

# **The Pocket Guide to Suppers**

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### **1. Mission**

The Suppers Programs provide safe and friendly settings where people with health problems related to blood sugar and mood chemistry can transition to a healthier lifestyle. We recognize that the specific diagnosis is inconsequential compared to the biochemical and environmental causes of a health problem. Our programs of whole food preparation support anyone with diet-related health problems, especially those who are challenged by depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and/or problems with alcohol. We further recognize that it takes the warmth and camaraderie of the family table to support those who must let go of highly processed food in order to heal, and with this in mind our programs take place around a shared meal.

### **2. Introduction**

#### **2.1. The Forgotten Body**

The Suppers programs seek to fill a longstanding void in our medical and recovery cultures by restoring the body to its proper role in health and mental health. Briefly, here is the problem: Health challenges – and especially addictions – are widely accepted to be problems of the body, mind, and spirit. These are complex problems requiring integrated solutions.

So far, there are 12 step programs and faith-based programs to address matters of the spirit. There are support groups and therapy for a person's mental, emotional and psychological challenges; and for the body, we have pharmaceuticals and medication monitoring. But pharmaceuticals are expensive, after-the-fact physical interventions. What about prevention and natural methods of intervening? There is no cost-free, member-to-member support group that does for the physical body what 12 step programs and support groups do for the spirit and the mind. One third of the body/mind/spirit equation has been left out of the equation.

So we created it.

At Suppers, we believe that failure to care for the physical body in preventive ways explains our deplorable health statistics and recidivism rates. When you leave a third of the equation out of the equation, poor health is the logical conclusion. At Suppers we believe that serving healthy meals is not a Suzie Homemaker solution; it's a dead serious solution to a national health crisis. Our culture has sent women back into the work force without finding adequate substitutes for the relationship services that women have provided through the millennia. Traditional stay-at-home moms and grandmas have skills that are critical to the well being of the population. They can cook. They care. We must not let these moms and grandmas get away before they have taught us what they know!

#### **2.2. Whom We Can Help**

Suppers programs exist to provide free, member-to-member support for people who are ready to start making diet and lifestyle changes to improve the quality of their health, mental health, or recovery. No one is excluded for financial reasons because the only cost is the price of one's own groceries. We invite people who are ready to work in an environment where it is safe to experiment with change and trade stories, knowing we will never be judged for the course we choose. We protect our members by disallowing all commercial messages and requiring members to refrain from the promotion of any specific diet, product, or service.

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We cannot help someone who has something to sell. We cannot help people whose limitations make it impossible for them to read some literature, handle kitchen tools, and conduct themselves appropriately as a guest in someone's home.

### **2.3. Why Whole Food**

Suppers relies almost exclusively on single, whole, fresh ingredients (one chicken, 2 yams, 3 apples) and almost entirely excludes refined, concentrated or otherwise processed food (breads, canned goods, things with labels that come in packages). There are three main reasons:

1. It keeps things simple. If you eat closer to how nature presented the food, you won't have to worry about fads in food science or experts disagreeing with each other about which food is healthiest to eat. You won't have to read labels because single foods don't need any; you can tell what the ingredient is from looking.
2. In general, it's the processed foods that are more drug-like. The people who come to Suppers have one thing in common: They need help eating more of the foods that promote health and less of the foods that degrade it. In most instances that means less junk fats and refined carbohydrates like chips, cookies, soda, candy, bread and pasta and more whole fruits and vegetables, grains, meat, fish, fowl, nuts and seeds.
3. Whole fresh food is more likely to provide the needed building blocks for healthy brains and stable blood sugar.

### **2.4. Rationale for Our Menu and Our Exclusions**

No one at Suppers will tell you what you should eat. We do work with certain assumptions. Because it is easy to let milled grains (like white flour), dairy products, sugar, and convenient foods slip back into your diet, we don't include them in our menus *at meetings*. This is not to say everybody should totally eliminate these items. It is to say that where diet plays a role in people's health, mood, behavior, and learning challenges, these refined convenient foods are more likely than real whole food to be the culprits. They can become drug-like, and therefore require more thought before consuming. In addition to the problem of processed foods acting more like drugs than food, they are also more likely to be at the root of food allergies and sensitivities. Anyone who must practice food elimination will find a supportive environment at Suppers.

The exception is for Type 1 diabetics. For people with Type 1 we teach an extremely low carb menu, which you may choose to follow or not follow at home. But at meetings the carb count will be very low.

We also prepare a lot of one-pot meals like soups, stews, chili, salad, and raw vegetable slaws. This approach serves several functions:

- It makes the meal more affordable. At this writing, we can prepare complete meals including some organic produce for about \$5 per meal.
- One pot recipes allow people to tailor the meal to their needs. So at a meeting, there may be one pot of the vegan version, another for the omnivores, and maybe even a third for those who are allergic to something. Everyone starts with a base (like chicken broth or coconut milk) and an assortment of beans, meat or fish, and lots of vegetables.

