

The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

EPISODE 4: WEIGHT

What do a pretty barrette and dirty hair have to do with the number on the scale? Keep listening!

Welcome to the Done Bingeing podcast, where you'll hear about powerful life coaching strategies that empower you to end binge eating.

Binge eating is no joke. So, explore all your options. If you're functioning well in your life and you want to explore a non-clinical approach to stop bingeing, coaching might be perfect for you. Life coaching isn't therapy, but it may help you on your journey whether you also choose to do therapy or not. Trust yourself, take good care of yourself, get the support you need, and see what works for you. If you want to hear how life coaching can help free you from binge eating, you're in the right place! You have more power than you know. Why not take it back? And now, your host, Life and Weight-Loss Coach Martha Ayim.

Welcome to Episode 4 of the Done Bingeing Podcast. Thank you for being here with me.

We spent Episode 3 talking about the price we pay when we feel shame about our bingeing. And we talked about self-regard being central to freeing you from bingeing. Remember, self-regard brings the peace you need to stay present and watch everything that unfolds before, during, and after your binges with a gentle, neutral curiosity. Becoming more conscious of what happens for you throughout the whole bingeing cycle is an essential part of wiring a new neural connection away from the bingeing.

Episode 4 and the next few episodes will break this down and look at how this works in key areas of binge eating.

Binge eaters tend to have six main factors to contend with:

1. their unhappiness with their weight
2. their attempts to diet to lose that weight and to control their eating
3. their urges to binge
4. the bingeing itself
5. the aftermath of binges
6. dealing with their weight after the binges have stopped

We're going to start with #1: the weight.

Now, not every binge eater is overweight. And not every binge eater is unhappy with their weight, whether it's "technically" above their ideal weight or not. But the research does show strong ties between binge eating and excess weight or obesity. And the research also shows strong ties between binge eating and an intense concern with one's weight and shape (APA, 2013; Herpetz et al., 2011; Tanofsky-Kraff et al., 2013).

When my bingeing was at its worst, I weighed 225 pounds. For some people, this is a normal and healthy weight. Depending on their build, frame, lifestyle, and preferences, 225 pounds may be the perfect weight for them. They're active and healthy and they love their body. For others who want to lose weight, 225 pounds might be a wonderful milestone on their way down from a higher weight. For me, given my size, frame, and weight history, 225 pounds was a struggle for me.

Here's how I handled it.

Sometimes I'd wear tight clothes thinking that that would remind me not to binge. So far, so good, right? But that just ended up making me feel physically uncomfortable because my waistband cut into my stomach. And, I was embarrassed all day because I knew my jeans looked too tight. But I thought I had to teach myself a lesson that my weight was bad. I thought I had to punish myself with my clothes.

Sometimes I'd do the opposite and wear clothes that were too big for me. I did this because I felt I didn't deserve to wear properly fitting, flattering clothes. Who was I to try and look attractive? It's like putting a really pretty barrette in your hair when you haven't washed your hair in two months.

Without self-regard, I wasn't able to view my weight as okay. But once I started seeing my weight as neutral, I was able to start to treat my body with respect and to wear comfortable clothes. That, in itself, knocked off a huge source of discord in my life and allowed me to focus more closely on resolving my bingeing.

My clients will often say, "I don't want to be okay with my weight because then I won't be motivated to stop bingeing." But it's the opposite. Being okay with my weight didn't give me license to binge. It gave me space to figure out how to stop. I know that's surprising, but it's true. In fact, when people come to see their weight as neutral, their binges sometimes stop instantly. And at the very least, their bingeing resolves faster than when they keep hating their weight.

Now how did I get to self-regard from self-loathing with my body at 225 pounds? I didn't get there by suddenly thinking, "I love my body"—even though that was a thought that was available to me. My body *was* lovable *and* beautiful. But I couldn't see that. All I could see were the rolls of fat on my back and stomach, my thighs that rubbed together, and my round face. Sometimes it seemed like I could actually feel my flesh growing and my skin stretching. It felt like I was lugging around a 100-pound backpack. I could feel it every time I stood up or moved.

Even though I wasn't able to love my body, the way I was able to be okay with my body was by noting all the ways that my body supported me.

Whether or not it felt like I was lugging a huge weight, my body still gave me breath. It gave me life. It took me everywhere I wanted to go. It got me up. It got me to work. It got my groceries. It held my loved ones. It grew to accommodate my bingeing. It was the home for my presence on this earth. And I surely owed it gratitude for that.

I also knew that in another time, or another culture, or another land, my size would have been viewed by the prevailing norms as just fine. That gave me perspective to hold on to.

With all of this in mind, I was able to get to a place where I could give myself permission to practice letting my body be okay. It wasn't what I wanted it to be. But I was willing to try to let it be okay.

So, I gave away my scale and my measuring tape. I stopped punishing myself with clothes that were either too small or too big. I kept only the clothes that fit me in my closet and put the rest in storage. I didn't make any heavy-duty decisions about the ones that didn't fit me right then; I just moved them out of my view. My job was to dress in the most flattering, comfortable clothes that I had and could afford.

