

Ambivalence After Getting To Goal

I found the first couple of years of maintenance to be daunting, both physically and emotionally, and a totally separate challenge from the weight loss phase of my journey which was, like most everyone else's, plenty daunting enough. It was a time of changing my whole relationship with food, a relationship that I now can see still needed to change somewhat from how it had only BEGUN to change during the weight loss part of my journey.

One of the unforeseen consequences a lot of us who stay with and succeed long-term on lowcarb end up facing, is that our feelings toward this "miracle" in our lives will begin to change over the years. We go from feeling things like "I love this diet, I never feel deprived, I can eat like this forever and I will love it" to feeling not so totally happy about living with the limitations it sometimes brings. Eventually we DO feel some kinds of resentment, we feel angry and deprived—it's not all fun to be normal-bodied when we have to work like we have to work to keep it. Those are not feelings we expected to feel after we lost weight.

Here are some ambivalent feelings I remember from my first few years of maintenance.

- *I can't have what's fair. I hate this diet sometimes (even though it is making a lifelong dream into a reality).*
- *My friends are impressed, fascinated, some of them are envious about my weight loss, but I also sense some disapproval around my continuing approach to food—they think I am too rigid, maybe fanatical. They're right. About this—and **only** this—I have decided to take a "radical" approach. Staying abstinent is straining a few of my relationships in some surprising ways.*
- *I can see a lot of things in my life, my long-term patterns, more clearly now and I don't feel so great about everything I'm seeing. I'm not as wonderful or as special as I've been leading myself to believe..*
- *I have made some mistakes in my life. But making changes will have all kinds of effects on other people. What do I **really** want to change, what do I really need to change? Oh God, now what?*
- *In some ways I miss all the drama, dancing, and the inner commotion of my old bingeing life. "OH MY GOSH, I'M SO FAT, I'M SO MISERABLE. I MUST CHANGE, BUT IT'S SOOOO HARRRRRD. I'll do better tomorrow." Well okay, I'm not fat or miserable anymore, I'm just ordinary. Day after day the same old boring foundation food. No hunger, nope, but there sure isn't anything very exciting about that.*

There was a lot of work to be done, a lot of new feelings to be felt and abided during those first few years after reaching goal. I think the ONLY reason I've made it thus far is because I made a final decision in late November 1998, which was more than 2 years into this journey, when I finally found the lowcarb combination that worked for my body. I decided that these diet changes would be permanent. I was done with 30+ years of negotiating with food. Thus, the only challenge that remained was one completely new

to me...to just live with all the physical, social and emotional consequences of that one big decision. At that time I had no idea that I had any emotional issues with food. It only seemed clear that my body needed something different in order to thrive and I had merely decided to see that my body got what it needed no matter what anybody else felt, said, or did.

But that decision eventually led to what I now call “spillage”—which is what can happen when you get enough time and distance away from your substance using behavior. That’s when you begin figuring out some of the deeper reasons you used to binge and overeat (if there were any). Some inner memories and truths eventually start bubbling up. That was an initially scary thing, it was when I first REALLY started feeling the totally emotional pull to eat it all back down again.

One of my first lines of defense against intruding thoughts and feelings the first few years was to go back and read old favorite posts I’d saved from my mentors.

One of my favorites was from one of my lowcarb mentors, Patricia, who remains firmly at goal today, we still correspond occasionally. Patricia was the one who helped drive home for me the importance of exercise, especially strength training, AND the importance of cultivating a kind of calming and gentleness about all of this—of letting our whole life/mindset gently change along with the way our food and bodies change with this quiet diet.

Patricia, interestingly, was and is not much of an emotionally addicted eater, but in my opinion she had keen insight into what it is about this journey that links all lowcarbers as people who struggle with aspects of maintaining this life change forever.

She wrote this in December, 1999...

*I sometimes feel left out (in a good way, I guess...), when you guys talk about issues and going to the root of things and emotional reasons for eating, etc. Do I sometimes want to eat a cinnamon roll or homemade bread? Yes. But is it a physical craving that must be listened to like it used to be? No. It is completely different. I don't dream about that food, I don't yearn for it, I am fine with never having it again—I mean, considering what I got in return. All my life trying lowfat I tried to sort out my issues—and they *were* there, an abused child, wacko family. But unlike my sister, I was, (I think now), able to leave that behind. I may be in the minority for believing that you can change what you are or will be just by practicing different behavior, everything in the world does not have to be hashed over to be abandoned as a mistake/untrue/best let go of.*

For a long time I believed that my inability to lose weight was tied to emotional problems and I was truly tormented by it—sh%, I was tormented by just about everything... I think that is where Oprah and others are unknowingly leading people down a steep primrose path these days—perceiving the inability to lose weight as having not yet confronted your deeper problems, so you've got to do that first or you are doomed.*

*I know I'm just talking about myself, and that there are varying degrees of emotional ties and *habits* regarding food. But I was always such a troubled person, and I did take refuge in food, but after my first week of LC, those delusions dropped away. Honestly, miraculously. I obviously had *extreme* problems resulting from eating grains, etc. That is why I have never had even one tiny bite of anything not LC since 2/16/98. It was a profound and life-changing experience. I would be a fool to mess with it.*

I know I've just rambled and maybe have not been clear. I'm not saying we shouldn't confront our issues, and that emotions are not very tied into eating and a lifetime habit of assuaging pain with food. What I am saying is: Never forget the physical principles involved here nor discount their monumental effects on how you might perceive everything. And when you have the resulting clarity and peace of mind, understanding of things that have tormented you in the past may be resolved one epiphany at a time. "Coming to you like a feather," Rani once said.

That's how it's been for me.

Folks, my slogan, my angle to all this became LEAD with the diet, LEAD with the (physiological) TRUTH of your body. Because whether or not we're emotionally entangled or addicted, I think we're dead in the water if we don't play it that way.

Having now hung on to my brand of abstinence since November 1998, I can also see that eventually most of the sadness, anger, and resentment has slowly dissipated. I was eventually able to process all those feelings and slowly get more and more comfortable with my decision to not behave (eat) like most others do. It really did take YEARS, especially years of dealing with the winter holiday season which only comes around once a year.

And I submit all this long-winded blabber to support my advice to those who try to approach maintenance—or any other part of this journey—by repeatedly trying to negotiate with any aspect of the diet that is right for their own body, especially with trying to occasionally let sugar, grains and other personal poisons and triggers "back in". That is an exhausting and ultimately self-defeating pattern from our old lives for the vast majority of us, and even if it works somewhat (and I have seen it work for as much as about two and a half years), eventually people who approach it this way seem to end up going down the tubes, landing harder than ever at a new lower point back down in the abyss.

Instead, stop cheating! Decide and execute that decision 24-7-365, awkward as it may be sometimes. Then just watch all the surprising places that one decision takes you.

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