

Learning to Stress Well.¹

Nourishing body AND spirit

By Mary Elaine Kiener

Throughout much of my life, I have unabashedly self-identified as a (moderately adventurous) “foodie”. I LOVE food: thinking about food, exploring new recipes, sharing my cooking with others and recalling memorable meals. I never have to “remember” to eat—and generally bring a “healthy” appetite along with me. You could say food is a major “hobby” for me and that I fall within the category of someone who “lives to eat”. Yet, since I have also become fairly knowledgeable about a wide range of dietary perspectives, I might also self-describe as someone who “eats to live”.

On the other hand, food is also my “handicap”. My relationship with food has not always been healthful, contributing to a lifelong struggle to maintain a healthy weight. When tired and/or stressed, I’ll often resort to take-out. Sometimes, this has even involved taking extra time out of my way to feed a momentary craving, rather than simply heading home to assemble a quick meal from that which is already available in my kitchen.

Several years ago, while driving home from a meeting, I became aware of a longstanding personal pattern of behavior. Whenever I transition from one activity to another--especially when the initial activity has involved a shift in emotional energy--I want to eat something. Anything. And, most frequently, that will mean some sort of “comfort” food resulting in predictably negative consequences to my physiological wellbeing.

This awareness led me to learn about a seemingly paradoxical distinction between Primary and Secondary Foods as taught by the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. Within this perspective, *primary* food refers to those things “beyond the plate” that nourish the spirit and satisfy our hunger for living, making what we actually eat *secondary*.

One way to describe this is to visualize two empty containers of unequal size. The smaller of the two represents the amount of (secondary) food we actually need to consume each day in order to nourish our bodies, while the larger represents the (primary) food that sustains our life by nourishing our spirit. Our daily challenge becomes how to fill the larger container without overflowing the smaller. Or, how well can we nourish our spirit without overfeeding our bodies?

The recent onset of a rare head cold, invited me to revisit--in “real time”--the concept of primary food alongside my actual behaviors. The week before symptoms emerged, I had been dealing with an exceptionally busy schedule, coupled with several unexpected life challenges and fresh life learnings. All compounded by added cravings for *comfort* foods!

So, I tried to offer my body and spirit both healthy food and nurturing comfort to help get my energy flowing once more. Plus, I hope, “priming the pump” for us to explore the concept of “moving” next time we meet.

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¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, April). Learning to stress well. Nourishing body and spirit. *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.