My Health, My Journey

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Memory is a funny thing. We think we remember the past, maybe even think we remember it well, and then we run across a letter, a journal entry, a list—and discover that our memories are woefully incomplete.

Worse yet is the tendency to downplay or ignore cause and effect when we are faced with making major changes in diet or lifestyle. We don't want to remember that there are patterns of pain or disease when we are faced with giving up foods we love.

I was reminded of these tendencies when I ran across a list of symptoms I put together for medical doctors back in the day when I wasted a few thousand dollars chasing a definitive diagnosis for my auto-immune "disease."

Oh, I remember that it was bad—horrific, actually. I remember the day I stood at the bottom of a flight of stairs at work and cried because I just couldn't make myself climb them. And I remember the day I sat with my accountant struggling with a mental fog so profound that my lack of short term memory made coherent speech nearly impossible. I remember how my joints, my bones, my muscles, and my organs hurt. But I didn't remember half of the actual acute and painful symptoms on that list, like the blisters inside my mouth or the lumps in my salivary glands.

This started me thinking about my journey towards health. Once

the worst of the acute symptoms were under control and I felt significantly better, the denial of cause and effect took over. Sometimes when I ate bread or other wheat, my heel hurt so badly I could barely walk. Sometimes I broke out in weeping rashes. My joints ached. My muscles hurt. Sometimes the symptoms appeared within a few hours, sometimes the next day, sometimes in three days.

These discrepancies were enough to allow me to dig a deep, deep trench of denial—to crawl inside and eat my pizza, French bread, and cookies for years. It wasn't until I mentioned these symptoms to a friend who sent me a link on Celiac disease that I stopped pretending the cause and effect wasn't clear and convincing. It wasn't until I understood that every time I ate gluten more of the cilia in my gut was destroyed, and it became harder and harder for my body to pull nutrients from the good food I was eating. That's when I gave up gluten.

But I still hadn't conquered sugar.

Now mind you, I always ate better than the Standard American Diet. For years I had eaten more fresh food than anyone I knew. I'd given up sodas and nearly every food with preservatives, food coloring, or flavorings except for the occasional bag of Cheetos.. I avoided MSG, except when I ate out (See how it works?). I limited my chocolate intake, but I kept ignoring the fact that sugar feeds Candida, even though my ear and my gums hurt every time I ate it and other nasty symptoms popped up, too.

You see, I felt so much better than I had at the height of my illness, I ignored the pain and discomfort I still lived with every single day.

I am happy to say I finally adopted the motto, "If it makes you hurt, don't do it dummy!" and I eliminated hidden gluten from my diet and really cut out sugar (almost completely). It was then that I discovered the third piece of the puzzle: I

was vitamin D deficient. Wow! What a difference a little vitamin D made!

When you live with chronic pain, you learn to ignore it (as much as is humanly possible). You stop remembering what it feels like to actually feel good. When the day comes that you wake up pain free, cause and effect takes on a whole new meaning. Once I reached this level of health, I knew every single time a tiny bit of gluten slipped through my defenses. I could feel it in the stiff muscles of my back and neck as well as other muscles that tightened up or became inflamed. I discovered that every single time I ate refined sugar my glands, my ear, my sinuses or something else ached.

Nearly everyone I know (other than the majority of my Facebook friends who are health nuts) has disconnected the cause and effect of their food intake and their health, especially as they age. Most of my friends drink alcohol. They eat out of cans and boxes and nuke their food with a microwave. They hurt. They are sick. And they all accept their symptoms or illnesses as an inevitable side effect of aging.

I even have a dear friend recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's who told me there is no way she can eat a clean healthy diet of all fresh, organic food. The thought of giving up canned food and possibly shopping more than once a week was just too much to ask. So I didn't even bother to talk to her about giving up alcohol. Cause and effect. Pure and simple.

If you are sitting on the fence in contemplating a healthy lifestyle, whether it is a radical change or just a further shift towards health, I strongly suggest you start a journal. Write down all of your symptoms—everything that hurts or isn't optimal. Then do a cleanse and follow it up with a truly healthy diet until you are symptom free and pain free. Once again, write down how you feel and compare it to your first journal entry.

Every time you feel sick or you hurt, or you have no energy, take an honest inventory of everything you ate for the previous 3-4 days and write it down. Be honest with yourself. I am willing to bet you will soon discover your own cause and effect. And with the proof right there staring you in the face, maybe you won’t waste years like I did fooling yourself. You’ll find the strength to heal yourself and live a happier, healthier life.