

Concepts

These concepts are the underlying assumptions on which all of the Suppers programs are based. We have incorporated with gratitude ideas from many fields and organizations, including environmental medicine, nutritional psychology, counseling, public health, the whole food movement, and the 12-step programs. Our literature presents a wellness orientation that emphasizes the health of the physical body and the body's role as the human terrain on which all other experience takes place. We work with the assumption that certain problems are "health relatives" because their biochemical and environmental causes are so similar. These principles apply, regardless of the diagnosis, to anyone whose health challenges require lifestyle change, including those with depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and/or problems with alcohol.

Concept 1: Biological Individuality

Every body is different from every other body.

The concept of biological individuality reminds us that everyone's body is different from everyone else's body. Biological individuality is seen at all levels of health, mental health, and addictive experience. Suppers honors the biological individuality of each member by not assuming what is right for someone else and keeping the focus first on finding our own pathways.

We honor each other's individuality by assuming we don't know what is right for someone else and keeping the focus first on finding our own pathways. The courage and power to change our individual biology lies in the challenging work of diet and lifestyle change. This means subtracting processed foods that light up the pleasure centers in the brain artificially and then let you crash, just as drugs do. It means adding whole foods that build stable, happy brains over time.

Concept 2: The Forgotten Body

Poor health and addiction are the logical conclusion of leaving the body out of the body, mind, and spirit equation.

The Suppers programs seek no more but no less than to restore care of the physical body to its natural place in this equation. The body's nonnegotiable needs are simple, if not easy, to fulfill. We require a diet of whole foods as they exist in nature, meaningful physical activity, and ways to manage stress, including satisfying human connections. The profit motive for orienting care of the body toward treatment and pharmaceuticals is intense. At Suppers, we remember the body and focus on prevention and repair through diet and lifestyle.

Concept 3: Food Is the First Addiction

Suppers recognizes that food is our most expensive national addiction. In human and dollar calculations, the consequences of the processed, drug-like food supply already surpass the consequences of cigarettes and alcohol. Not only does processed food lead us down the path to obesity and diabetes, the havoc wrought on blood sugar and mood chemistry sets us up for dependence on and addiction to other substances. Experts disagree on which foods have what consequences, whether or not there are good foods and bad foods, or whether there are any nutritional advantages to organic or locally grown foods. Suppers recommends we not be part of their experiment. We know that eating food as it exists in nature is safe; for everything else we are lab rats.

Concept 4: Appetite Foolishness

Desiring and repeatedly consuming things you know are hurting you.

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“Appetite foolishness” is characterized by craving things that are unhealthy for your body. You experience appetite foolishness if you get repeated urges to consume foods or beverages that temporarily resolve a discomfort but create a greater problem over time. Many feelings we assume are our emotions are really reactions to drug-like food. It is very easy to develop appetite foolishness in a culture that combines a food supply that is more like drugs than food with intense profit motive.

If appetite foolishness is part of your problem, the matching solution will include changes in habits. The solution is simple, but it may not be easy. It calls for 1) a diet of wholesome foods to meet personal nutritional needs, 2) new habits of mind and body, and 3) a community of family, mentors, and peers to support the change process. For some individuals, professional help will be necessary, especially when toxicity is an issue. But even the best professional help is no substitute for support from a community of caring people who want to see their loved ones thrive.

Concept 5: Automatic Choices

The choices you make when you aren't consciously participating.

The concept of automatic choices tells us that if we do not consciously work on change, we will be run by our default settings or automatic choices. If appetite foolishness governs your automatic choices, you are very likely to have health, mental health, or addiction problems. There are lots of reasons for the gaps between what we know is best and what we actually do. Here are some of the ones that drive the choices we make:

Unfamiliarity. Staying the same is familiar and easy. Changing is strange and hard.
Discomfort. The pain of staying the same is less than the anticipated pain of changing.
The nature of addiction. The forces that make us want to change are weaker than the forces that keep us addicted.
Time. Changes require intention, acquiring information, creating a plan, implementing the plan, and adjusting the plan. These things are time consuming.
Expectations. We expect change to be difficult, and so it is.
The unknown. The grip of addiction doesn't happen for just one reason. It's the unknown forces you aren't addressing that will sabotage your process.
Support. If supports are not in place, changing and maintaining changes is sabotaged by the ease with which we can fall back into the relationship with the addiction. Appetite foolishness will prevail without support.
Your other personal reasons.