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- The meal can be prepared in a relatively short amount of time, to fit the meeting format. Sometimes the leader or a volunteer will need to do some food prep ahead like soaking and cooking dry beans.

We always have some raw food on the menu to up the nutrient content and preserve precious food enzymes that would be killed by heat. As all chemical processes that take place in the human body require enzymes, Suppers makes it a priority to serve something raw at every meeting.

These foods are easy. One promise of the Suppers programs is that if you can make a pot of coffee, you can make a pot of soup. It's just not complicated to put together a simple pot of soup and a salad. All that non-cooks lack is experience.

### **2.5. It Takes a Table**

Learning from books and videos is great, but the deep lessons are learned by *practicing* what you learn in the safe, fully integrated settings of real life. At Suppers, we think it is more important to apply what we already know but ignore, rather than pushing harder to find more answers, doing more research, or in any other way stalling on manifesting change in our lives. Enough facts are in. It is our diet and lifestyle that are making us fat, sick, and depressed. This is why every Suppers meeting is built around a shared meal. Creating a meal and sitting down with loved ones and therapeutic friends provides nourishment for the body; stimulation, learning, and exploration for the mind; and gratitude, rituals, and joining for the spirit.

## **3. History**

### **3.1. How We Started**

Suppers started when Dor was studying counseling at the College of New Jersey. She asked every psychologist and therapist she ran into if there existed any free-to-users support group that does for the physical body what 12-step groups and therapy do for the minds and spirits of their members.

"No". In all cases, no one had heard of a free support group that teaches people how to cook and eat, that helped them set goals and monitor the progress of the lifestyle changes they wanted to make, or that created a non-judgmental environment where they could share their stories about trying to improve their nutritional status or create a family table at home.

So she decided to work on the program design with the near term goal of helping people in recovery from addiction and the longer term goal of working with *anyone* whose health issues included blood sugar regulation and mood chemistry problems. Very shortly she met Cindy -- then 12 years sober in AA -- who heard about the Suppers pilot project and decided to be the first to work the program. Cindy read every scrap of Suppers literature and resisted all the suggested changes. She saw the value of them for other people; she fixed her children's diets, all the while squirreling chocolate and self-medicating with coffee.

One day it became clear at a workshop that sneaking, lying, resisting, torturing friends, and complaining were all natural steps in the change process. The program had to include the wisdom of counseling models like harm reduction, which provides an alternative to abstaining. This was a good thing since you can't abstain from food anyway. The program had to include stages of change model thinking, and

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facilitators would have to understand how to not speed along or otherwise sabotage people's change processes. That required motivational interviewing skills. After all, what the program was offering people was a support group to stop eating their favorite foods, the foods which for them act more like drugs than food. Not an easy sell. Wisdom from family therapy had to be included in the program design to deal with the inevitable spousal sabotage and rebelling children. The net result is the Suppers model we call nutritional harm reduction.

Since this beginning, we have created Suppers for Families with ADHD, Suppers for Stable Blood Sugar, Suppers for Teens, and general Suppers meetings for anyone who wants to use whole food to deal with their depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes or problems with alcohol. This is our audience, the people who will not be OK until healthy diet and lifestyle change have taken root in their lives.

### **3.2. Less Hierarchy**

The first participants in Suppers had a background in 12-step programs. We did not need to re-invent what was already working. From AA we have borrowed the goal of keeping things as non-hierarchical as possible. With the internet, we have been blessed with the possibility of making all our literature available free, so there is no reason people can't participate for financial reasons.

We have laid down the law that the program is about avoiding processed foods in favor of whole ingredients. Aside from that, we inform members about ways of eating and things to try but have no investment in a particular diet. At meetings, vegans, vegetarians and omnivores work together by keeping a few pots going on the stove. There's normally an enzyme-rich salad or raw vegetable choice. There's usually 4 – 5 ounces of protein available but no pressure to eat it, if that's not your preferred way of eating.

Leading is according to a script, so anyone who practices the principles of the program can lead a meeting. And finally, any one who gathers for the purpose of leading a healthier life through diet and lifestyle change may call themselves a Suppers meeting and borrow our literature as long as the focus is on using less processed food and increasing the use of whole food, practicing non-judgment, and avoiding commercial messages.

## **4. Terms and Concepts of the Programs**

The concepts are the underlying assumptions on which all of the Suppers programs are based. 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. Suppers reaches out to people with depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and problems with alcohol.

### **4.1. Concept 1: Biological Individuality**

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 honor the biological individuality of each member by practicing not knowing what is right for someone else and keeping the focus first on finding their own pathways.

