



Eating by the Light of the Moon

I had the good fortune to attend a workshop given by Anita Johnston, author of Eating by the Light of the Moon. I reread the book in preparation for the workshop, and loved it even more the second time around.

Anita uses a metaphor to distinguish between eating for physical versus emotional nourishment. Imagine that within us, we have two tanks that need to be filled. Tank A is what we fill when we need physical nourishment. It is filled with food. Tank B is what we fill when we need emotional nourishment. It is immensely helpful to learn to distinguish between the two tanks. These are two different kinds of hunger; one comes from the stomach, the other comes from the heart.

When tank B is empty, you might feel a craving or hunger. But no amount of food will satisfy this emotional need. The hunger of the heart must be satisfied with love, attention, recognition, spiritual connection; it must be filled from the heart.

How do you know the difference? In the beginning it can be hard to tell. One clue is about what kind of food you are craving. When the hunger is physical, then *what* you eat is less important than *that* you eat. Your body craves sustenance. When it is physical hunger, tank A, you fill it with food and are satisfied for the time being.

When you are hungry for a specific food, or the craving is vague (something sweet, something salty), it is likely a tank B craving. It is not really about food after all. This is a clue that something else in your life needs attention. Finding your way to feed *that* will be far more satisfying.

It's not about perfection

When someone tells me that now they are always making good food choices, I pay attention. Perfection is suspicious – it can't be sustained. I am more interested in hearing about how they are finding their own path through the day to day challenges. It is not about getting it right, it is about finding a balance that feels good and works. It is messy, but it is sustainable.

I also pay attention when someone tells me that they didn't do very well. It often translates into "I wasn't perfect". We wish so ardently to do it right. But *doing it right* is a treachery that we lose ourselves to over and over. *Getting it right* is a heartless master. It is cold, unforgiving and stagnant.

The questions that I think are more valuable are: Are you making different choices than you were? Is there movement? How are you feeling, both physically and emotionally? In the long run, progress will get you further than perfection.



Chronic Stress and Cortisol

I recently heard someone say that stress will eventually kill you—but first it will make you fat. Startling words, and they just might be true.

Many of us have an odd relationship to stress. It is so easy to consider it just a fact of life; we know its there yet it feels out of our control. But we need to pay attention: it has a corrosive effect on our wellbeing. It changes body chemistry, making it hard to lose weight and jeopardizing our health. And worse, we often handle stress by eating more!

When we live with chronic stress, we flood the body and brain with stress hormones, including cortisol. High cortisol levels cause chronic inflammation of the lining of the blood vessels, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Many studies show that chronic emotional stress reduces the immune system's ability to protect you from infection. High cortisol levels interfere with memory, learning and sleep. And it increases the chances of developing abdominal fat.

You can counter the effects of stress with a regular practice of relaxing activities such as meditation, music and yoga. Many of my clients find that exercise is their favorite stress reducer.

Also step back and look at your whole life. What decisions do you make that add to your stress level? Some things truly can't be changed, but often we think that is true when it is not. What are the things you *can* change? Start with the small things, but take an honest look at the big stuff too. It *could* save your life. It *will* give you your life back.

Thanksgiving Strategies

Before you sit down to eat your holiday meal, have a plan in mind. How do you want to handle the abundance of food found at most gatherings. Here are some suggestions:

- Focus on your family and friends instead of the food
- Don't go in famished; eat healthy at earlier meals
- Limit alcohol and appetizers; decide where you really want to spend your calories for the day
- Decide what part of the meal is most important to you. There are often multiple starches and desserts. Skip the ones available other times and enjoy the once-a-year treats
- Aim for balance: you might eat more than normal but you don't need to be stuffed

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Health and Wellness Coaching and Nutrition Consulting.

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