

The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

EPISODE 5: FOOD RESTRICTION

How could it possibly make sense to eat more food when you're trying to stop binge eating? 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 5 of the Done Bingeing Podcast. Thank you for being here with me.

In Episode 3, I introduced the concept of self-regard and talked about the price we pay when we feel shame about our bingeing.

Episode 4 began the process of breaking it down so we can see how self-regard plays a vital role in six main areas that binge eaters tend to face:

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

Episode 4 focused on #1: the weight.

This week, in Episode 5, we're gonna tackle food restriction.

Binge eaters often resort to dieting as a way to lose weight or to control their eating. But dieting is also often a precursor to binge eating.

A 2014 study showed that 38 per cent of participants recruited had reported dieting in the prior year (Andrés & Saldaña, 2014). And the participants who dieted were roughly twice as likely to binge eat as those who didn't diet.

Remember how in Episode 4 we talked about the cost we pay for being unhappy with our weight and how even aiming to be neutral about our weight can help so much? Well, this study brings it all together: the findings suggested that being unhappy with one's weight led to dietary restraint, which then triggered binge eating (Andrés & Saldaña, 2014).

What I've found is that sometimes simply returning to eating enough food is all you need to stop bingeing.

And I find that fascinating. Because feeding yourself enough food also requires something that we've been discussing for the last two episodes . . . self-regard. You need to believe that you're *worth* feeding yourself sufficient, satisfying food.

If you're a binge eater, anything outside of a diet might sound risky, and possibly even silly.

You might be thinking, "The problem isn't that I don't eat enough, the problem is that I eat way too much."

But here's the thing. We often start the day, especially a Monday, trying to make up for last night's kitchen bender. And so we don't eat real meals. We eat diet meals with egg whites from a cardboard carton and fat-free cheese peeled off a plastic wrapper.

But I'm talking about real meals with eggs cracked from—oh, I don't know, *an egg shell*—yolk and all—and full fat cheese cut from a block. Throw in a little spinach and a few berries on the side—and you've got yourself a nutrient-dense, satisfying meal.

Now, you might be afraid that eating more than you're used to at meals will make you gain weight.

But I can pretty much promise you, that what you'd eat in a satisfying meal will be way less than what you'd eat when you binge.

Let's do some math. But before we do, by now I hope you know that all calories are not created equal—I'll be talking more about that in an upcoming episode. For now, I'm only going to use calories as a general measurement because it can be helpful to give us a sense of comparison.

So, as a rough calculation, suppose you eat about 1500 calories per day. Maybe each morning, you promise yourself to eat only 1000 or 1200 calories, but by day's end, you're closer to 1500. Multiply 1500 calories per day times 7 days and you're at 10,500 calories per week. Not bad, right?

But wait! Let's say you binge twice per week, and each binge contains about 5000 calories—that's about the calories in a dozen donuts . . . not every binge eater's go-to for sure, but it gives you a rough idea. Now you've added 10,000 calories to your week, for a grand total of 20,500 calories per week.

Divide that by seven days, and that averages out to almost 3000 calories per day.

Now let's say you were to add 1000 calories to your initial desired caloric intake, and intentionally allowed yourself 2000 calories instead of trying to hold yourself around 1000 calories?

Then your weekly caloric intake would be 2000 calories times 7 days, or 14,000 calories per week. That's 6500 calories less than if you binged! How did I get that number? Well, 20,500 calories per week if you try to restrict and end up bingeing twice versus 14,000 calories per week if you just feed yourself enough food and make your brain much less likely to signal urges to binge.

Again, it doesn't just come down to calories, but sometimes a rough calculation like this is enough encouragement for my clients to relax into giving this a try.

Does this mean you'd aim to eat 2000 calories per day forever? Not necessarily. But it might suit you for a while, depending on your age, size, activity level, etc.

If you're trying to lose weight, I want you to ask yourself this: Would you be willing to postpone your desired outcome of losing weight for now, if it meant that you could resolve your bingeing?

I'm asking this because it'll be much easier to resolve bingeing when there's no pressure to lose weight.

If you've tried other approaches to ending bingeing, you've probably noticed that most approaches won't address weight loss. There's a whole lot of well-meaning and important talk about loving your body, but mostly hemming and hawing about weight loss.

This always puzzled me. It was mostly thin people helping me to stop bingeing. I wanted to be thin like they were. But when I brought up my desire to lose weight, I got close to nada. Why? The reluctance to touch the weight loss issue was probably driven by the research that shows a strong correlation between a dieting and bingeing.

It makes sense if you remember that dieting likely got us into the binge eating cycle in the first place. Keep dieting, and we're likely to stay in the cycle.

I believe that you can address weight loss after binge eating has resolved, but the research is clear, the dieting needs to end first.

And so I like to think of seasons of recovery. A season to stop bingeing, and a season to address weight.

Maybe your favorite season is summer, but spring has just sprung. What are you going to do? You're going to live your life through the spring and not wish away the days you have before you right now. Living a good spring will help you live a full summer. But trashing the spring has you stumbling into summer anxious and desperate.

