

Why I Keep Fortune Cookies on My Desk

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Many of my patients ask, "Why do you have fortune cookies on your desk?" Then, I offer them one. I considered having other treats, but decided on fortune cookies because of

Comfort. The cookie is a small treat for those who want one.

Diet. You don't have to eat the cookie to enjoy it; you can still read the fortune. For patients who have an eating disorder, the cookie allows us to naturally transition the conversation to issues they are experiencing.

Cultural competency. I treat patients of many backgrounds. Some have never seen a fortune cookie (remember to warn them there is a fortune inside!). Others know the fortune cookie is not a Chinese invention, as it is popularly thought to be.¹

Impulsivity. Do patients grab a cookie immediately, wait for one

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to be offered, or ask for one?

At this point, I ask patients to tell me their fortune. This allows me to assess:

Fine motor skills. Do they have a hand tremor or weakness, or a problem with involuntary movement? How well do they open the individually wrapped cookie?

Problem solving. On the slip of paper in the cookie, fortunes are printed on one side; on the other side are lucky numbers and a Chinese phrase. Some patients fail to turn the slip of paper over; they look it and say, "There are only numbers on this piece of paper."

Eyesight. Can they see without glasses? Did they bring their glasses? (By extension, I can gauge whether they need, and use, glasses when reaching for a pill bottle in the medicine cabinet.)

Literacy. Can they read their fortune aloud?

Last, I ask what the fortune



means and how it might apply to them. This helps me understand their:

Mindset. Having them explain how the fortune applies to them can be helpful to understanding their thinking.

Thought process. I am looking for how they think: Abstractly? Concretely? How well do they articulate and explain the meaning of the fortune? **CR**

REFERENCE

1. Lee JB. Solving a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside a cookie. *New York Times*. January 16, 2008. www.nytimes.com/2008/01/16/dining/16fort.html. Accessed October 13, 2016.

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