You can get help from your therapeutic friends at Suppers by learning to observe how your default settings are running your life.

Concept 6: Health Relatives

People whose problems have similar biochemical and environmental causes, regardless of their diagnoses.

Many people with dissimilar-sounding diagnoses are actually quite closely related because the diet and lifestyle changes needed to turn them around are virtually the same. To the extent that health problems are lifestyle-related, the Suppers programs provide the ideal support for anyone with some combination of depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and/or problems with alcohol. These issues tend to cluster in families and individuals.

Concept 7: The Diagnosis May Be Inconsequential

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If eating processed foods caused your problem to begin with, the right solution—whole food—may be more important than the diagnostic labels.

Suppers welcomes people with a wide array of health and mental health challenges related to diet and lifestyle. Most of us have problems with blood sugar regulation and mood chemistry. Though nutritional requirements vary greatly from one person to the next, we all share a fundamental need for whole food. Determining which whole foods make us feel best will require doing experiments to collect the data. Suppers has nothing to do with the details of dealing with particular diagnoses; that's up to people and their practitioners. But Suppers has everything to do with providing the support people need to make health-restoring change.

Concept 8: Your Internal Observer
The part of you that notices but doesn't judge.

Inside each one of us is an observer. If you ever tried meditation, you may have learned this already. It is the part of you that witnesses what you're doing while you do it or shortly after. Your internal observer is your best friend as you try to break a habit. The trick is to learn to make the observation before your internal judge takes over and charges it with uncomfortable emotions. For today, just start noticing that part of yourself that observes what you're doing while you're doing it.

Concept 9: How You Feel Is *Data*
Your body is constantly communicating important information to you, if you would just learn to interpret its language.

At Suppers we seek to help you establish connections with the part of you that is constantly trying to send you feedback about what's going on inside and how you need to change. We do this mostly by teaching you how to do experiments and make observations about how foods and behaviors make you feel. Honoring biological individuality, Suppers does not advocate any particular diet over any other. Rather, we focus on helping people develop a palate for the freshest, healthiest whole food. Of those, Suppers experiments will help you determine which are the healthiest for you. Daytime fatigue, mental energy, depression, anxiety, cravings, mood swings, and of course good spirits, emotional stability, and freedom from impulses are all important data. You just need to learn to interpret the signals your body is sending you.

Concept 10: Addition and Subtraction
Good health is achieved by adding what the body needs to have and subtracting what the body needs to not have.

Health challenges at the biological level boil down to two simple functions: addition and subtraction. In simplest terms, addiction, or any disease, is a combination of not having enough of something that's required for good health (deficiency) and having too much of something that is bad for health (toxicity). Whether the reasons are genetic or acquired, good biological health rests on having enough of what builds healthy cells and not having too much of what destroys cells. The task for people who are earnest about making diet and lifestyle changes for the sake of better health is to subtract the things that are making them toxic and add the things that will restore their brains and bodies to health.

Concept 11: Nutritional Harm Reduction
A gentle transition process that makes healthy change possible.

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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.

Concept 12: Logical Miracle

What takes place in the natural course of things when your needs are met.

The dictionary says a miracle is an extraordinary event that manifests divine intervention in the lives of humans. It is highly unusual. "Logical" simply means capable of using reason. At Suppers we assume that miracles are not so unusual after all. We can reasonably expect them to happen when people receive the nourishment and support they need in safe, non-judgmental settings. Reversal of the progression into diabetes, freedom from food cravings, relief from depression or anxiety, and more rewarding relationships are just a few of the logical miracles we see in people who work our program. Dreams that seemed impossible prior to getting your needs met become ordinary outcomes once your needs are met. They become logical miracles.