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Accepting the concept that we are all operating from biologically different bodies empowers us to accept our personal biological differences and to change the biological conditions over which we have or can get control. The courage and power to change our individual biology lies in the footwork of diet and lifestyle change. This will mean subtracting processed foods like chips, candy, and soda that light up the pleasure centers in the brain artificially and then let you crash, just like drugs do. It will mean adding whole foods that build stable, happy brains over time.

### **4.2. Concept 2: Addition and Subtraction**

Health challenges at the biological level boil down to two simple math 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.

### **4.3. Concept 3: Appetite Foolishness**

“Appetite foolishness” is characterized by craving things that are unhealthy for your body. If you get repeated urges to consume soda, alcohol, chips, candy, cakes, fast food or any other processed or drug-like food that temporarily resolves a discomfort at the cost of creating a greater problem over time, you experience appetite foolishness. A person who ingests his or her drug of choice has this problem. Without desire or anticipation that ingesting or doing something will change how you feel, you wouldn't develop addiction. 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, 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.

### **4.4. Concept 4: Health Relatives**

The concept of health relatives is set forth in the following statement: The diagnosis or name of the disease is inconsequential compared to identifying the biochemical and environmental causes. For this reason, 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. The Suppers programs provide the ideal support needed for anyone with some combination of depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and/or problems with alcohol.

### **4.5. Concept 5: Automatic Choices**

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. 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:

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- Unfamiliarity. Staying the same is familiar and easy. Changing is strange and hard.
- Discomfort. The pain of staying the same is less than the 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 effortful 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 are 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.

### **4.6. Concept 6: Control is Partly a Matter of Biology**

The ability to exercise appropriate control and make good enough choices in life is part biological. That's the part we can help you with at Suppers. The candy-sucking teenager, the carb-bingeing frazzled mom, the beer guzzling guy who pops his cork over the small stuff all show signs of personal biologies that are out of control. Where personal biology is out of control, the need for urge-or impulse-management builds. If that teenager, mom, or guy need to put something in their mouths to change how they feel, chances are good they have control issues elsewhere in their lives. This concept calls on us to understand that the better job you do matching biological problems and solutions, the less control you'll need to exercise elsewhere in your life. The more you exercise appropriate control in the areas where you are powerful, the less you'll be powerless over.

### **4.7. Concept 7: Nutritional Harm Reduction**

People who join Suppers have at some point suffered because of the addictive nature of the national 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 all 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 over night? At Suppers we see it as a transitional process with nutrition. That means that as you learn how to determine which foods work best for you and your family, as you learn to prepare them, as your body acquires 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 also 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 we feel, adding foods that are healthy while slowly subtracting things like soda, chips, and candy that are more drug-like, and learning about the other influences of timing, content, digestion, and the circumstances under which we eat.

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### **4.8. Concept 8: Healthier Sources of Pleasure**

People who have dependent relationships with coffee, soda, alcohol, chips, pizza, breadstuffs or any food or drink that changes how they feel are not experiencing pleasure and comfort in the ordinary, healthy way. 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 or composed. 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 co-creating to be so profoundly healing that we have built opportunities to co-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 co-create your own groups!

### **4.9. Concept 9: The BRIM of Illness (Barrel of Risks and Influences for the Manifestation of Poor Health or Addiction)**

This concept, borrowed from environmental medicine, is relevant for anyone willing to make diet and lifestyle changes to improve health or reduce risk of relapse. Each body may be thought of as a barrel, with risk factors raising the level and positive influences lowering the level of risk of developing illness or relapsing. The top, the point at which there is overflow, is the point at which the body overflows into disease or relapse.

Anything that influences the raising or lowering of risk goes into the barrel: genetic factors, family history, life stress and support, age, food allergies, allergies to the constituents of alcoholic beverages, nutritional status, relationships, media messages, peer pressure, emotional and psychological factors. There are many more. Some will cause the level to rise toward illness, addiction or relapse; some will be protective and lower it.

By distancing ourselves from our diagnoses and focusing on the biochemical and environmental causes of our problems, we are each free to explore our own highly individual barrel of risks and influences and find our own personal path to wellness.

### **4.10. Concept 10: Your Internal Observer**

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 notices it after a time lag. Your internal observer is your Number 1 friend as you try to break a habit. The trick is to learn to make the observation before your internal judge takes over.

For today, just start noticing how your good observations are snuffed out by judging. Getting good information from your therapeutic friends and your internal

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observer will increase the quality of the information you plug in when you do your BRIM inventory at Suppers.

### **4.11. Concept 11: Natural Reality**

The natural reality of a health challenge is what is actually happening, not biased by how we label or diagnose it or how people in a particular discipline understand it. Without awareness that our illnesses and addictions have a natural reality for us to uncover, we are at risk of buying our own or someone else's assumptions about what's going on. This concept requires us to stay curious, experiment, observe and identify the roots of our problem. At Suppers, our bias is that the roll of the physical body has been under-considered in health and mental health treatment and recovery.

