

Practical Daily Pleasure-- Creating Pleasurable Habits

Post by "Elayne" of November 11, 2019 at 11:46 AM

Here was the original post that started this discussion: I replaced it with the current topic header. I wrote it a few months ago, and since then I have found that being an omnivore but exercising more is working better for my pleasure and future health markers.

"Here is something I have had to make decisions about recently: what I eat. I have had a long-standing preference for foods like beans, pasta, olive oil, nuts, fruits, vegetables, cheese, and good bread. I don't eat much sugar, but when I do, it is usually in the form of chocolate!

These foods have agreed with me, physically. I had given up meat for several years, because it aggravated my autoimmune arthritis and made my feet hurt, but about 6 months ago, I started eating some meat here and there. After passing menopause, it didn't seem to bother me as it had previously.

Then, I went for my routine physical, and my fasting blood sugar was in the pre-diabetic, insulin resistant range. I had never had trouble before. This was scary, because everyone I know of on my mother's side of the family has diabetes. I have 3 high risk genes for macular degeneration, and my grandmother had it-- my mother died too young to know if she would have gotten it. This condition causes people to lose their central vision-- my grandmother was unable to read or write after she got it. The risk of macular degeneration is sharply increased in the setting of insulin resistance.

Because adding meat was the only change I had made, I decided to try stopping it, leaving me with basically a vegetarian Mediterranean diet. Unfortunately, my blood sugars remained high. I have read a good bit about this issue due to my profession, and I re-reviewed the latest studies. This is not medical advice, but the main strategies I have seen with research support are Mediterranean, whole foods plant based (very low fat), and ketogenic, which can be either meat or plant based. It seems harder to get things to work with both carbs and fat-- for many people, one or the other has to go. With the meat based keto, there is some concern about increased insulin resistance over time. These studies have multiple problems-- all manner of confounding factors. And we have so many possible genetic enzyme variants. I doubt that the same diet will work for every person.

I thought about my goal of pleasure in life, as I am in the habit of doing. Eating 2-3 times a day is one of the easiest times to have pleasure. I cannot imagine living without the sensory pleasure of food I enjoy. And cooking for myself and friends is a great pleasure. It doesn't have to be complicated or expensive food, but I want it to taste good, by gosh! However, my vision also provides me with extraordinary pleasure-- reading, writing, art-work, crafts... it is a key

pleasure sense for me.

As an Epicurean, I decided to experiment and find the diet that provided the best intersection of short term (taste) and long term (vision) pleasures. I got a glucose meter and started tracking what happened. The ultra low fat high carb whole foods plant based diet fixed my blood sugars quickly-- my fasting sugar went into the 70's, and I never got over 120 after meals. But without nuts or olive oil, I was not getting a lot of taste pleasure. If that had turned out to be the only option that worked, I would have tried to adjust to it, because of the importance of vision to my happiness.

Next I tried ketogenic, mainly plant based except the cream in my one cup of morning coffee. This tastes really good to me, and it has also worked very well for my numbers. I still get to eat most of the vegetables I like, and some berries. Every time I try adding fish, meat, or cheese, my fasting and post-meal glucose go up. Apparently my body is not thrilled about those proteins. The absence of meat turns out to not really affect my pleasure-- I don't feel deprived. I am going to have to learn some new recipes, lol. After a few months, I will probably experiment with adding meat and cheese back in, just in case.

Anyway, that is a long explanation of my decision, but the key is that I did not approach it just with taste pleasure alone or future health alone-- I found a way to have my (nut) cake and see it too. I thought about my own pleasure, not what my doctor might find most pleasurable for herself. I studied nature, in the form of published research and my own responses to my actions.

- And I didn't just give up, as I see many people do, and say something like "well, that's just my bad genetic luck"-- I took action."