

The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

EPISODE 8: WELCOMING THE URGE

Why on earth would you want to welcome—and even look forward to—your next urge to binge? 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 8 of the Done Bingeing Podcast. Thank you for being here with me.

In Episode 3, I introduced the concept of self-regard and we've been talking about the price we pay when we feel shame about our bingeing. There's one thing for sure. There's no up-side to the shame.

Since Episode 3, we've been considering how self-regard plays a key role in six main areas that binge eaters often 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 bingeing
6. dealing with their weight after the bingeing have stopped

Episode 4 talked about #1: the weight. Episode 5 looked at #2 food restriction. Episodes 6 and 7 explored the reason we get urges in the first place and how to witness them when they come. This week, in Episode 8, we're going to talk about allowing, welcoming, and even looking forward to the urge—even when it feels uncomfortable.

Many approaches to ending binge eating or compulsive eating talk about riding out the urge or tolerating the urge. And there's nothing necessarily wrong with that, except that there's a hint of resistance there, of pushing against something to keep it away, to keep it at bay. But that speaks to me of fear. I don't want you to be afraid of your urge. And we're going to keep talking about why you don't need to be afraid of it.

When you're pushing against something, who's got the power? You? Or it? It does. The stronger it is, the more you have to push back. But what if you're exhausted when the urge hits or you're occupied with taking care of kids or making dinner or finishing up at work? If the urge out-muscles you, you're a goner. And then you're back to the binge. That isn't freedom. You're depending on the urge not showing up or showing up at just the right time, when you're alone, when you're well rested and you've got your sleeves rolled up and earrings out and are ready for a duke-out.

I don't want that for you. I want freedom for you. Freedom is when you're willing to allow the urge. To open the door to it and welcome it in. And, like I said, by the end of this episode, I not only want you to welcome the urge, but also to look forward it.

If you're willing to allow, welcome, and look forward to the urge, if you're willing to walk toward the urge—not run from it—who's got the power now? You do. Walking *toward* the urge gives you your power back. And that's where it belongs. With you. Being willing to feel whatever unfolds for you in an urge. What's that called again? It's called holding the space for yourself, a cornerstone of self-regard. Now, *that's* freedom.

Now, for a binge eater, the idea of experiencing an urge is no small thing. We've spent months, years, some of us decades, feeling completely spun out of control by our urges or by *something*—some of us binge so quickly and so frantically we don't even know why. We aren't even aware that we have an urge.

But before every binge, is an urge, a thought, and a feeling. And we're going to go into way more detail about that later, but for now I want you to start thinking about your bingeing this way. Because the more consciousness you can bring to the process, the better off you'll be. Bingeing loves the darkness, the lack of awareness, the lack of consciousness. So, practice shining the light of awareness on this process: there's always an urge that triggers a thought that causes a feeling that leads to a binge. Bit by bit, you'll see more and more of the parts of this sequence come together, earlier and earlier in the process.

Now, when I'm asking you to welcome an urge, am I saying that your urges feel comfortable? No. I'm not saying that. But what I *am* saying is that you might not have a *clue* what your urge is *actually* like because you binge so fast when it comes.

Urges feel very different for different people. When some of my clients get to the place where they're willing to welcome an urge, they come back to me and say, "*Come on!* Are you serious?! That's all it was? For the love of God, I've been eating a box of Ho Hos every time *that* came up for the last ten years? That was nothing."

Now other clients are more like I was. I had pretty intense experiences of urges. They felt like multiple forces in and on my body.

One force felt like it was dragging me down inside, starting with my face. It was like the space behind my eyes got heavy and full and just ready to bawl. My bottom of mouth felt like it was being weighed down and forced open. And then my heart was falling down until I felt bent over, an empty cavern inside.

Another force felt like it was literally pulling me toward the food, like I could actually feel my flesh leaning in the direction of the kitchen. Kind of like a massive magnetic force.

Then my mouth was a pool of saliva and I'd be swallowing constantly just so I wouldn't drown in there.

Then my head was literally screaming. I once likened it to being in a crowded jail with inmates rattling the metal cell doors, banging anything they could get their hands on against the bars, and screaming at the top of their lungs, "Eat! Eat! Eat!" Sometimes I got headaches from all the noise.

