

Nancy's Story – Appetite Foolishness

I think it was some time during my teenage years that I learned that there were lots of things I could put in my body to change how I feel: legal drugs like cigarettes and alcohol, and some not legal drugs like marijuana, cocaine, and speed. In my adult life my absolute favorite mood altering substances became all forms of sugar and any drink that had caffeine in it. Boy did I love soda! I would get such a sense of pleasure from drinking a soda. Pizza was also a great source of pleasure for me. Lucky for me that soda and pizza went so well together. Now, don't get me wrong, there were lots of other things in life I got pleasure out of, but these foods and drinks really seemed to add enjoyment to my life. I really had no idea that my teenage years of ingesting mood altering substances set me up to depend on mood altering foods and drinks long after I'd stopped the harder stuff. Even though I knew at some level that soda and pizza were not the best choices, I always seemed to choose them anyway.

It wasn't until I started attending Suppers meetings regularly that I learned that having my coffee in the morning caused my appetite to be fooled into thinking I didn't need food. I was satisfied just with coffee. "Appetite foolishness" they called it. If you gave me the choice between food first thing in the morning or coffee, the coffee always won. I didn't even realize that most times I just skipped eating breakfast all together. I also learned the same thing was happening when I grabbed a soda. Throughout the day if my moods or energy levels started dropping or if I was getting a little hungry and couldn't get to some food, I could ALWAYS find a soda and that seemed to be the answer to all my problems. Now I have come to a new understanding: When a food or drink resolves a discomfort immediately, like caffeine drinks or fast food did for me, that food or drink is acting more like a drug than a food. In my case, I was using it to get a sugar rush to brighten me up for a while. As I look back on it, I did tell myself I'd be better off eating nutritious food, but the fast food always won. At Suppers, I learned that my appetite foolishness meant I had developed a strong voice inside that told me I had to get what I was craving even though I knew my choices were not the best things to ingest.

So I started learning how to quiet this loud voice in my head, little by little, by taking baby steps towards eating non-mood altering foods – whole foods – before having my coffee or soda. These baby steps were the first actions I was willing to take as I started practicing nutritional harm reduction. I was not willing to quit anything in the beginning, but I was willing to eat real food first and soften the jolt from coffee and soda. I was amazed that my mood swings started leveling off and that my energy levels improved. At Suppers meetings I am finding that creating the meals together, sharing on topics, and experiencing camaraderie at the family table are becoming my new mood altering activities. I'd call that healthier sources of pleasure!