### **4.12. Concept 12: Relapse is the logical conclusion**

Whether our challenge is with food or drink, failure to adhere to changes we know would be healthy for us is the logical conclusion of making poor matches between problems and solutions.

This is another concept that calls us to seek wisdom: If what you're doing isn't working, willfully doing more of the same will probably not yield better results. One possible interpretation of the widespread failure to do what we know is good for us is that solutions lie in the areas that haven't been explored, the areas where it's harder to search because there isn't as much light to see by.

The concept that "relapse is the logical conclusion" calls us to investigate those unilluminated areas. It refers to no particular factor but to the need to stay curious, experiment, and make good matches based on all the possible factors that lead to appetite foolishness and how they can combine *in an individual*. It is our understanding at Suppers that the unilluminated area is often the nutritional status of the physical body.

### **4.13. Concept 13: Therapeutic Friendship**

The concept of therapeutic friendship offers all people the possibility of becoming the designers of their own plans for better health or recovery with the help of peers. Once the possibility of individual biological natural realities is accepted, the footwork is up to individuals in relationships.

The concept of therapeutic friendship calls us to acknowledge that there is such a thing as expertise but not experts at the Suppers tables. The biggest problem with experts is that they disagree with one another. Disagreement among experts creates confusion and invites failure. But in a community of therapeutic friends where no one is the expert while all have expertise, the greatest matches between problems and solutions can emerge.

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 friendships, individual strength to lead or follow, learn or teach, listen or speak are equally valued.

### **4.14. Concept 14: It Takes a Table**

The family table is an authentic setting. Learning from books and videos is great, but the deep lessons are learned by practicing what you learn in the safe, fully

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integrated settings of real life. This is why every Suppers meeting is built around a meal. Creating a meal and sitting down with loved ones and therapeutic friends provides nourishment for the body; stimulation, learning, and exploration for the mind; and gratitude, rituals, and joining for the spirit.

### **4.15. Concept 15: The Body is the Temple of the Soul**

The spiritual foundation of the Suppers programs is that the primary spiritual act is caring for the body. 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.

### **4.16. Concept 16: Serenity Soup**

Serenity soup is more of a concept than a recipe. It is based on research in nutrition and addiction that shows that certain foods promote stability while others destabilize. Because of biological individuality, it's not the same foods for all people, but what you can rely on is that the most therapeutic foods are single, whole foods. Some foods speed the healing of digestion while others promote digestive misery. Some foods provide the building blocks of normal brain function while others starve the brain. A serenity soup uses almost exclusively single, whole, fresh ingredients and excludes processed ingredients like sugar and flour that can trigger craving. And it is usually served with a salad of raw vegetables that promote good digestion. We avoid most prepared foods like boxed macaroni and canned or packaged foods that have lost their nutritional value. Individual Suppers groups are free to run the gamut of fare; what is offered in our recipe section is directions for complete, inexpensive meals that were developed by and for people in recovery and others suffering health issues related to blood sugar and mood chemistry.

### **4.17. 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" and "Resources". 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.

## **5. Meetings**

### **5.1. What is a Suppers Meeting?**

A Suppers meeting is a gathering of people who come together for the purpose of learning how to prepare and enjoy fresh whole food. The usual elements include: preparing the meal (either the full group or people volunteering each week), enjoying the meal together at the table, discussing a topic or hearing a non-commercial presenter, and reading outside books or program literature, especially the stories of people who have healed in the program. There are other formats, but that's the basic idea. Some groups are continuous; some run for a few months, at which point people may opt to join a continuous meeting.

Some meetings welcome anyone who has issues related to blood sugar and mood chemistry (including people with depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and problems with alcohol). Some are focused on particular populations:

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people in recovery, diabetics, etc. Their only requirement for membership is the desire to lead a healthier life. Groups seek to be non-judgmental and inclusive, welcoming people with varying preferred eating styles (i.e., vegans or carnivores) and dietary needs (i.e., people with allergies and sensitivities to specific ingredients). We manage this by having more than one pot simmering and allowing people with special considerations to assemble their own salads, etc.

Members are required to leave their biases at the door and keep the focus on their own personal healing through whole food and the camaraderie of the Suppers family table.

### **5.2. What you Need to Make a Meeting**

- Somebody has to cook. No book, website, DVD, or video can create the most important habit of caring for the physical body: Lovingly preparing whole foods to be served at a family table.
- A location. Homes are where the heart is, but not everybody has a home to which they can or will invite members of the community. So church kitchens and agency settings with cooking facilities will work.
- At least one person in the group needs to learn the program, preferably by training as a facilitator.
- Participants who want to start making diet and lifestyle changes so they can lead healthier lives.
- If you call yourself a "Suppers" group, we ask that you adhere to the fundamental principles of the program: keeping the focus on healing with whole food, practicing non-judgment, and avoiding commercial messages.