The summer will come. Let the spring thaw the frost. Let the spring soften the land and welcome the rain. Let the spring open into summer for you, one bud at a time. You will be ready for the summer if you don't rush the spring, but instead choose to learn from it while it's here.

What if you made your only goal right now to eat enough food, without focusing on weight?

I know that this can be a tough question when you're bingeing. Remember, I spent more than three decades here. And for most of those thirty-plus years, I said no to the spring. Restricting my calories seemed to make sense. After all, I was eating waaaaay too much with the bingeing, and dieting is what most doctors and dieticians ordered me to do.

But there were some times when I was able to take the risk and eat enough food, and the risk was always worth it for me and for my clients.

What if you went all in and just fed your body such satisfying meals that there was no question about whether you were getting enough?

My experience of eating full, nutrient-dense meals to ensure that I was getting enough has always been that, before I expect it, I've forgotten about bingeing and about tracking my food. I didn't need to "cut back" after doing this either. My eating tapered down on its own as my body naturally returned to feeling calm with less.

I know the fear of gaining weight. I know it can be a challenge to let go of the focus on weight loss while you work on another goal for now. But I'm wondering if it you might be open to this.

When I stopped restricting my eating, it didn't stop my binges, but both the amount of food that I ate in a binge and the frequency of my binges dropped significantly. And I lost weight naturally. The journey also became a whole lot more enjoyable without the gnawing hunger that went along with so many restrictive diets.

Now if that's not enough to convince you to stop dieting and eat enough food, there's more, and it comes from brain science.

You probably already know that you have a higher brain and a lower brain. I've over-simplified of course, but we're talking brain science here!

According to Dr. Amy Johnson, a psychologist and the author of *Fighting the Urge*, the lower brain is the oldest part of the brain. We're talking *pre*-prehistoric. It first showed up in fish almost 500 million years ago. Most creatures have it—including reptiles—so it's sometimes called "the reptilian brain." It's old and rigid. It doesn't think or reason. It's stayed through evolution to be a part of the human brain.

One of your lower brain's main jobs is to keep you alive by sending powerful impulses for anything it thinks you need to live—and that includes food.

So if your lower brain thinks that you're remotely in danger of starving, it'll send out any kind of signal it can to get you to eat. It sounds the alarm for you to binge. Why? Because it wants you to live. The reason it can really feel like you'll die if you don't binge is because the urge comes from the part of your brain that relentlessly tries to keep you alive.

Luckily for us, we also have a higher brain that knows better. In an upcoming episode, I'll be talking way more about the higher brain and about how it can be an amazing ally as we find our way out of binge eating.

But for now, it's enough to know that if you eat a real meal—and make sure you're satisfied—your lower brain can relax and say, “OK, we're fed. No need to sound the alarms.” And it'll probably call off that urge to binge.

So . . . even if you've promised yourself you'd eat nothing today because last night you ate half a lasagna and a loaf of garlic bread, do yourself a favor and eat real, satisfying meals today. You'd be surprised what that can do to quiet the binge sirens.

Let's tie this altogether and take a closer look at why it matters what you think you need to do when you're bingeing.

The fact is, you're still bingeing. Suppose you think, “OMG, I need to diet to control my eating!” Most of my clients react to that kind of thinking with some mix of fear, resentment, sadness, anger, and desperation. Feeling a cocktail like that, they restrict their calories below what they really need. The result? They binge and reinforce the cycle and the neural pathway anchoring it.

Now what if you were to think differently about your bingeing? What if you were to think, “My bingeing may be a message that I'm not letting myself eat satisfying meals.” Instead of mostly fear, resentment, sadness, anger, and desperation, maybe you'd be likely to feel more of curiosity, resolve, compassion, and calm. You respond by eating full, whole, nutrient-dense meals. The result? Your binges likely decrease in frequency or volume, or both. You weaken the pattern of binge eating, and, counter-intuitively, you reduce your caloric intake.

See the difference a different thought can make?

By now, you probably know that I'm gonna put in another good word for self-regard. Why? Because it'll help you convince yourself that you're worth feeding, you're worth nourishing.

Self-regard will help you beat the self-defeating cycle of starving yourself because you binged and bingeing because you starved yourself.

When I work with clients, it often comes down to this: Clients pay me and then I take that money and try to sell them on themselves. I try to convince them that they're worthy of good food, they're worthy of satisfying food.

Are you willing to treat yourself with enough self-regard to eat enough food?

Ask yourself.

Answer yourself.

Take a chance on yourself.

I think you're worth it.

That's it for Episode 5. 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.

Reference

Andrés, A., & Saldaña, C. (2014). Body dissatisfaction and dietary restraint influence binge eating behavior. *Nutrition Research* 34(11), 944–950. doi:10.1016/j.nutres.2014.09.003

Johnson, A. (2013). *Fighting the Urge: Change Unwanted Behaviors Once and For All*. www.DrAmyJohnson.com.