

Both body, soul must be fed properly

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Faith & Family

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I used to think my moods depended solely on the state of spiritual condition.

If I had paid attention to the priest's sermon at Mass and reflected on the words of the prayers instead of daydreaming about the 40 things I hadn't yet accomplished on my weekend's to-do list, if I had gotten down on my knees in the morning and consistently said my dawn meditation, if I had dutifully read the Bible before tucking in for the night, then I wouldn't suffer from anxiety and depression.

Now I think my mental state has more to do with what I ate for breakfast and lunch, on whether I have gotten this body into motion by running or swimming in the last month and on remembering to take my vitamins and antidepressants.

Of course, a stellar record of physical activity, nutritional balance and a boost from drugs isn't completely responsible for my soul's contents. I need God in my life. I try to foster my relationship with God as I would with a friend, sister or husband — by talking to him.

But interestingly enough, those



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Our Turn

moments with the Creator have the same physiological effect on my brain as exercise and proper diet.

In her groundbreaking book *Potatoes Not Prozac*, Kathleen DesMaisons cites a few activities that trigger a beta-endorphin release in your brain, similar to the high an addict experiences from alcohol, drugs and sugar. She draws on scientific articles about the beta-endorphin effect of exercise, meditation, music, yoga, prayer, inspirational talks, sex and nutritious food.

That's good news for many young people like myself who used to live for the next high — be it from Marl-

boros and full-leaded lattes in the morning, six-packs of Miller Light and bags of Doritos at night or Godiva chocolates around the clock. These persons with sensitive biochemistries cope daily with dangerous yo-yo emotions, spiking and then crashing so many times daily that they fall to their beds in exhaustion, only to wake weary in the morning, craving the first cup of coffee, which generates the cycle again.

I was only 18 when I discerned that alcohol wasn't my friend. Two pregnancies heralded the other changes; with a share of resentment. I wasn't a chain smoker, but cigarettes sufficed as a nice crutch in uncomfortable social situations when I couldn't drink. But the more I binge-smoked and stopped, I realized I was once again on the dangerous road to addiction.

As I approached my daughter's due date, I counted down the days until I could once again wink at the barista at my favorite caf(e-acute), cueing him to make my regular coffee. But after her pediatrician detected an irregular heartbeat, I had

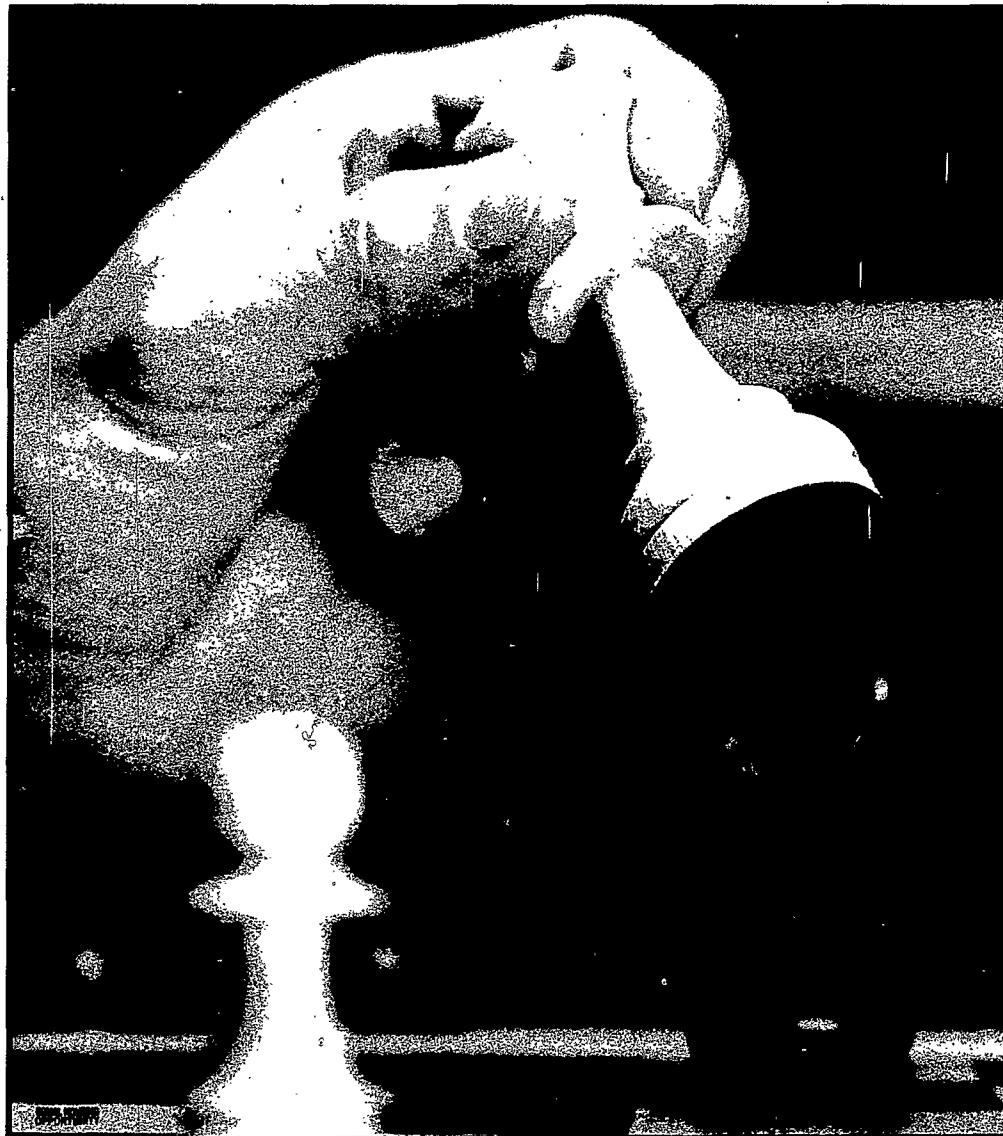
to abstain another nine months (because caffeine is transmitted in breast milk), which was enough time to notice I was a much nicer person without that artificial boost of adrenaline in the morning.

The sugar epiphany has only come of late. As often happens, my 3-year-old son was my teacher. After unsuccessfully trying to tame his wild and unyielding tantrums following birthday parties at preschool, where he'd ingest cupcakes, suckers and fruit punch, I observed a pattern.

Following two episodes where his unbridled outbursts landed other children in the emergency room, I finally said "no mas." I studied up on how some sweets affect small brains and realized that my big brain wasn't benefiting from these socially accepted uppers either.

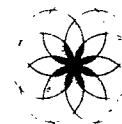
It's beginning to feel like Lent all year round for me. Which means I'm feeling a bit holier, or at least even-keel, even when I miss my morning meditation.

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