### **5.3. Meeting Formats**

Each group determines for itself which format it will use. The ones we have created so far include:

- Cooking meeting. Some or all members come together to prepare, learn to prepare, and ideally record recipes for meals. A cooking meeting usually precedes a meeting at which a meal is shared.
- Topic meeting: During the meal, a topic is discussed. Outside speakers are welcome as long as there is no promotion of any diet, product or service. Members and speakers may certainly share their experiences and ideas; they are not permitted to promote or sell. Members who have written their Suppers story are welcome to share them here.
- Big Cook meetings come together expressly for the purpose of cooking large quantities to take home for families and friends to try or to store for future meals.
- Walking meeting: Groups that want to include an exercise component may want to cook ahead, or allow a few people to prepare the meal while others get some sunshine and exercise. We do this with our diabetic members.

### **5.4. In-home Meetings/Meetings in Institutions**

We run in-home meetings and meetings in institutional settings. Suppers meetings that run in churches or institutions are valuable meetings, but when it comes to restoring family tables, there is no place like home. Sitting at a Suppers family table in some one's kitchen, dining room, or picnic table calls on members to respect the household rules. Many times we have heard disbelief from newcomers, "You mean you welcome strangers into your homes and you do all these activities for free?" Yes, that's how Suppers works. You come. You benefit. You pass it on to newcomers in need. There are several good reasons for meetings in institutions.

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Obviously, there is a big trust issue around inviting people in to your home. Some newcomers are more comfortable in a more anonymous setting. And some ready-made groups want a Suppers meeting to come into their agencies. As each Suppers group is co-created by its members, each group decides for itself the details of its meeting. All we ask is that if you call yourself a Suppers group you keep the focus on whole food preparation, practice non-judgment, and avoid commercial messages.

### **5.5. Finding a Meeting**

Go to [www.SuppersFor.org](http://www.SuppersFor.org) and click on Activities.

### **5.6. No Commercial Messages**

At Suppers, we are very concerned about the profit motive that drives the national menu of highly processed food and drink, one of the strongest forces degrading the food supply, setting us up for addictions and frustrating struggles with weight, and endangering our health. So we pledge to set a good example and keep the program free. All of our literature is available at no cost as PDF files at [www.Suppersfor.org](http://www.Suppersfor.org).

In return, we ask all who attend to embrace our spirit of no profit motive, to share their experience while refraining from the promotion of any particular diet, product, or service.

### **5.7. Stories**

All of the Suppers literature is available free on our website. That includes information on how the program came about, who the founders are, the research that went into the program design, and members' stories. Most of our teaching is through the voices of real members who have written their stories.

As people participate in the program, we ask them to write their stories or share anecdotes so that we can write their stories. Names are usually changed to preserve the anonymity of contributors, though many members have been proud to own their stories and use their real names. Some are success stories; some are work-in-progress stories; some are one-step-forward and two-steps-back stories. But they are all valuable in conveying the processes people go through as they learn and practice nutritional harm reduction. We can take almost any challenge a person has in Suppers and understand it as a necessary stage in that person's change process. Even relapse has a valuable place if shared in a program where learning, non-judgment, and overall harm reduction are the orders of the day.

Here is a sample, Rose's Story: Lentils Saved Me

*I have been a psychotherapist for over 30 years. I was trained in the psychodynamics tradition, and I am a great lover of Freud. For most of my adult life I have had an eating disorder, and for most of my adult life I have been in therapy. I have spent more time talking about my relationship with my mother than I spent having my relationship with my mother. It wasn't until I was nearly 60 that I became willing to try another approach to my uncontrolled eating. My husband is a psychologist. He's a lot more open than I am to playing with diets and trying new things. At the time he suggested I give Suppers a try, I was so frustrated with these 40 lbs I agreed.*

*Lentils saved me. It was at Suppers that I was introduced to the idea that to stave off hunger and prevent binges, I'd have to eat more. I'd have to make the time in the afternoon to have a small meal between clients so that I*

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*wouldn't be screaming for huge plates of pasta and heavy bowls of popcorn at the end of the day. The leader of my meeting sent me home with all the leftover lentils. I couldn't believe what happened to my body. Not only did it reduce by more than half the vigilance required to stay away from empty carbs, I found I was feeling more loving toward my husband. All because of a daily cup of lentils to prevent a quick drop in blood sugar.*

### **5.8. Topics**

Most of our discussion topics relate to healthy lifestyle and reflect Suppers program priorities in terms of the rationale for the program design, the terms and concepts, the boundaries, and the personal stories that emerge at meetings.

