

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

By Robin Slater

I do wish I knew what ingredients are put into the stew called Brain Injury because I would never serve that dish to *anyone*. EVER.

I agree with Tyrone Bell's assertions about the connection between diet and lifestyle before brain injury and the outcome of rehabilitation. Most of my life I have taken considerable care with how I fuelled, and treated, my body. I believe the payback that resulted from my healthy life style carried me thru the trauma I sustained in my motor vehicle accident. What goes in comes out.

Knowing the restorative powers of a vegetarian diet and the benefits of balanced eating habits: high in fibre and carbs, low in fat, with attention to vitamins and protein, had kept me free from illnesses and without disease, for many years. Those long-lasting habits gave me a foundation from which to rebuild my broken body. I consider my brain as a physical part of my body that needed to be repaired structurally in order to become capable of higher, abstract functioning. The way I know to do that best is by superior nutrition. Having a "head" start on the value of foods as part of recovery, I could adapt my meals to further enhance my healing from the accident. More soy, even as a vegetarian I ate more fish, more Vitamin B. I could also use the pleasure of preparing meals to add to my cognitive, memory and fine motor skill exercises.

- How much is 3 times half a cup?*
- How many eggs have I already dropped in?*
- Did I read all the dry ingredients properly or did I miss one?*
- How do I move my hands to "finely chop" without cutting off a finger?*
- Did I add any eggshell when I cracked those eggs?*

At the same time, trying to learn and add to my knowledge base so I could eat even better, improved my language proficiency and reading comprehension.



Today, diet and food choices have become part of most people's consciousness. When added to a recent global awareness of the environmental impacts that are directly related to our cooking choices, no one escapes having their consciousness raised when buying groceries. I'm optimistic that this universal shift in outlook will have a direct effect on the prospects awaiting future brain injury survivors. As ingredient listings become more widely investigated, rehabilitation success rates should increase proportionately.

I believe that people can "get with the program" at any time of their lives, damaged or not. Patients often get scared into a healthier lifestyle by the warning of an approaching heart attack. Type 2 Diabetics learn to control their condition through diet, changing the very behaviour which caused the disease in the first place. Whenever people want to improve future prospects, in any part of their lives, they can start to develop the habits that will lead them in a new direction. With a brain injury, or not, habits still take seven days to form. Conquering the lack of motivation and having insufficient discipline, both necessary to initiate change, is not limited to those affected by trauma, although it may take a bit more determination to get us started on a path to health. Of anyone in the general public, we should have even more incentive to make positive modifications to our lives.

Our approach to the physical aspects of life, before and after, with or without, a brain injury is only a fraction of what goes into an attitude of wellness. Just as important are the mental, emotional, and spiritual factors that combine to create an overall strategy for recovery. I'll explore using *I Think Therefore I Am* as an exercise in preparing for intellectually overcoming life's obstacles in a forthcoming issue of NABIS News.

Robin Slater lives outside of Canmore where she chops wood as a break from her reading and writing. When asked about herself she wrote: *When I was 28, I bounced off an elk and rolled the small truck I was driving. I've lived with a severe brain injury now almost as long as I was "normal." I look up to the mountains for my strength and watch the wildlife and birds in my garden to ground me. Life is good.*

NABIS News welcomes Robin's next posting.