

Stressing New Patterns by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt

When my 12-year-old daughter, Mo, and I adopted a raw vegan diet, we were anticipating some changes. Some changes. One of the things we didn't anticipate was that this “diet” would become a “lifestyle” - meaning, it was originally about new recipes and appliances, but it quickly turned into a series of choices and changes.

When we began to incorporate more raw foods into our diets, we were consciously changing our bodies on a cellular level. And when we change the input, we must, by necessity, anticipate a different output. In other words, when we began feeding our bodies raw vegan foods, we found that we were becoming different people. We were experiencing the world through different eyes – literally and figuratively.

We got into veganism out of compassion and into raw veganism out of a desire to minimalize. Could we live on less? Were there simpler ways of acquiring, preparing, and ingesting our foodstuffs? What we found along the way was that this minimalist approach also played out in our emotional development. We began to recognize patterns in our thoughts and actions that were inefficient and, well, downright destructive.

Pretty heavy claim, eh? But go with it for a minute. Here's what we found when we started looking at stress. We talked about what stress felt like, how we responded to it, some of the things that trigger it, and our odd desire to hold onto certain types of it.

We decided to break down our old patterns of dealing with stress into the following categories:

- ***Eating foods that alter how we feel:*** When we felt stressed, we noticed that we would gravitate towards certain foods to numb that feeling. The foods we usually craved were breads, sugars, and savories. Foods that triggered, chemically, those things we wanted to feel – calm, happiness, and comfort.
- ***Drugs:*** Now, of course, Mo never did these things, but I did my fair share for years. Though I quit smoking years ago, I would, ironically, think about it every time I got stressed. I noticed, too, that friends of mine would want to take me out for a drink when I'd had a particularly difficult day. Sometimes I would go; sometimes not. On a gut level, I was always wary about alcohol, which I find telling.
- ***Raging:*** When Mo and I felt overwhelmed, we'd rage. We'd just explode and start an emotional avalanche that would cascade over anyone in its wake. I remember someone confronting me about this and I responded, “Look. I'm just ranting. I'll get over it.” I was very invested in not being accountable for my actions and wanted very much to play the victim. Raging justifies the stress in an oddly backwards way; when you rage, it's because you're stressed and your stress gets validated.
- ***Sleeping:*** When it doubt, sleep it out. We noticed that when we were stressed, we'd just get exhausted. It took a lot of energy to keep up that mindset! We had to rest! Of course, when we woke, we never really dealt with the source of the stress, but at least we could get recharged for round two!
- ***Validating grudges:*** Mo and I were talking about grudges and we both agreed that we didn't hold them because we saw no utility in it. But, upon closer inspection, we realized that we did “short-term grudging”: when you're stressed over a particular person or incident, you play it over and over, finding different ways to justify it. Doing this ensures that you'll be holding onto this stress for a lot longer than necessary. But again, this is oddly backwards. Replaying this over and over is an investment for you and no one wants to let go of anything they've invested so much time and energy into. So we'd find ourselves stuck with snowballed situations and then we'd really get stressed!

After listing all of these out, we realized that stress comes from perspective. Originally, humans have all that adrenaline for our fight-or-flight response, for emergencies only. If we're viewing our lives as a series of mini-emergencies, we're setting ourselves up for illness and, ultimately, self-destruction. We also questioned the

patterns we saw. First of all, we were rejecting our own accountability and, therefore, our own power. Secondly, we noticed that we had a lot of fear around resolution and worried a lot about the other parties involved. And, lastly, that we were using food as a tool for comfort instead of fuel for our body; we'd given our food power over our emotions.

So, we reworked our mindset. Below are the new tools and patterns we're currently developing and instituting.

- ***Eating foods that alter how we feel:*** We believe that a raw vegan diet can dramatically alter how we feel. We're stripping away all those layers of protection built by years of consuming SAD (Standard American Diet) foods. Of course, we found that this left us feeling vulnerable, which has its disadvantages and advantages. If you choose to do this, you have to allow yourself to deal with these new feelings, this new you. And, yes, we still eat some foods for comfort, but now we recognize it. For example, whenever Mo is feeling sad or stumped about some problem, I stick her in a warm bath and give her a couple of pieces of my raw vegan chocolate and let those work their magick. We're using food now for its medicinal properties and are making more conscientious choices about where and when that's appropriate.
- ***Grounding outside:*** We got totally turned onto this idea by David Wolfe. Go outside every day and stick your feet or hands on the Earth. This re-establishes connection with the energies of the Earth. (Google David's work on this subject for more info.) When we get angry or frustrated, we've found this practice to be centering and calming.
- ***Prevention:*** If our desire is to change our perspective to enable us to change our responses, then we need to have a prevention plan. Some of the techniques we've brought more to the fore are deliberate deep and focused breathing, daily exercise, prayer, and, of course, a raw vegan diet. One last idea that we thought was interesting was that we are both avid game players. We've noticed that when we play competitive games with each other, we can let go of some of our aggression safely.
- ***Recognizing patterns:*** What are your patterns? Doing this exercise with someone you live with is incredibly eye-opening and healing. If you live by yourself, I would strongly recommend you try doing this with a close friend. Sometimes they see things in you that you don't.
- ***Let ourselves be loved:*** Mo came up with this one. I said, "What's the most important thing you can think of that's missing from our list?" She said, "Let yourself be loved." I said, "Whoa. OK. Why?" She said, "Because then it's all worth it."

Nuff said.

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