

Lisa's Story – Marshmallow Madness

My March Madness turned into Marshmallow Madness and gave me the clue to heart palpitations, and more!

Does this sound familiar? A middle-aged woman approaches menopause, begins to gain weight, joints start to ache, feels anxious and cranky, and starts getting heart palpitations. Well that was me. Most of this I passed off as a lack of self-discipline, the inevitabilities of age—except for the heart palpitations, which were intense and scary. I had always felt quite sane, but this was making me crazy. When I shared this story at a recent Suppers meeting, everybody was nodding their heads like they knew exactly what was going on with me. But at the time, it was a mystery.

The doctor, and a cardiologist, did some tests—EKG, stress echocardiogram, thyroid—and confirmed the palpitations and an underlying heart arrhythmia, but could not determine a cause. They said the arrhythmia was not life-threatening, and prescribed beta blockers. The doctor said people have heart palpitations all the time, and I would be fine just taking the beta blockers.

I'm a single parent and this just wasn't good enough for me. I couldn't believe my heart could withstand that stress for very long. So I turned to the internet and did a simple search on "heart palpitations." The first results I checked listed three causes and one of those was glucose. This rang a bell because I've always had a feeling I was sensitive to sugar. If I eat a donut in the morning for breakfast, I have brain fog the entire day.

So I decided to do my own test and stop eating sugar and starch. And although I had a lot to learn, I began to feel better. That was in February.

In March, I took my young daughter on vacation in California, and we stayed at a fabulous little hotel with a pool with outdoor fire pits. I took one look at this and said, "Let's roast marshmallows!" So we bought a bag of marshmallows and skewers. We sat by the pool that night chatting away and demolishing the bag.

At 3 a.m. I woke with the worst palpitations I had felt yet. My heart was going crazy. In retrospect, maybe I should have gone to the hospital, but I stayed in bed hoping I would make it until morning, saying to myself, "Well, I think I just gave myself a glucose tolerance test." I recalled that in high school, my pediatrician suspected a glucose tolerance problem, and I had a 3-hour glucose tolerance test, apparently not long enough.

You really need to trust your intuition. Since high school, I've always suspected I had some kind of problem with sugar. I began to do more reading on issues related to insulin resistance, and followed the diet outlined in *Protein Power*. The results were immediate. My heart palpitations disappeared in three days; I lost 40 pounds without the struggles I'd experienced on diets; all my aches and pains disappeared; I felt more clear-headed.

I returned to my doctor and told her the results of my unintentional experiment with marshmallows and the results I'd had with a high protein, low carb diet. She said, "You're a good detective. You should write an article." I should write an article? When I asked her what we should do next, she said, "Well, if you've figured it out, just keep doing what you're doing."

I returned to the cardiologist and told her the same story. She was very concerned about the low carb diet and felt that it would increase my cholesterol and create a greater heart risk.

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I went to an endocrinologist as well, looking for verification of what I had discovered. He was as dismissive as the cardiologist, and attributed everything to my weight loss. He couldn't understand that I was incapable of losing weight until I discovered the role that sugar and refined carbohydrates played in my cravings. And just to add insult to injury, he charged me \$500 for a 15 minute consultation.

That was 8 years ago. For the first two years, I couldn't eat carbohydrates without getting heart palpitations 6 hours later. I could set my watch by it. After two years, my body began to heal itself, a mixed blessing because now I can cheat a little. So my weight is 10 pounds higher than my low, but overall I feel good.

I wonder where I would be now if I hadn't figured this out. It's scary that none of the doctors I consulted—an internist, a cardiologist, or an endocrinologist—would have figured any of this out.

Here are all the symptoms (many that I did not even know were related) that have disappeared since I've eliminated sugars and starches from my diet:

- Heart palpitations
- Irritability
- Feeling flushed
- Foggy-headed
- Memory problems
- Disintegrating handwriting
- Food cravings
- Caffeine cravings
- Overweight
- Aching joints
- Bad knees
- Inability to lose weight
- Momentary dizzy spells
- Nail biting
- Gum disease
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Blurred vision
- Nightmares related to heart palpitations
- Feeling shaky/jittery at end of day or when under stress
- Sleepiness/drowsiness watching TV, movie, theater
- Inability to wake up in the morning, like I'm drugged

So was the cardiologist right to be concerned? I eat over a dozen eggs a week—and bacon when I'm in the mood! Here are the results of my blood tests in 1999 when the heart palpitations began and today:

	October 1999	January 2008
Weight	180	155
Good Cholesterol	62	107
Bad Cholesterol	130	125
Total Cholesterol	221	232
Triglycerides	76	40

I had discovered most of my own answers before trying the Suppers program. But I've decided to do the program because I want the support, the company of people who have similar concerns, the accountability I feel, and the creative input. The greatest direct benefit so far has been using the motivation to get off diet soda. Once I decided to do it, it became easy.