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# Mindful Eating

by Hayley Rawle

My therapist Rachel sat across the room from me holding a small red box of Sun-Maid raisins. We were in her office at counseling services in a basement corner of the Brigham Young University student center. I had started seeing Rachel a few months prior for my myriad manifestations of anxiety, which she had confirmed with a diagnosis. She told me that particular Wednesday afternoon we would be practicing mindful eating. I noticed half of a rose tattoo peeking out beneath her yellow cardigan sleeve as she handed me the raisin box.

According to instruction, I opened the box lid and plucked out a raisin. She asked me to put the raisin in my palm and inspect it. I put my hand eye level and looked. The raisin was puckered, a near purple shade of dark brown. Hold it up to the light and see how it changes, she coached, notice the weight of it in your hand. The weight was slight, a tiny point of pressure. The brown tinted amber, especially around the edges, when held between my thumb and forefinger against the fluorescent office light. I noted the deepness of the grooves along its surface. The edges of the wrinkles were sharp.

I felt slightly uncomfortable as Rachel watched me examine it, but paying such close attention to the raisin was comforting. She knew about my recently prescribed daily dose of fluoxetine. I had ended up in urgent care after a panic attack a few weeks before, my leg muscles shaking uncontrollably and pain swelling in my chest. I told her the physician had prescribed anxiety medication and she assured me it was the right thing. But still to come to counseling to learn other coping mechanisms. I told her I would. My Google search results suggested that medicine plus therapy produced the best success rate for handling generalized anxiety disorder. Plus, I liked it there in her office, usually cross-legged on the couch, one of the throw pillows on my lap.

I also took to Google to refresh the knowledge I partially remembered from my high school AP Psychology class once I got my prescription. I recall feeling fascinated as Mr. Stevenson pointed out components of the brain on a projected chart as he explained the scientific process of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. The projector whirred overhead as I tried to comprehend a pill that could convince a brain neuron to not reuptake serotonin. And how that extra serotonin could make someone calmer and happier.

Years later at 22, I was skeptical to be taking something that would chemically change what was happening in my mind. But I needed help. Just think of it like migraines, I told myself, wouldn't you take medicine for that? After a few months of adjusting to the side effects of sleepiness and mild nausea, I came to greatly appreciate the extra serotonin flooding my

head. The medicine took the edge off my fear and stress and sorrow. I still felt like myself, just more relaxed. Life went back to normal.

At therapy, Rachel continued to teach me different mindfulness techniques. She told me to put the raisin in my mouth, close my eyes, and take some time to taste it. The sugariness was biting. I felt each crease of the dehydrated grape with my tongue, the same tiny point of pressure rolling around my mouth. I split the skin with my left back teeth and more sweetness spilled out. I chomped down again and paid attention to the way it sectioned the honey taste. I chewed a few more times and the raisin continually split into fragments until it nearly dissolved. I swallowed. The pieces were too tiny to track as they travelled down my throat. Rachel gave me the little red box of raisins, which I dropped into my backpack before I left.

That night I examined my bottle of fluoxetine, which is colored a clear bright orange. The pill capsules are blue-green. “To open hold down tab and turn” the white cap reads. I slide one out and feel its pressure in my palm. It’s a slight bit heavier than the raisin. It is longer and thinner on my tongue. I can’t leave it there too long or its bitterness will seep out. I take a sip of water. I swallow. This time I can track it down my throat.

And beyond that, as I lay in bed before I fall asleep, I imagine I can sense it in my organs. A swelling as it is absorbed by my stomach and small intestine, a slight ache as it passes through my liver. I wonder what it feels like as it slips into my bloodstream and gets pumped throughout my body. I can almost sense its texture when it soaks into my brain.

*Hayley Rawle is a Utah native and a Brigham Young University English major. She particularly enjoys reading contemporary novels and writing nonfiction, as well as eating Indian food, movie theater popcorn, and chips and salsa— but not all at once.*