Now, of course, I made all of this worse for myself by trying to fight my urges with willpower. And we all know how simple and effective willpower is, right? Wrong. When I would decide I wasn't going to binge, I used to have to block off a whole weekend when I could hide under the covers and sob. I wanted to binge so badly. Smashing my head into a wall seemed like it would've been more fun. Sometimes I could hold out for days, sometimes for months. But in the end, I felt overpowered and exhausted by my urges. I'd been trying to *fight* them.

The funny thing is that by giving my urges so much attention and emotional energy, I was actually strengthening them, not weakening them. Remember, emotional energy is like glue in the brain. It helps to cement neural connections. So, we don't want to make a big deal out of the urge. We want to be as neutral about the urge as possible. And I'm not talking about tiptoeing around the urge 'cause then that gives the power back to the urge. Remember, in Episode 7, we talked about how to use your gentle, compassionate witness to neutrally observe the urge. We want to reserve our emotional energy for pride and joy and excitement for every single step forward we take in our journey to heal—no matter how small.

I really want you to hear me here and to look for opportunities to celebrate your successes. I have this amazing client who'd shifted her binges significantly and didn't even notice. When she was bingeing, she'd go to the store, buy the food, and eat it all in two hours. Then one day she told me she'd gone to the store, bought the food, and eaten it over the course of two days.

I asked her what she thought about that. Here's what she said she'd been saying to herself: "Well, that was stupid, I still binged." Now, what feeling did a thought like that create for her? Shame. And what action did shame lead to? Another binge. And a whole lot of negative emotion over the act of overeating food she didn't want to eat.

With a little encouragement and some infectious excitement from me, she was willing to give herself a nod for not eating all the food she'd bought to binge on in one sitting. We actually did the math. The food she'd bought to binge on lasted her 24 times longer than usual. I tried to offer her the thought, "This is fantastic! I'm awesome for not eating all of that food all at once."

She wasn't willing to go with me there, and that was totally okay. It's essential that your thoughts feel authentic and believable for you. Our work isn't about positive thinking or affirmations. Now, these might have an important place in another approach, and that's totally fine, but they're just not a part of my approach.

My client was willing to meet me part way. Instead of thinking, "Well, that was stupid, I still binged," she opted for the thought, "This is a step forward for me." That thought triggered feelings of pride and hope. And these feelings inspired her to be willing to write about the urge the next time it came. Putting her emotion behind her success, rather than behind her "failure" worked in her favor for strengthening a new neural pathway away from the bingeing.

When you can stay neutral about your urges and neutral about any binges that still happen on your journey to healing, you weaken the old, outdated neural connection anchoring your bingeing. So, remember to experience your emotion with intention and make sure you like your reason for what you're feeling. Why? Because a different feeling is one thought away.

Now, I'd been creating a whole lot of emotional drama around my urges because I was trying to fight them. I didn't realize that the drama was totally optional. I didn't know what I know now: That my urge was just a carryover from my prehistoric brain. And that I had something so much more powerful than willpower to respond to my urge: I had my evolved higher brain.

It's worth repeating, so let's recap what we've talked about in earlier episodes. The part of your brain involved in deciding to binge is not the part of your brain sending out the urge to binge. Remember, you have a lower brain and a higher brain. The prehistoric lower brain is old, rigid, and without thought or reason. Your lower brain has two main duties. Duty #1 is to keep you alive by sending out powerful impulses for anything it thinks you need to live—and that includes food. Duty #2 is to try to help you run more efficiently by automating patterns that it notices happen repeatedly—like this pattern: you get an urge to binge, you binge to make that urge go away; you get an urge, you binge to make it go away; urge, binge; urge, binge.

When these two lower brain functions (that is, sending out powerful urges to keep you alive and automating repeated patterns) come together, you've got a wicked one-two punch. The urge can feel so intense is because it comes from the part of your brain that desperately tries to keep you alive.

But, we also learned that we have a powerful higher brain that's far more recent, evolved, and sophisticated. It's sometimes called the "primate brain" (as opposed to the "reptile brain") or it's sometimes called the "prefrontal cortex." It's the part of your brain responsible for your logical reasoning skills, your ability to make conscious choices, and your capacity to make voluntary movements (like chopping an onion) as opposed to involuntary movements (like pumping your blood).

While your lower brain can send out pre-programmed orders to binge or die, it's your higher brain that decides whether you follow through. Since it's not in charge of your executive functioning, your lower brain can't do either of these two things:

1. make the decision to binge
2. move your body to get to the food

Like me, you needed to understand your brain. Now, you do. The lower-brain's urge sirens that can feel like life-and-death really aren't. And your decisions and actions in response to the urge come from a completely different, more highly evolved part of your brain. With this knowledge about what's going on upstairs, we know that the urge is just an outdated signal from our lower brain.

