

Treats and Triggers

How to use this card:

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

Concept 18: Treats and Triggers

Can you do portion control or is abstinence needed? To find out, distinguish treats from triggers.

A treat is something you eat and really enjoy that does not precipitate more eating or other unwanted behavior. Having it feels good, not gleeful. A trigger is something you eat that does precipitate more eating or other unwanted behavior. It feels like a tripwire.

Distinguishing treats and triggers is important work at Suppers. People are designed to seek pleasure, but in experiencing too much of the wrong kind, we can fall into addictive relationships. We want to help people eat with as much pleasure as possible without triggering themselves.

Sally M's Story: I Am The Steward

Circling round and round, our Suppers group was examining the question: What role does planning play in moving me into action on a change I know I need to make but resist? We wondered how we can get more motivated.

For one thing, it's really hard to give up something you love (let's say, to pick a totally random example, ice cream) if you don't know for a fact you'll get relief from pain or lose the weight as a result. I want a signed guarantee. One of our group wondered, "How much time do I have until I have to start eating healthy," which led to our imagining a wrist band device that would give us the countdown: "1.2 years until pre-diabetes, 8.5 years until first signs of dementia." Wouldn't it be great if that existed? Then we could continue eating as we please, right up to the day before we have to turn it around. I understand there are some flaws in this logic, but that's how the conversation went.

It's really hard to give up favorite treats that might be inflammatory foods when they provide marvelous services like reducing pain, being a substitute for human company, or even just providing a hit of our favorite legal substance. But many of those treats are triggers too and lead to over-consumption.

I decided to approach the question from another angle: I am the steward of my brain. I am the keeper and protector of the body that was given to me. I have friends who have entered dementia and in my profession I work with people whose brains have been damaged. I watch the suffering and yet I still comfort myself with my favorite foods, the sweets that provide fleeting comfort but set me up for crashes. Given what we're seeing even in the mainstream press, these favorite foods are the same foods that escort us into diabetes, obesity, and by some estimations cancer and dementia too.

The woman in our group who has chronic pain has taken a much longer view. Pain is highly motivating. In her case, identifying and then avoiding her inflammatory foods did contribute somewhat to pain reduction, maybe 10 to 20% overall. So in her case, it was pretty motivating and she has managed to greatly reduce her sugar intake, although not without challenge.

We went home with the assignment of journaling how we feel in response to foods. If we don't get some immediate, major reaction like pain, asthma or a rash, we can look for the subtler ones, like fatigue, sadness or forgetfulness.

I have a body with a brain that can work in ways that amaze me and works well when I give it what it needs. I am watching myself honor it part way. I don't know if fear of dementia will help me or stress me out so much that I end up doing even more anxiety-driven eating. I do know that having a safe place to talk about the issues and a group of friends who have similar challenges helps motivate me to change.

Continue around the table by briefly sharing how you relate to the Suppers concept of Treats and Triggers.

Name a food that gives you great pleasure without triggering you into unwanted eating or other unwanted behavior.

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

- Name foods or beverages that “have no brakes”, meaning once you get some you feel a need to have more than you planned.
- How does the concept of “treat” apply to meals? Snacks? Desserts?
- How has your sense of which foods are treats and which foods are triggers changed over time?
- Describe the people and places that increase the likelihood that you will eat in a triggered way and which people and places increase the likelihood that you will not feel triggered.

Ideas for Next Steps:

Experiments and Observations

- Do a thought experiment with your group. Describe a food or beverage you identify as a trigger and share your feelings about abstaining from it for a week. What would need to happen so that you could go without it for a week?
- Do a thought experiment: Imagine setting up a tray with your favorite foods. Imagine organizing these items so that the treat foods are on one side and the trigger foods are on the other. Share the results of your experiment with your group.
- If everyone agrees, actually do the experiment above. Group agreement is needed; don't set this up if it would be too triggering for a member.

Between Meetings:

- Read how other Suppers members related to this concept.
 - For people who feel addicted to certain foods or beverages, read [Alice's Story](#), page 119 in the 2nd edition of *Logical Miracles* or on the Suppers website.
 - For people whose food issues involve self-esteem, read [Lucille's Story](#), page 233 in the 2nd edition of *Logical Miracles* or on the Suppers website.
- Journal your feelings around giving up a trigger food for a week.
- Journal your feelings and thoughts around replacing triggers with foods that give pleasure without leading to triggered eating.