity or diabetes, for example, we would expect to find more mental health challenges and addictions.

Suppers is informed by science, but it is purposely not scientific. It is about returning — to the best of our ability — to the conditions that predate the problem. Briefly, my position is that we don't need deeper science; we need to apply what we already know but ignore.

That's where the addiction piece comes in. Everybody knows they need to eat better and that it involves more vegetables and less junk. People walk into type 2 diabetes knowing full well their habits are killing them.

What is just coming to the public eye is the notion that the food supply itself is addictive in this country because 1.) most processed foods overtax the endocrine system that stabilizes blood sugar and mood chemistry (leading people to self-medicate with carbs) and 2.) the brain is the first organ to be affected (fatigue, depression, mood swings, craving, and self-medicating for these feelings) because it is the most sensitive organ to poor nutrition.

So long before diabetes, stroke, and heart attacks we are likely to see fatigue, depression, etc. because these are the early signs of the disease process. We are also likely to see eating and drinking patterns that "self-medicate" for the energy and mood swings.

The need is greater than the need for AA. We are talking about the underlying biochemical cause of the obesity and diabetes epidemics and everything that extends from them (stroke, etc.) But AA's message is really simple: Don't drink. Go to meetings. With food, abstinence is not an option. The entire processed food industry is central to the problem.

Suppers provides a social context for living life a healthier way. It provides delightful events at which people can form relationships with others who want to form healthier friendships. It supports values of small, local businesses and farming practices. And it changes the

physical terrain on which people are experiencing the world because eating this way changes your brain for the better.