

Nutritional Harm Reduction

Tips From The Suppers Programs Families Who Have Succeeded at Change

Following is a list compiled by members who have succeeded at making incremental changes in their households and experienced good to excellent results. Their efforts to practice nutritional harm reduction – gentle, manageable changes over time – have paid off for themselves and their children in the following ways:

eating more variety	more stable moods
reduction of depression	more stamina for exercise
easier breathing	better bowel function
more energy	weight loss
better ability to concentrate	reduced angry outburst
more stable blood sugar	increased impulse control
less jitters, anxiety, panic	developing a taste for fruit and veggies

Eat a Terrific Breakfast

The best results we have gotten have happened when people figure out which foods meet their personal needs, which often means eating a breakfast combining protein, complex carbohydrates and some high quality fat and NO sweet or artificially sweetened items. Here's why: Higher intake of protein and high quality fats can be a therapeutic bridge to better mood chemistry in people who have eaten and drunk too much fuel (carbs) and not enough building blocks (fats and protein) for stable blood sugar and mood chemistry. (See **Ross** and **Simontacchi** in Resources for more information and recipes.) To sort out which foods help you feel best, you can also try our breakfast challenge and get real data about your body:

www.suppersfor.org/Documents/Activities/BreakfastChallenge.pdf

Teach Them the Difference Between a Snack and Dessert

The most brain aging and inflammatory item in our diet is sugar. (See **Hyman** in Resources.) Snacks are the same food you would eat at a meal; they help children grow. They are healthy for adults too. They include leftovers, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, or any real, whole food. Desserts are everything else: they should only be eaten on a belly full of real food (high fiber vegetables and fruits, good fats, and lean protein). That means you don't have to totally vilify chips, candy, cookies, bagels, soft drinks, and other junk, which would cause rebellion. They just have to start looking like dessert instead of a snack. The exception: Any food to which you have a dramatic response. If wheat, dairy, sugar or any food produces a big comfort response or mood elevation followed by mental fatigue or mood, behavior, or other brain symptoms, you probably need to avoid it. An elimination challenge (See **Bock** in Resources) will help you know for sure. Craving is also a tip-off that your body can't tolerate that food. For those who have alcoholism or diabetes in the family, heading in the direction of eliminating processed sugars altogether may be necessary because of the relationship among sugars, hypoglycemia and addiction. (See **Larson** in Resources.)

Replace Favorite Foods with Healthier Versions

Keep the family in the discussion. Start with small changes like replacing big-name junk food items containing hydrogenated fats, high fructose corn syrup, and food additives

(See **Blaylock** in Resources) with the health food store varieties. Here's why: Although they still contain too many blood sugar destabilizing processed ingredients, they eliminate the most suspect ingredients and are a step in the right direction. Our members have braved the objections and been happy to realize that as favorite junk foods are less available, fruit and healthier versions of junk food gain acceptance.

Introduce Water as a Beverage Option

Keep a fresh pitcher in the frig. Put the pitcher on the table at snacks and meals. At the same time, reduce purchases of sugared or artificially sweetened soft drinks. Expect sabotage and/or rebellion, that's fine.

Beat Them To It

Have fresh fruit, cut up veggies, nuts, seeds, hummus, cheese (if they tolerate it) and leftovers ready when they are hungry. Let the salad or a plate of fruits and veggies be the first thing on the table while you prepare the rest of the meal. If no adult is there and they are regularly feeding themselves, this is part of the problem. This is not to make anybody feel guilty; it's just to acknowledge that without an adult taking charge, most kids will gravitate to sweet, salty, fatty processed foods that are less like foods and more like drugs. (See **Ross** and **Kessler** in Resources.)

Buy Mostly Food That Has No Label

The food that will turn your health around doesn't need a label because it contains only one, readily obvious thing: one chicken, two apples, three yams. Of particular concern are flavor enhancers like MSG and artificial sweeteners which are particularly toxic to brain cells when blood sugar is low. (See **Blaylock** in Resources.)

