

## Renee's Story – Transition

I have been attending Suppers meetings for almost a year now. I have learned so much about nutrition, supplements, how blood sugar works and how I have spent much of my life eating many things that really are not healthy for me. It has been an education and a relief. Knowledge is power. Prior to finding Suppers and the support that I receive at the meetings, I felt I was floundering physically and emotionally. Little did I know that some basic dietary changes could result in such improved health and feelings of well-being for me and my family.

That being said, the last several months have been trying. I have been practicing nutritional harm reduction and taken away as much harmful food as my family will tolerate. I have removed all of the sugary snacks from the house. I can safely say there is no high fructose corn syrup in the house and, as far as I can tell from the labels on the few packaged foods I buy, no Trans fats. My family gets their sweet treat from eating fruit. I keep lots of fruit and cut up vegetables such as carrots, cukes and celery in the fridge, all washed and ready to eat. We are still in "nutritional transition", though. I am introducing as much healthy food into our meals as my family will tolerate. They still want the occasional pizza, and I have not been able to do away with pasta or white rice, although I have tried to substitute whole grain pasta and mix in some brown rice with the white. So far, it's a no go! Good thing my friends at Suppers warned me that spousal sabotage and rebelling children are normal steps in the transition process. My biggest problems occur when my children are out on play dates and traveling around the neighborhood, times when automatic choices take over.

Overall, my kids are doing a lot better since the nutritional harm reduction and pantry clean out started about 10 months ago. We still have plenty of arguments. Let's face it, I have a teen whose middle name is "I don't agree with you at all!". What I notice as we unhook ourselves from sugar is that all my children are more tolerant and more resilient in the face of adversity. They are able to have an argument and then think about solutions rather than progressing straight into shouting, tears and door slamming. Of course, I have changed, too. I have stopped denying their feelings. If they are unhappy, I recognize it and tell them that I see it. Then, when they are ready, we talk about the problem and try to strategize ways that might help turn things around. I do the same for positive feelings and we celebrate together. There has been a major change in the climate of my household.

For my son, however, this summer has been rough. My son is particularly vulnerable to cravings for candy of any kind. During the school year, he was doing fairly well since candy is no longer allowed at school. I noticed that he was much more serene during the year, despite a pretty rigorous curriculum and lots of challenging homework. This summer, it is like he has had a recurrence of a disease, an anger disease. As was the case before I got rid of the sweets last fall, he is irritable and prone to angry outbursts. These outbursts are usually followed by a low, meaning he seems suddenly quiet and sad and retreats to his room to listen to books on CD, refusing to talk to anyone for several hours.

I recognize this behavior because I had it as a child. I ate candy to feel "energized" but the high soon wore off and I was left feeling angry and depressed, with little energy to do anything but retreat to my room or the woods, where I would sit in my tree house until I felt normal again. Even when I learned, in college, what was going on with refined sugar and its effects on the body, I was unable to control my cravings for sweets and I gave in every time I felt the need for a little energy bump. I regularly drank 3-4 large cans of soda a night during exam periods. It has only been this year, since I have had support from the Suppers group, that I have really gotten a handle on my cravings for sweets. I realize that I need to talk about my struggles. Once I faced that fact that I was a sugar-holic and that I

## Renee's Story – Transition

would have to manage this issue for the rest of my life, I came out of denial and I was able to start taking charge of my behavior.

I have been trying to talk to my son about his love affair with candy. I know, as humans, we are hard wired to appreciate sweets. It is going to be a rough row to hoe because my son is refusing to talk about this problem right now. He not only eats candy when he is on play dates and at the neighborhood pool, he hoards it and hides it in his room. I recently found his stash and we threw it out together. He is still angry at me, even though he agreed to toss the hidden candy. I know this is not over since I found candy wrappers in the wash today.

Making the nutritional transition for myself and my children simultaneously has been a huge challenge, with elements of both comedy and tragedy. I think of myself as an intelligent, rational person, but it takes more than intelligence and good reasoning skills to deal with the biochemical grip of sugar and the ambivalence that rises when you decide to deal with it. I found myself paying a nutritionist for his help and then lying to him about my sugar consumption! Ultimately, I came clean; it was a necessary step on the way to being loving and firm with my adolescent son, who clearly inherited my vulnerability to sugar. I have been trying to think of the best ways to approach this problem. So far, I haven't come up with a strategy that feels right to me. I do plan to talk it over with the group at the next Suppers meeting. It is so good to know that I have a resource and a place where I can get help without feeling judged. They won't coddle me, though. I'll get lots of questions and honest suggestions. I feel very confident that, with the support of the group and some good information about how others have dealt with similar issues with their kids, I'll find my way through this and help my son find his way back to a healthier state. In the meantime, I will continue confronting him gently when I find hidden candy and I'll be taking lots of deep, cleansing breaths!