As readers will see, there is always some tension between the research-based program design and the program's imperative to stay out of the details of people's diet and lifestyle choices *as long as* they are trying to work with single, whole, fresh food and reduce consumption of processed foods. The founders' preferences and biases may be evident in similarities to our sources of wisdom: the 12-step programs, the public health model called harm reduction, the counseling models called motivational interviewing and stages of change, and the work of numerous researchers and clinicians in nutritional psychology, educational psychology, nutritional anthropology, addictions counseling, and the whole food movement.

Though all of our materials are available on our websites, we understand the better way to learn is through firsthand experience and the sharing of personal stories.

As members accomplish -- or don't -- the goals they work on at Suppers, we encourage them to re-create their experience in a short story. Any story shared from the heart will find readers who can heal from the message. Stories give readers the chance to identify -- or not -- learn from, take courage from, internalize or rule out for themselves the experiences of those who share their stories.

No matter what the topic, we seek first to create a safe environment for sharing. This requires vigilance on the part of leaders and members as we humans slip so comfortably into the role of judging. People who are taking the risk of sharing must feel safe to speak without fear of being judged.

### **5.9. Differences and Boundaries**

Each group sets up its own boundaries in terms of budget, shopping, reimbursing the shopper, food preferences (for example, if you choose to create a vegetarian meeting or one for people with specific food allergies). If you call your group a general "Suppers" meeting, broad tolerance of differences is required. If you specify Suppers for..., you may set those boundaries before attracting members. Groups may choose to cook together or have volunteers rotate coming early each week to cook. Groups may set the budget and determine how much money is collected for the kitty. A cushion is good to cover staples and the occasional no-show. Groups may decide to honor strict beginning and ending times or remain flexible. In any case, some of the best conversations happen during or after clean up.

### **5.10. Facilitator Training**

As people work the program, they have an opportunity to lead meetings and gather information and experience to help meetings run smoothly. Eventually this may spell into facilitating one's own meeting. Once some one has a basic understanding

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of cooking from scratch, we can invite them to training workshops, mostly oriented toward internalizing the literature and particularly practicing non-judgment.

People who would like to train to facilitate meetings should have accomplished the following:

- The ability to prepare 8 meals according to the Suppers guidelines (including soups, stews, chili, salad, and slaws made with high fiber vegetables, high quality fats, and lean protein)
- Familiarity with Suppers literature
- Attendance at enough facilitators meetings to learn non-judgment, understand the stages of change, learn basic motivational interviewing skills, and be conversant with the concepts and boundaries of the program.
- Feel comfortable juggling the varying dietary requirements and preferences of our diverse population

### **5.11. Our Finances**

Suppers is supported by grateful members and people in the community who wish to help pass on the program. Donations are not solicited from members. Most services are donated.

### **5.12. Meeting Logistics**

Running a meeting that promises to teach people to prepare and enjoy meals, to set and monitor doable goals, to create opportunities for people to share their experiences and wisdom, and to create a forum for speakers is no small logistical challenge. Here are some formats that have worked for us:

A split 2-hour meeting. Those who want to cook arrive at, say 11:30. They use the ingredients in different combinations so that everyone's dietary preferences (like vegan, omnivore) are represented. The eating and meeting starts at, say, 12:30, when the other members arrive. At this point, the leader follows the leader's script to run the meeting.

1 1/2 hour meeting. All members arrive at, say, 6:00. The menu is limited to things that can be prepared in half an hour or the leaders can start a few things ahead. By, say, 6:30, the meal is ready and the leader follows the leader's script. The work of the meeting is usually accomplished in an hour and a half; at which point the closing is read and volunteers help with clean up

### **5.13. Leader's Script**

"Please join us in the Prayer for Suppers."

Let gratitude fill me,  
Family and friendship sustain me,  
And respect for my body, mind, and spirit,  
Guide my choices.

(If there are newcomers, go around the table and do short introductions.)

(If there are no newcomers): "Welcome to the tables of Suppers. Suppers is a learn-by-doing program for people who want more vibrant health. All you need to join is the willingness to start making diet and lifestyle changes. The program is based on whole food preparation, restoration of family tables, and formation of healthy habits which, though simple, are hard to follow without support. At

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Suppers, we don't tell you how or what to eat. Our focus is on supporting people's personal pathways to better health using whole food. You set the course and the pace.

The only requirement for membership is the desire to lead a healthier life.

The only fee you will ever pay is the cost of your own groceries.

The only investment you will ever make is your own time and effort; and the payoff is more vibrant health for you, your loved ones, and anyone to whom you pass on the program. What we ask in return is that all who attend embrace our non-profit spirit and share their experience while refraining from the promotion of any particular diet, product, or service."

"Groceries come to about \$\_\_\_\_\_ each today; the kitty is in the kitchen."