Exercise Control at the Grocery Store and You Won't Have to at Home

Food is mood altering for some people, more like a drug than a food. When food is used for reward or pleasure to the person's own detriment, it meets the definition of addiction. Food manufacturers cleverly create foods that layer salt, fat and sugar in irresistible ways. (See **Kessler** in Resources.) The most important time to exercise control is before junk comes into the house. If you buy it and try to control it at home, it's a lot harder. You can get a babysitter once and go read the labels. Make selections without the children's input. In general, the whole food is in the periphery of the store, and the junk is in the aisles. Avoid aisles. Real nutrition information is in small plain print. Nutrition information that's eye-catching and clearly part of the package design is more about advertising than nutrition.

Take Them Out for the Treats

Head in the direction of letting the home pantry contain only healthy foods. Set a clear boundary. Let a trip to the ice cream store or bakery (if they tolerate some dairy, wheat and sugar) be a real treat because it doesn't take place every day. If something takes place every day, it's not a treat; it's the expected norm.

Pay Attention to Digestion

Digestion is data. Bloating, diarrhea, constipation, excessive farting, foul smelling gas, and belching are all indications that a body is not digesting well. You are NOT what you eat. You are only what you absorb of what you eat. If digestive problems don't clear up

with an improved diet, a consultation with a nutritionist may be in order. (**See Bock and Campbell-McBride** in Resources.)

Do Not Ask Your Kids or Yourself “Does It Taste Good?”

Nutritional harm reduction is a transition. If it were easy to switch from our favorite junk foods to a diet of whole foods, we would have done it by now. In our experience at Suppers, as you eat healthier, whole foods, your body will transition from “Yuck” and disappointment to acceptance to enjoyment. This is a leap of faith. Once the body makes the association between whole foods and better mood chemistry, tastes can develop for the healthy foods.

Talk to Them

Let spouses, friends, and children know how important it is to make these changes and why. This is not a democracy. Parents determine what comes into the house.

Learn Which Jobs are Yours and Which Belong to the Kids

Reduce Family Tension. When it comes to feeding and eating, the division of labor is clear.

The Parents’ job is to:

1. Bring into the house only the healthy foods you want the children to eat.
2. Exclude foods that act like bargaining chips (you know they are more drug-like for your children if they lobby to get them).
3. Model the eating behavior you want from your children.
4. Provide meals and appropriate snacks. If you aren’t home to monitor controversial items, it’s easier for everybody if you do not keep them in the house.
5. Include the children in as many steps as possible: eating together at a table, preparing the food, picking the food, even growing the food.
6. Avoid hovering, micromanaging, prodding, bargaining. None of these is necessary if you have only healthy whole food in the house.
7. Observe how they react/respond to foods and drinks. Take charge of food elimination and challenge experiments if a dietary culprit is suspected.
8. Don’t worry yet about a “balanced diet”. Balance comes *after* they acquire the taste for whole food.
9. Finally, reduce a child’s exposure to food advertising, which is directly related to obesity. (**See Brownell** in Resources.) No TV in the bedroom.

The Child’s job is to:

1. Decide what they want to eat from the healthy foods available.
2. Decide how much to eat.
3. Participate with the family in as many steps as possible: eating together at a table, preparing the food, picking the food, even growing the food.

Expect Sabotage and/or Rebellion

These changes are not going to be greeted favorably by anyone who is stuck on junk food’s hook. Humans are naturally drawn to energy-dense foods containing sugar and fat, and the makers of processed foods know this and appeal to this wiring in their advertising. (**See Brownell** in Resources.) Once you have determined what the

boundaries will be, parents are the keepers of the family health. Resistance, hostility, rebellion and spousal or friend sabotage are normal points on the trajectory of change.

Schedule a Clean-Out-the-Pantry Day

Make it a family event. Once you have started making changes and the family is accepting some healthier alternatives, make a project of reading all the labels in the pantry and throwing out whatever does not meet the new family standard. One mom gave her kids the choice of keeping all their favorite breads, salad dressings, and canned soup and never having dessert OR switching to the healthier versions of staples and enjoying (health food store) desserts. The kids got on board in spite of the obvious manipulation.

