

If It Feels Good...

Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

Growing up during the diet crazed 1980s, I remember repeatedly hearing the phrase, "If it tastes good, spit it out!" I took this to mean that if it brings pleasure and feels good, stop it! When it comes to food, I had long forgotten that rule of thumb (thank heavens!), but it cropped up again in my mind recently in, where else (?), a yoga class, and I began to think of this concept in another way.

I was taking class with my teacher, and someone (who shall remain nameless!) expressed resistance as the instructor guided us through a challenging sequence of poses. Then I heard my teacher saying, "If it feels good, maybe that's not something you need to practice so much," (a less harsh "spit it out!"),

And there it was! If it tastes good...spit it out? I do believe in moderation in all (ok most) things, but in this instance, I thought of my home yoga practice, where I take time to practice the poses I love, aware that I tend to avoid, but knowing I can benefit from, those I don't love.

For instance, in general, I notice that I tend to resist a **good twist**. Some people love them and I can see immediately the benefits in my students. I've done a good deal of research on the benefits of twists, and I continue to ask my teacher for new ideas and ways to help me "make friends" with twisting. According to Charlotte Bradley, publisher of Yoga Flavored Life, twisting, among other wonders,

- Improves digestion,
- Helps to maintain and strengthen flexibility in the spine, discs, and ligaments
- Can help balance emotions and release stress (Yoga master BKS Iyengar calls twisting the "twist-and-soak action")

The Broader Concept

How does this concept of doing something you resist apply to the broader concept of life? I hear my students, colleagues, friends, and myself for that matter, talking about experiences we would like to have, but for some reason haven't. We go on practicing that with which we are comfortable. If trying something new, whether it be a new exercise, social

event, or haircut feels uncomfortable and you find yourself resisting it, then that's where you begin your practice.

Since this is a yoga-related newsletter, here practice begins "on the mat", with a twist! If you find your life requires you to sit a lot (or not), a simple variation of *Bharadvajana* (seated twist) can bring immediate relief to stiff or sore muscles.

Sit on the very front of your chair with your feet hip-width apart flat on the floor.

Place the palm of your right hand on the outside of your left knee.

Hold the seat of your chair with your left hand behind you.

Take a big breath in, and as you exhale, bend your elbows away from each other as you twist your body to the left.

For 3-5 more breaths, with each inhale, lift your chest and sit up taller.

With each exhale twist a little more deeply.

(Be sure to keep your head facing the same direction as your chest. No neck straining here!)

Release and take the second side.

All of this is to say, if it tastes good, or if it feels good, enjoy it. And if there's something you know you want but resist it, start small.

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