"Are there any brief announcements?"

"To start familiarizing you with the boundaries, terms and concepts of our program, we will read one of the boundaries and one concept at each meeting. Today I have selected:

(Leader read one boundary and one concept of your choice.)

"Today's topic is\_\_\_\_\_." (Leader: describe topic.)

"Welcome to the tables of Suppers; let's serve!"

(Serve meal and lead meeting.)

"Let's finish with the closing:

Thank you for joining our family table,  
For offering your friendship and sharing your self.  
Our parting wish for you is that you find the healthier life you seek,  
In body, mind, and spirit."

### **5.14. Types of Meetings**

#### **5.14.1. Suppers for Stable Blood Sugar**

We run separate groups for people with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. Unlike the rest of the Suppers programs, our menus for Type 1s are not flexible on the point of amounts of carbohydrates. We teach very low carb cooking. Members are mentored by people who have succeeded at reducing use of insulin through carb restriction. This is not to say that you have to embrace this lifestyle in order to participate. It is only to say that menus *at meetings* are extremely carb limited, and the focus of discussions related to diet, stress management, or physical activity are all oriented for people who want to explore ways of reducing insulin use through lifestyle. Menus for meetings for Type 2 diabetics include a range of whole foods: vegetables, fruits, meats or fish, legumes and seeds, and to a limited degree non-gluten grains. Because our members have a wide range of needs and preferences, we have 2 or 3 pots on the stove, and we each assemble our own salads.

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All Suppers programs are geared for people with health and mental health problems related to blood sugar and/or mood chemistry. So people with diabetes can attend general meetings where the food is all whole but not as restricted as at meetings for diabetics. Diabetics who want to take a baby step instead of a leap might want to attend a general Suppers meeting and transition to Suppers for Stable Blood Sugar later.

### **5.14.2. Suppers for Sobriety**

Suppers for Sobriety welcomes people who are ready to make diet and lifestyle changes to make sobriety more comfortable. The program is right for people who are already in recovery; it is probably not right for people brand new to recovery if they can't focus enough yet to do some reading or handle kitchen tools. The menu is ideal for alcoholics in recovery who, very typically, still suffer major swings in mood and blood sugar in the months and years after quitting.

### **5.14.3. Suppers for Families with ADHD**

This Suppers group runs in 12-week cycles with 8 weeks for parents and 4 weeks for the children to work with mentors while their parents take an hour off. The focus is on building learning brains. People who are willing to start removing gluten, sugar, dairy foods, and most processed foods from the family food plan to support their children's mood, learning, and behavior are good candidates for this program. There is homework for this group; we read numerous books by doctors, nutritionists and/or psychologists.

### **5.14.4. Suppers**

All Suppers meetings are built on learning to cook and enjoy meals made from single, whole, fresh ingredients and letting go of processed foods. The general Suppers meetings allow people to make these changes at their own pace and on their own terms. Activities include learning to set and monitor doable goals and instruction in food journaling for those who want it. The other key element is eating at the family table and enjoying the warmth and camaraderie of others who have come together for the common purpose of healing for the greatest number.

### **5.14.5. Teens and Children**

To date, our children's meetings have not included the meal, primarily so that the kids can take home the food they cook to share and talk about with their families. Depending on the age of the children, one mentor to 3 - 5 children works. The children chop and prep the ingredients for soups, stew, chili, and salad. They should bring jars to transport food home. We have found that with kids it's especially important to give them control of what goes into their pots, which sometimes means there is more than one pot bubbling on the stove. Adults help them prepare ingredients and kids decide which items they include. One usually writes up the recipe as we work and it's posted.

### **5.15. Home Groups and Short Programs**

Some people run meetings once a month. More typically, Suppers meetings run weekly in 8 - 12-week cycles or function more like home groups and run continuously. In our experience so far, it has taken from 8 weeks to 2 years for people to do everything they have to do to set lasting change in motion in their households. Each group may decide for itself the nature of the meeting schedule. For short programs, there is a greater need to adhere to a (flexible) agenda so that all proposed topics are covered.

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Following is an example of a meeting schedule, the one we use for Suppers for Stable Blood Sugar. At this and all Suppers meetings, we start with a consideration of the importance of eating whole food and the consequences to blood sugar and mood chemistry of eating processed food.

### **5.16. Sample Suppers Schedule**

A meal is prepared and eaten at all meetings.

