



Suppers program teaches members healthy eating

By Stephanie Vaccaro, Special Writer

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Several years ago Priscilla Algava's doctor was worried about her health, and rightly so. Her cholesterol was high, her triglycerides were high, she was a borderline diabetic and she had a fatty liver. Along with a prescription for her pre-diabetic state, and having experienced years of irritable bowel syndrome, Mrs. Algava's doctor recommended that she consider participating in the Suppers Program.

At around the same time, she came across a brochure about the program and met founder Dorothy Mullen at a seminar. She thought, "The universe is telling me I ought to go see what they're doing."

The Suppers Program is a free-to-users program that teaches its participants about good nutrition in a supportive, nonjudgmental atmosphere. Participants are encouraged to eat whole foods, but they are not encouraged to follow a particular path. Instead, they are taught to conduct their own food experiments and observation in order to find the foods that produce the most desirable health for their own bodies.

Mrs. Algava, a Princeton resident for the past 30 years, goes to at least three meetings per week, which involve food preparation and eating together. "The cost is only the cost of your groceries," Mrs. Algava said, which is usually \$7 to \$10 per meeting.

There, Mrs. Algava found the support, encouragement and information she needed to make sustainable lifestyle changes that eventually transformed her health.

But it didn't take years to start seeing results.

In a mere four months, Mrs. Algava witnessed remarkable changes. She used to have grinding stomach aches, but her irritable bowel syndrome nearly disappeared. Both her cholesterol and triglycerides resumed normal levels. The fatty liver diagnosis as well as being a borderline diabetic was gone. Six months later, her CRP, a tool that measures your risk for cardiovascular disease, had gone from the highest category to the lowest.

Prior to the Suppers Program, Mrs. Algava tended to eat whatever she wanted. As an artist and a member of a large family, she attended many openings and family events filled with tasty food. Having brain fog or feeling like she was in a “carbohydrate coma” was familiar to her.

Then Mrs. Algava decided to start making changes to her diet.

”I basically got off things like dairy and white flour,” Mrs. Algava said. “I don’t have sugar highs and lows.”

Mrs. Algava discovered from one of her experiments that she felt more energized if she had a protein-rich breakfast, with eggs and avocado or a turkey chili. In the past, her lighter breakfasts resulted in 10 a.m. coffee and sweets cravings. “Now I can go from 5 in the morning when I eat breakfast to 1 in the afternoon and be perfectly energetic and not crave anything when I have a high protein breakfast,” she said.

”It reconfigures my day,” Mrs. Algava said. “I don’t crave sugar during the day, which I did before.” She’ll still have a cup of coffee, but she doesn’t depend on caffeine to function.

Mrs. Algava said the lifestyle changes were not diet alone. The program also encourages its members to exercise. For her, it includes swimming, working out at the gym, walking, yoga, at least five times per week.

”For me also, the accountability — going back and seeing the same people and being in a group, meeting people who have the same issues that I have — is very, very important,” Mrs. Algava said. “It’s such a kind of spiritual community in the sense that people are really there to help each other. One premise is that it’s nonjudgmental, that people don’t heal when they feel judged. So, that part has been really essential.

”I think it really helps to have other people in your life who are like-minded and think about food as a way to change negative behaviors and health issues,” Mrs. Algava said. “Everybody is so different. One of the tenets of the program is biological individuality and diversity.”

The sum total is that everyone gets to try to figure out what is best for them by doing the food experiments, observation and mindfulness.

Mrs. Algava said one of her food experiments involved waiting 30 seconds before she put anything in her mouth. “Thirty seconds is a very long time,” she said. “But it really worked. It enabled me to not eat things I might have eaten and to be more conscious about what I put in my mouth.”

Not only is Mrs. Algava planning to stay with the program, but she’s also training to be a facilitator.

"I think it's a wonderful program, and I want to try to help it be very successful. I think it's made such a contribution to my life and the lives of so many other people."

"I think going forward I'm going to be even healthier than I already am," Mrs. Algava said. "I've already started to lose weight, which is good."

"I just see how much better I feel when I eat properly," Mrs. Algava said.

"I think it's amazing to have something like this available where you can actually partake in healing yourself under a doctor's supervision, of course, and be empowered by so many other people who are involved," Mrs. Algava said.

What was her doctor's reaction?

"Oh, she was thrilled," Mrs. Algava said. "She was just so happy for me and for her. She's a wonderful doctor. She's amazing, she really treats the whole person."

Her story of helping to heal her body is a powerful one, but not a perfect one. "My blood pressure never went down enough to please the doctors," Mrs. Algava said. So, she still takes medication for it.

But her story is a remarkable testament to the capacity of the human body because she isn't in her 30s or 40s — Mrs. Algava is in her 70s.