

Nutritional Harm Reduction

How to use this card:

Pass this card around. Each person please state your name and read a small section of the content on Nutritional Harm Reduction:

Concept 11: Nutritional Harm Reduction

A gentle transition process that makes healthy change possible

People who join Suppers have at some point suffered because of the addictive nature of the food supply. With food, abstinence is not an option. That leaves harm reduction. We understand that there are many obstacles to change, particularly for those who live in households with others who are not ready to change. That's why the Suppers programs are about reducing harm gently, supporting people as they explore their willingness to head in the direction of a healthier life. Let's face it. Are you going to eliminate everything you know is bad for you and switch to eating only things that are good for you overnight? At Suppers we see nutrition as a transitional process. It takes time to learn how to determine which foods work best for you and your family, to learn how to prepare them, and to acquire a taste for, and ultimately a desire for, healthier foods. You will probably experience all kinds of slips, relapses, and hilarious stories along the way. Self-doubt, ice-cream cones, spousal sabotage, secret eating, and rebelling children are all natural steps in the transition process. At Suppers, our stories will help you learn the many ways to reduce harm by becoming aware of automatic choices, facing appetite foolishness, experimenting with better choices and noting how you feel, and adding foods that are healthy while slowly subtracting those that are more like drugs.

Lucia's Story: Dark Chocolate

My life used to be organized around bars of dark chocolate. I didn't go anywhere without them. Dark chocolate was my universal solution. Stress at work? One square. Fatigue? One square. Feeling blue? One square. It seemed that every two hours there was some reason why I needed to dive into my purse and break off a piece.

I come from a family of sugar-loving Spaniards, most of whom are also diabetic. We come from a fishing village and eat lots of fish and vegetables, but our healthy diet did not protect us from the consequences of indulging in our great favorites like *flan*, *turrón*, and *tarta*.

In my 40s I got a wake-up call that forced me to examine my habits: at my annual exam, my fasting blood sugar was 120 mg/dl and my doctor wanted it under 100. There was nothing I could do about my family history but lots I could do about my habits. I never ate breakfast, for example. I lived on coffee. I never cooked because I didn't know how. And my career kept me late at work and often on the road. Who wouldn't rely on a predictable friend like dark chocolate under such a strain!

When I started going to Suppers I was prepared to make changes, but not to totally give up chocolate. I went to meetings whenever I was in town, and learned to cook basic dishes. I found I actually enjoyed shopping and selecting the perfect piece of fish. It was a pleasure when I had the time to prepare the greens myself. I learned that if I cook a pot of lentils ahead of time, I can heat some for breakfast faster than most people can prepare a slice of toast. I learned that eating the lentils – to my amazement – immediately reduced my desire for coffee and even chocolate. I learned to notice how I feel after eating this or that. Now that I know how to observe myself it is clear that eating breakfast, reducing my coffee intake, and cooking simple meals have given me energy, alertness, stamina, and happier moods.

I would also like to say that there is another form of nourishment I discovered at Suppers. When someone else cooks for me or the leader sends me home with a jar of stew, it somehow feels even more sustaining than if I cooked it myself. I feel loved and supported all over again when I heat it up for breakfast the next morning.

Now here is the part I am sure you have all been waiting for. I did not have to entirely give up my dark chocolate. I am lucky because practicing nutritional harm reduction and making the other changes allowed me to lose my dependence without having to cut it out entirely. In the context of a healthier lifestyle, chocolate is a treat not a trigger for me. I know not everyone is so lucky, and for this I am sorry. Each individual must experiment to find out what his or her body will tolerate. For myself, it is now a great pleasure to have a little bit of chocolate because I enjoy it, not because I have to have it to get through my day.

Continue around the table by briefly sharing how you relate to the Suppers concept of Nutritional Harm Reduction.

Name a change—even a small change—that you are considering making that might reduce nutritional harm.

Discussion Prompts (Each person select a prompt that works for you.)

- Describe the direction you would like to head in with healthier habits.
- If you have a health outcome you'd like to achieve, be specific in describing it.
- Are there small changes you can make, or is something absolute needed like abstinence of some kind?
- What have you done in the past to bring yourself closer to the desired outcome? Did you have the support you needed to make it work?
- Name a gentle change you're willing to make prior to the next Suppers meeting.

Ideas for Next Steps:

Experiments and Observations:

- Test your theory. While making a gentle change you think will bring you closer to your health goal, note if you in fact get the result you expected.
- Experiment with a reduction. Describe how portion control works for you.

Between Meetings:

- Read how other Suppers members related to this concept.
 - For people with disordered eating, read [Gillian's story](#), page 169 in the 2nd edition of *Logical Miracles* and on the Suppers website.
 - For emotional eaters, read [Phyllis's story](#), page 171 in the 2nd edition of *Logical Miracles* and on the Suppers website.
 - For parents: read [Stuart and Mom's story](#), page 173, and Violet's story page 175 in the 2nd edition of *Logical Miracles* and on the Suppers website.
 - For people who experience "triggered" eating, read [Tory's story](#) page 176 in the 2nd edition of *Logical Miracles* and on the Suppers website.
- Ask for support. Ask a Suppers friend or trusted other to be your witness as you experiment.