

Dose of Vitamin A

By Lesa Knollenberg



© Shanna Wolf

“WHAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK?” my instructor sometimes yells as we’re cycling our bodies up a fake hill. On Fridays, I take a killer Spinning class, where the instructor is both inspiring and indefatigable. “What’s keeping you from achieving your goals?” she beckons. I think about that while my quads quiver. I’ve tried to blame a hectic schedule, a sluggish economy and metabolism, and my algebra high school teacher who planted a seed that I was dense. But I usually cop to the admission that I’m the one holding me back.

It’s definitely me that’s holding me back. I’m the one who gets in my own way when I give up on a personal goal, when I let time-wasting people use up my exercise time, or when I give up on myself just when I need it the most. I’m the one who decides that buttered popcorn is, indeed, the best reward for the delicious feeling of losing a pound or two. Sometimes I really bug myself.

But usually, after a circuitous moment to think about it, I can also name the cure for self-sabotage: Vitamin A. Now don’t worry, this isn’t a diatribe on supplements. The vitamin A I need to boost is being aware. When I get too busy and too distracted, I forget to be aware. I start making decisions based on momentum rather than careful choice. When I remember to stop and take a breath, I usually can tackle the heart of the matter. For example, do I really want this stale, leftover Halloween candy? Or am I just tired and need to rest? Although I could use a run today, do I want to risk pulling my touchy Achilles tendon? Maybe a walk in the woods with the dog would be better. How does that feel? What do I need?

When I’m aware, I listen to my body. I ramp up when I feel strong and change things when I feel bored. When I’m aware, I also make good food choices. I listen to what really sounds good and nourishing and eat to fuel rather than to forget. I notice what I’m eating and enjoy it, rather than rushing through the meal and missing the taste.

One of my favorite authors is Geneen Roth. (And let the record reflect that I discovered her years before Oprah did). She wrote the pithy, wise book called *When You Eat at the Refrigerator, Pull up a Chair*. She advises that when you eat when you’re hungry and stop when you’ve had enough, you can learn to be in your own corner instead of fighting with yourself. It sounds great in theory but is difficult in

practice. It takes an uncommon amount of awareness. Not the talking-on-the-cell-phone-every-time-you-have-a-spare-moment type of awareness, but closing your eyes awareness. Taking a breath awareness. Thinking about where you are and how you feel awareness. It’s taking a moment to check in with yourself and being kind to yourself.

Once you become aware of yourself and your own truth, you can notice other peoples’ truth, too. You can become aware of their situations. And since you’re practicing kindness on yourself, you can extend it to others. I’ve been on the receiving end of somebody being aware, and I’m a firm believer in its power.

Years ago, grocery shopping in Woodman’s, my son was walking behind me with his head down while his newborn brother rode in the cart. We stopped frequently as cute little grandma-types admired the baby. In the card aisle, a woman barreled toward us. She glanced at the baby and said “What a cutie!” Then she knelt in front of my four-year-old son and looked him in the eye. “But YOU! You are such a nice-looking boy. And you look creative. Are you creative? I bet you draw a lot.” She charmed this young besotted boy, and a spark returned to his eyes that I hadn’t seen since his brother was born. They had a nice little conversation about art. As she stood up to leave, I mouthed the words “thank you” over my son’s head. She merely nodded, smiled and whispered, “I had three of my own.” Then she walked away. Years later, I’m still moved at how one woman’s awareness changed an otherwise dreary day for a displaced little boy. I hope I remember to notice someone else’s kid in the grocery store some day. mb

Lesla Knollenberg lives, works and tries to keep things simple just outside of Madison.