

Lucia's Story – Dark Chocolate

My life was organized around bars of dark chocolate. I didn't go anywhere without them. Dark chocolate – chocolate negro -- was my universal solution. Stress at work? One square. Fatigue? One square. Feeling blue? One square. It seemed that every two hours there was some reason why I needed to dive into my purse and break off a piece.

I think I have a reputation for my great love of chocolate, which would be funny if it weren't so scary. I come from a family of sugar-loving Spaniards, most of whom are also diabetic. We come from a fishing village and eat lots of fish and vegetables, but our healthy diet did not protect us from the consequences of indulging in our great favorites like *flan*, *turrón*, and *tarta*.

In my 40s I got the push that forced me to examine my habits, my fasting blood sugar was 120 mg/dl at a physical and the doctor was not pleased. There was nothing I could do about the family history but lots I could do about my habits. I never ate breakfast. Ever. I lived on coffee. I never cooked because I didn't know how. And my career kept me late at work and often on the road. Who wouldn't rely on a predictable friend like dark chocolate under such a strain!

When I started going to Suppers I was prepared to make changes, but not to totally give up chocolate. I went to different meetings, whenever I was in town, and I learned to cook basic things. I found I actually enjoyed shopping and selecting the perfect piece of fish. It was a pleasure when I had the time to prepare the greens myself. I learned that if I cook a pot of lentils, I can heat up some for breakfast faster than most people can prepare a slice of toast. I learned that eating the lentils – to my amazement – immediately reduced my desire to drink coffee or dive into my purse for chocolate. I acquired the habit of noticing how I feel when I eat this or that. It is so clear now that I know how to observe myself that eating breakfast, reducing my coffee intake, and cooking simple meals have given me energy, alertness, stamina, and happier moods.

I would also like to say that there is another form of nourishment I discovered at Suppers. When someone else cooks for me or the leader sends me home with a jar of stew, it somehow feels even more sustaining than if I cooked it myself. I feel loved and supported all over again when I heat it up for breakfast the next morning.

Now here is the part I am sure you have all been waiting for. I did not have to entirely give up my dark chocolate. I am a lucky one because practicing nutritional harm reduction and making the other changes allowed me to lose my dependence without having to cut it out entirely. I know everybody is not so lucky. And for this I am sorry. Each individual must do the experiments to find out what their body will tolerate. For myself, it is now a great pleasure to have a little bit because I enjoy chocolate, not because I have to have it to get through my day.