Appendix B

THE WOOD-BURNING STOVE

A Metaphor for Dietary Regulation for Persons with Eating Disorders

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Imagine a round wood-burning stove. It’s morning. There is no fire in the stove, only red-hot coals left from the fire that burned down through the night. To get the fire started again you begin to throw a few small twigs into the stove. They fall onto the red-hot coals and, in a bright burst of flame, the fire ignites and begins to burn the twigs. As more twigs are thrown in, the fire increases.

You enjoy a good breakfast and head off to work or school to begin your day. You’ve got meetings to attend, or a paper to write. You’re able to focus and even feel patience in regard to one of those colleagues you don’t care to be around. You feel confident and satisfied that the work is going well.

By midmorning your fire begins to burn down and you feel a sense of hunger, an emptiness or nausea like feeling. You throw a few small twigs into the stove to keep the fire burning. On you go with the next task at hand, working through the morning. As noontime nears you realize that you won’t be able to fuel the fire for a long while so you throw a few small logs onto the fire. The fire burns and you continue to work with the energy you need.

You may throw a couple branches on the fire to keep it burning through the afternoon. As the day comes to an end, work or school finished, you run a few errands and head home. You decide to throw a few small logs into the stove to keep the fire burning as you finish your work. You might go out for the evening, thus throwing in some twigs later that night. By the time you get home you’re tired; you head to bed while the fire burns on.

The next morning, you wake up. There’s no fire—just red-hot coals. The fire has burned down through the night. There’s much to do this day: meetings to attend, tasks to complete.

No time to fuel yourself with a real breakfast today. So, as you head off, you decide to grab some black sludge and throw it onto the red-hot coals. The coals explode, creating a static reaction throughout your body, but no fire is started. As you push forward into the morning your coals get weaker and cooler. You might feel anxious and find it harder to focus. In the midst of all the work you find yourself running from one task to another. Your patience dies out as the coals get grayer and cooler.

By mid afternoon you feel irritable, your concentration has faded, and your thoughts are fragmented and slowed. You may feel tired or a bit depressed and your patience for that colleague whom you tolerated yesterday is gone. The coals in your stove are cool and gray.

You feel unable to think rationally as you drive home. In an impulse that’s hard to control, you grab whatever is fast and easy to eat. You stuff several large logs into your stove throwing them on top of the cool grey coals. BUT…will they burn?

No. The logs may smolder amongst the coals but are unable to burn well since there is no fire.

If you want your food to turn primarily to fat, then don’t start your fire when you first get up and don’t keep it burning throughout the day.

If you want a higher portion of your food to burn well, then start your fire when you first get up, and keep the fire burning through the day.

The wood-burning stove is like your body’s digestive system, and the fire is your metabolism. Each morning, when you get up your coals are red-hot, ready to be ignited and fueled.

Food is fuel.

Calories are simply energy produced from the fire. The energy is sent throughout your body: to your brain, your heart, your muscles to help you think and focus and function with the power your body needs. Each bite that you eat is a twig thrown onto the coals to start your fire.

When the fire dies down, you may start to feel hungry. That is the body’s way of saying, “I’ve still got a fire going. If you put some fuel in now, I can burn it.”

If you don’t throw any fuel in, the fire goes out causing your hunger to die down, and you may feel numb. Then you may think to yourself, “Oh good, I’m no longer hungry, I’m glad I didn’t eat.”

In fact, however, the fire has burned down or gone out. So the next meal doesn’t burn as well, making you feel uncomfortable. The food feels like a ball just sitting in your stomach. There are just coals left, which can’t burn the food or metaphoric logs well, so a higher portion of food can go off to fat.

- If you fuel with branches or twigs, smaller portion sizes, they burn faster so you may need to fuel more frequently through the day: every 2-3 hours.

• If you fuel with black sludge, well… that’s coffee and it doesn’t burn, just explodes. It creates agitation but not energy unless you add milk or other liquid foods.

• If you fuel with logs, larger portion sizes, fuel the fire about every 4 hrs.

• Two to three logs burn better off of one another than one log burning alone.

• A combination of logs or branches is needed to burn well. The body fire burns much better from the combination of protein, carbohydrates, and a little fat.

• Fat is a long burning fuel—an “endurance fuel.” Most importantly: keep the fire burning.

How do you make the fire hotter to burn better? With movement . . .

Exercise and other forms of physical movement are like a bellows on the fire. Just as a blacksmith pumps the bellows to make the fire hot enough to bend steel, the body’s fire is intensified and strengthened by the movement you do throughout the day. When you walk from one place to another, walk tall, pulling your shoulders back and taking a deep breath. Exercise or even physical chores at home are like the bellows at work, circulating the oxygen more effectively. Each movement makes the fire hotter. Muscles get repaired and your body feels stronger. The brain organizes thoughts through movement.

So just move. When you get up this morning, start your fire and keep it burning. Move, and your fire burns better.

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