- Week 1 Introductions and activity selections
- Week 2 Facilitator presents on blood sugar and mood chemistry, the foundation of all Suppers programs
- Week 3 Brief meditation  
Talk on Nutritional Harm Reduction, the Suppers model
- Week 4 Breakfast challenge, set up journals, read a breakfast story
- Week 5 Presentation on fats, check on journals
- Week 6 Presentation and exercises on mindful eating, read a relevant story
- Week 7 Member book review, check on journals
- Week 8 Member book review, read a story
- Week 9 Tour of whole food store with nutrition consultant
- Week 10 Share Suppers stories, check on journals
- Week 11 Big cook meeting, evaluations filled out
- Week 12 Discuss next steps

The home group, a continuous meeting, fosters the kind of relationships that support people through the ongoing process of improving health naturally. In a home group, there is enough time to do and teach food/mood experiments and track the results. There is time to develop the sense of safety needed whenever someone who feels vulnerable challenges him- or herself to strike off in a new direction. There is time to learn how to cook. And there is time to broaden one's understanding of how the Suppers programs work.

Another possibility is combining a 12-week program with a follow-up home group that meets once a month continuously.

### **5.17. Splitting a Group**

When a group includes people with highly variable personal priorities, there is no need to judge. There can simply be different preferred ways of being. There is no reason that a group can't be split if the members' priorities or boundaries call for it.

Some members may insist on all or mostly organic foods. Others may not be able to afford it. Some members may need a group that focuses on blood sugar management while others prefer a general meeting. Vegans or people following a blood type diet or people who want to spend more money and create more elegant meals need not judge each other to justify starting their own groups. At Suppers the only requirement for membership is the desire to lead a healthier life, but there is no rule that says everybody has to find their pathway at the same meeting.

## **6. Parents' and Children's Roles**

When it comes to feeding and eating, the division of labor can get pretty confusing. Here are the recommendations for families that need to stabilize blood sugar and mood chemistry:

The Parents' job is to:

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- Bring into the house only the healthy foods you want the children to eat.
- Exclude foods that act like bargaining chips (you know they are more drug-like for your children if they lobby to get them)
- Model the eating behavior you want from your children.
- 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.
- Include the children in as many steps as possible: eating together at a table, preparing the food, picking the food, even growing the food.
- Avoid hovering, micromanaging, prodding, bargaining. None of these is necessary if you have only healthy whole food in the house.
- Observe how they react/respond to foods and drinks. Take charge of food elimination and challenge experiments if a dietary culprit is suspected.
- Don't worry yet about a "balanced diet". Balance comes *after* they acquire the taste for whole food.

The Child's job is to:

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

### **7. Literature**

We remain committed to keeping these programs as free of profit motive, affiliation, and hierarchy as is possible and still have a program. One of the best ways we can do this is through use of the internet. All Suppers literature is available free as PDF files so no one is excluded for reasons of inability to pay. We will make certain pieces of literature available in print form, but our primary purpose in this regard is to make our information available free so that healing can take place for the greatest number.

Our website includes articles for counselors, descriptions of the research base of the program, activities, inventories, recipes and, most important: stories. Our stories are the true stories of people who have healed in the Suppers program.

### **8. How We Differ from Other Groups and Therapy**

We cook. We eat. Our primary purpose is to help people elevate care of the physical body to its rightful place in their plans to restore their health. That means acknowledging that their physical needs for building blocks – the nutrients in real food – are just as important as their psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs. We do this 1) through teaching people to prepare health-restoring foods, 2) by supporting people while they acquire a taste for whole foods and reduce interest in processed foods, and 3) to the extent possible in the context of meetings, by practicing stress management and helping them increase meaningful physical activity.

### **9. Money Matters: Non-affiliation**

Each Suppers group is self-supporting and need have no expenses save the cost of groceries (and location if rent is involved, as at a church): Every word of Suppers literature is free on the internet at [www.SuppersFor.org](http://www.SuppersFor.org) and therefore available for members to print themselves. Camera ready versions of printable brochures are free for the asking. Eventually a book will be available for purchase, but we are committed to making the literature available to download.

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### **10. What Suppers Does Not Do**

Suppers does not provide medical advice. Medical professionals may present at our meetings as long as there is no commercial message.

Suppers does not try to sell you on a particular diet. Vegans, vegetarians, and omnivores participate without being judged at Suppers meeting. We acknowledge that the founders find it is *easier* to follow recommendations for blood sugar regulation with some animal protein, but our only inflexible bias is for whole foods instead of processed.

Suppers does not refer or recommend professional services to its members.

Suppers does not promote other organizations, causes, or businesses.

Suppers does not endorse products.

### **11. How to Join**

Joining is easy. You just have to have the desire to start making diet and lifestyle changes. You will need the wherewithal to read literature, get to meetings, handle kitchen tools, and conduct yourself with the respect appropriate for being welcomed into someone's home. For help starting a meeting or joining a meeting if you are in central New Jersey:

609 921 0441  
[info@SuppersFor.org](mailto:info@SuppersFor.org)  
144 Patton Avenue  
Princeton, NJ 08540

### **12. Contact Information**

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609 921 0441  
[info@SuppersFor.org](mailto:info@SuppersFor.org)