Concept 13: Healthier Sources of Pleasure

Alternatives to food, drink, or drugs that trigger your sense of pleasure.

People who have dependent relationships with any food or drink that changes how they feel are not experiencing pleasure and comfort in the ordinary, healthy way. They experience false emotions, bad and good. It's hard for people with normal wiring and biochemistry to imagine the discomfort and desperation of the person who lives in a body that can't regulate itself or get comfortable. Whether for genetic or acquired reasons, some people return over and over to food or substances that artificially stimulate the brain's pleasure centers, looking for relief from the inability to feel normal pleasure.

The concept of healthier sources of pleasure calls on us to experiment with new ways of feeling normal comfort. Eating foods that help us feel comfortable in our own skin is just one example. For some it might be socializing, dancing, or cooking with friends. This concept calls us to the family table where we can make satisfying human connections. Any relationship or group experience that helps you feel valued, understood, and connected can provide an alternative to foods and substances as a source of pleasure. At Suppers we have found creativity to be so profoundly healing that we have built opportunities to create into the flexible structure of the Suppers programs. We have removed all profit motive; the creative energy is focused entirely on personal healing. We invite you to use our ideas, download our literature, and create your own groups.

Concept 14: Planning Is Everything

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If diet and lifestyle are central to your health challenges, the solution will require lots of planning.

There is no getting around the need for planning when your health demands that you change your behaviors. With the exception of type 1 diabetics, most of us at Suppers have eaten, drunk, and behaved our way into our health challenges. Environmental exposures like heavy metals and pesticides contribute too. It is so easy to slip back into familiar patterns: grabbing a slice of pizza instead of sitting down to a meal, defaulting on good intentions to exercise more, or feeling too busy to prepare a fresh salad. This is why Suppers is a program, not a club or a class. The program can only work if you work it, and that means planning: having good food ready to eat at all times, taking the initiative to buy the best fresh ingredients, making time for meaningful physical activity, and giving and getting support in a safe setting.

Concept 15: Therapeutic Friendship

The relationships that form around doing the work of Suppers.

The concept of therapeutic friendship offers people the possibility of becoming the designers of their own plans for better health or recovery with the help of peers. Once we accept that each individual has a biological natural reality, the footwork is up to individuals in relationships.

The concept of therapeutic friendship calls on us to recognize wisdom, but not to identify unassailable experts at the Suppers tables or in the resources we share. Health seeking can get very frustrating when experts disagree with one another. Whose advice should we follow? In a community of therapeutic friends whose purpose is supporting healthy change, we can help each other make the best matches between our diet and lifestyle problems and our diet and lifestyle solutions.

This concept is non-hierarchical, meaning help flows both ways and all roles have value: When the teachers are ready, the students appear; and when the students are ready, the teachers appear. In a recovery community based on therapeutic friendship, individual strengths to lead or follow, learn or teach, listen or speak are equally valued.

Concept 16: The Body Is the Temple of the Soul

The spiritual foundation of the Suppers programs is care of the physical body, the primary spiritual act. The life we experience here and now is the one we experience in our physical bodies. The addiction we experience here and now is not possible without a body. The thoughts we're thinking are influenced by the quality of our physical brains. Our spiritual experiences, thinking, attitudes, memories, emotions, joys, and traumas all take place on the terrain of the body and the cells that make it. We all have bodies. And that matters.

Concept 17: Gratitude Begets More to Be Grateful For

The Suppers programs are grateful to all the individuals, families, programs, researchers, clinicians, and writers whose ideas give life to this program. Credit is given in "About Us," "Food," "Stories," and "Resources," as well as in our member book reviews. We are grateful for experts who devote their careers to helping us and to the programs that save lives and hold answers for many of us. We are grateful for the accumulated wisdom of all who went before us, giving us more choices for our personal pathways.