Cook With Each Others' Kids

They often handle the information better if it comes from somebody other than Mom or Dad. Two moms in our group asked their sons to give them the present of attending Suppers for Teens as their Christmas or birthday present to Mom. The boys had control over the ingredients in the pots of soup and stew they took home. Pride in the process, greater interest in cooking, and curiosity about the food channel followed.

Observe Reactions

Everybody reacts differently to foods. There is no sense being a control freak about milk products if gluten grains are the big problem. It can get complicated to sort out food sensitivities, but here is a good rule of thumb: The more wedded someone is to a particular food or drink, the more likely it is to be acting like a drug *in that individual*. (See Ross's **The Mood Cure** in Resources.) Treating oneself to a bit of chocolate if one feels like an addict around chocolate is like giving a recovering alcoholic the reward of just one drink. Whining, craving, and lobbying for specific foods are clear signs that it's time to check for food sensitivities. (See **Bock and Campbell-McBride** in Resources.) Foods that produce brain fog, fatigue, depression, anxiety may actually be caused by "brain allergies" to those foods. (See **Hyman** in Resources.)

70 – 85% of the Whole Food Ideal is a Good Goal

70 – 85% of what's ideal for you is a good goal *except* for foods that are like drugs *for you*, the items from which you must abstain. That leaves plenty of room for treats as long as they don't trigger undesired eating or brain symptoms.

Conclusion

Our most costly national addiction is not alcohol, drugs or cigarettes. It's food. Highly processed foods that are designed to be irresistible are responsible for more preventable health problems even than smoking. And the national menu of processed foods is so drug-like that many of us have lost the ability to enjoy the taste of real food, food that supports life. This makes the standard American diet a gateway to obesity and diabetes, addictions, and many mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and learning issues. (See **Green** in Resources for more information on food and learning). We cannot abstain from eating. That leaves us with nutritional harm reduction.

To determine if you or someone you know would benefit from these dietary changes, ask yourself the following question: Do I believe that the food I eat has a significant

influence on my health, cravings, mood, behavior, and/or mental function? If yes, it is time to examine how much of a role is played by food. The early signs of being in the process that is leading one out of three American children to a diagnosis of diabetes are often weight gain and brain symptoms: depression, anxiety, poor behavior, and learning issues. This is because the brain is one of the most vulnerable organs to poor nutrition.

There is lots of good news.

Diet and lifestyle changes can help you delay, reverse, and even heal the problem. The way in to the problem suggests the way out: If eating and drinking processed foods and beverages got you into this mess to begin with, then changing to whole foods is the way out. At very least, you can mitigate the damage by thoughtfully addressing the content, timing, digestion, and circumstances under which you eat food.

Resources

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How You Feel is *Data*

What It Feels Like When Blood Sugar Peaks and Crashes

The mechanisms of blood sugar and mood chemistry are complicated in the details, but easy to understand in practical terms. Our experience of these physical events is feelings. If you have a “relationship” with refined carbohydrates (soda, chips, candy, cake, pasta, bread or alcohol) and you experience these feelings, it may be important *data*.

Below you will find a description of how people can feel when their blood sugar ranges high, normal, low or very low. Nobody experiences all of these feelings; it’s a matter of biological individuality which ones you do experience.

High Blood Sugar: Diabetic Range

Pre-Diabetic (visiting highs but not staying high) or T-2 diabetic (staying high) you may feel:

OK
Fatigued
Sluggish

Normal Blood Sugar: The Range for Normal Brain Function

You may feel:

Clear
Calm
No thoughts of food or stimulants

Low Blood Sugar: Hypoglycemic Range

You may feel many different kinds of brain symptoms and uncomfortable feelings:

Mental/Learning	Mood	Behavior	Physical
Poor concentration	Depressed	Laziness	“All gone”
Confusion	Anxious	Act on Cravings	Cravings
Mental fatigue	Dissatisfied	Act on impulses	Plunging
ADD or ADHD	Cranky		Discomfort

Very Low/Adrenal Stress Hormone Response

You may feel:

Desperate thoughts	Panic	Rage trigger	Palpitations
Survival mode	Anger/rage	Eating disorder	Sweating
	Impatience	Bingeing trigger	

Coma

The very uncomfortable feelings of low and very low sugar indicate how much your body does NOT want to let you go into a coma.

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