I stopped using every mirror I passed as a ruthless judge. In fact, I stopped looking in mirrors at all, if I could help it. In the past, I had tried looking at myself in the mirror and saying to myself that my body was beautiful. Even though my body was beautiful at 225 pounds, that practice didn't resonate for me. And so I just gave myself a break from *any* assessment of my body as either beautiful or ugly. It just *was*. And, in time, that was good enough for me.

Does that mean that that's what every binge eater should do? No. Not necessarily. I find that there are very few all-or-nothings when it comes to healing from bingeing.

When you're frantic about your weight, constantly assessing doesn't tend to help most people. On the other hand, you don't want to live your life afraid of a number on a scale or on a piece of tape or on a clothing tag, right? So sometimes it can be really helpful look at the number on the scale or the tape or the clothing tag, and then decide on purpose what you're going to make that number mean. Because as we're seeing, how you think about something will make all the difference.

I can make weighing 225 pounds mean:

- I'm fat.
- I'm ugly.
- I'm a failure.
- There's something wrong with me that I can't stop bingeing.
- No one's ever going to be attracted to me.

Or I can make weighing 225 pounds mean:

- I have a body.
- My body is my home.
- My body is soft.
- My body is warm.

- My body is curvy.
- My body is lovely.
- I'm open to believing that one day I'll truly love my body no matter what it looks like.
- I'm open to believing that someone that I like will also like me.

See the difference? I was making the fact that I weighted 225 pounds mean something negative about me. But I didn't need to do that. And I paid a price for doing it.

Let's take a closer look at why what you make your weight mean makes all the difference.

Suppose you step on the scale and it displays a number and you think to yourself, "I'm fat and ugly and broken." Thinking a thought like that, you're likely to feel shame and despair. And given your pattern of bingeing, you're likely to set yourself up for a binge. The result is that you'll have strengthened neural signals in your brain anchoring the pattern of bingeing.

Now if you step on that same scale and it displays the same number and you think to yourself, "I weigh X number of pounds and that doesn't mean a thing about my competence or moral integrity or worth." Thinking a thought like that will tend to leave you feeling calm and focused. And given your desire to end your pattern of bingeing, you're likely to figure out what is the next most important thing for you to do to try to resolve it. The result is that you increase the likelihood that you'll find a way out of the bingeing, you decrease the likelihood of reacting with a binge, and you weaken the neural connection anchoring your bingeing.

We'll talk more about neural pathways later, but for now, I want to highlight the power of intentionally choosing what you make your weight mean.

Do you see how you're not just choosing what to think about the number on the scale, you're choosing how to feel about the number on the scale, too? And emotional intensity is like a glue in the brain that helps to cement neural connections together. When you can feel calm about the number on the scale, you can unhinge the emotional drama from your weight. When you choose what to think about your weight, just like when you choose what to think about your bingeing, you also get to choose where you put your emotional energy. Where you put your emotional energy strengthens the neural pathway that energy is connected to. So why not put your emotions to work for you, and feel pride and excitement about every single step you make toward ending your bingeing—no matter how small?

Your next step toward healing is one emotion away. The inspiration for that emotion is one thought away. And you get to choose the thought.

The thoughts I chose took me from shame to calm. I was aiming to love my body at its highest weight. But I didn't make it. I didn't have life coaching tools at the time. I only made it to neutrality. But that was good enough. Neutrality was powerful enough to allow me to shift my attention from beating myself up to letting myself be.

I think we often underestimate neutrality because love is so revered. But the love that gets so much praise has a preference built into it. And often it's a preference for what isn't, for what we don't have, for what we wish we had, for what we long for.

But in neutrality is a gem that's often overlooked. In neutrality is compassion—a powerful form of love in itself. Compassion is a loving of what *is*, of what we are right here right now, of what we have right here right now.

And I can pretty much guarantee you that if you don't deal with any shame that you may have right now about your body and weight, if you don't at least make it to neutrality, the shame will be waiting for you even after you stop bingeing.

If you're a binge eater, you've probably yo-yo dieted and lost significant amounts of weight in the past. And all the way down that scale, if you were anything like me, you probably thought that things would be sooooo much better when the weight was off. But was it? Or did you just have a different kind of terror? Not the terror of being overweight, but the terror of re-gaining the weight. You weren't really free. And life still happened, right? Maybe you discovered that not everyone was delighted by your weight loss. Maybe you felt uncomfortable about the increased attention that your body got.

I am telling you, if you're open to tackling your unhappiness about your weight, this is a meta-skill that will serve you well long after you stop bingeing and return to your normal weight.

So . . . what do you do about your weight? You can throw out the scale or use it to manage your mind. There's no right or wrong, there's no now and forever. What might be right for you now may change in time. Choose what works best for you. Remember the advantages of each. See how it goes and change course down the road if you need to.

Remember, I was aiming to love my body and my weight, but I only made it to neutral. And that was good enough.

Why don't you aim for love? If you do, I hope you get there.

But if you don't get there, for sure get to neutral.

You may never be the same.

That's it for Episode 4. Thank you for listening.

If you enjoyed this podcast, subscribe so you never miss an episode!

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Thanks for listening to this episode of The Done Bingeing Podcast. Remember, although life coaching can complement therapy, it's not a substitute for therapy if that's what you require. Make sure you get the support you need. And let Martha know if she can help you along the way. Come back next week for more on saying goodbye to the binge.

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