I like to think of these outdated signals as "brain farts." Dr. Amy Johnson calls them "neurological junk." Co-founder of the Life Coach School and my teacher Brooke Castillo calls them "thought errors." I like both of those terms. But I kinda like brain farts too. It's a little silly.

Here's how thinking of your urge like a brain fart could help you.

What do you do when someone farts?

Do you get up and run away screaming and flailing your arms? No.

Do you wildly fan the air in front of your face? No.

Do you grab the nearest bottle of Febreze and spray it all over the perp's butt? No.

Do you pinch your nose and pretend you're gasping for air? No.

Do you roll your eyes up in your head and feign a faint to the floor? No.

Do you yell, "Lord have mercy, that reeks! Did something crawl up and die in there? Have you ever tried getting a colonic? Princess Diana used to get them you know. What about parsley? Maybe you should try eating more parsley!" No, you wouldn't say that.

You wouldn't do any of these things.

Why not? Because that would be considered *overreacting*. It'd be more polite to just let it go, to just do your best to handle the scent until it wafted away.

Why? Because unless the fart perp is like my seven-year-old son, he or she probably didn't mean to fart and is probably embarrassed. More than likely the fart was an accident.

All of the frenzied actions that I just mentioned to try to fight the fart would probably mean you inhale a little more methane than you would've if you'd just let it pass.

The fart is neutral. And so is your urge. Your lower brain isn't trying to hurt you on purpose. If you're eating enough food like we talked about in Episode 5, your lower brain is just accidentally sending out a signal that you no longer need. You don't need to fight that signal or get mad at your lower brain for sending it. You can even thank your lower brain for doing its best to try to help you.

So, let's run through what this would actually look like when an urge comes. Do you remember the Biker Dude Urge with the big loud motorcycle from the screenplay exercise in Episode 7? What would it look like to allow an urge with such character? Well, here's what you could say to yourself: "Oh boy. Here comes that biker again. He's always so intense. He storms in here like he owns the place. But he doesn't own it. He's just a ghost from an old part of my brain. He's done the best he could to help me. But I can take it from here. He'll go away in time. And I'll be perfectly fine until he does. I'm gonna watch him from that quiet place."

Let's try walking through a response to an urge again, except this time without a metaphor this time. Here's what your higher brain might say the next time an urge comes calling: "Oh boy. Here comes an urge. Now that it's here, I'm scared. That's okay. I'm gonna sit down and I'm gonna breathe. The urge is just coming from my lower brain. This urge isn't me. It's okay that it's here. I notice that I'm thinking, 'I've just got to have that whole pot of mashed potatoes with butter!' 'If I don't eat it all right now . . . I'm gonna die!' But that's just a glitch from my lower brain. Woah. I can see the potatoes already and I'm nowhere near the stove. Soft, fluffy whiteness with wispy steam curling up and golden butter drizzling down. Hey! Is that a pool in my mouth? Or is my mouth just happy about potatoes? My heart is pounding and my jaw is clenched. OMG, am I . . . *sweating*? Seriously? Has all this been going on every time I've had an urge to binge? Wow.

"But hang on. I'm still here. And I'm okay! I'm still sitting. Still watching. These are all just outdated signals from an old part of my brain that's been trying to help me survive. They're just sensations. They aren't a walk in the park, but they're so much more manageable when I remember to simply witness them and when I remember that my real strength comes from my conscious mind, the higher part of my brain that's in charge of deciding what I'll eat. My urges are welcome. My urges will give me chances to respond in a different way. They're actually going to help me heal.

"I think the urge is pretty much gone now. That took about 20 minutes. I'm ready to call a friend."

If you can respond to an urge like that, you've just allowed it to unfold while you watched with gentle curiosity, a form of self-regard. You didn't react to your urge by zealously trying to fight it with willpower or by begging it to go away with a binge. And what did you learn? That the urge is a tangle of sensations in your body that you can handle, untangle and describe in detail. You've just taken one huge step toward rewiring a new connection in your brain.

Now, it's possible that your urge may be shorter than 20 minutes. It's also possible that it may be longer. But even if it's longer, welcoming the urge and letting it pass is still far more efficient than the time it takes to make or buy the food, eat the food, and then have those crappy post-binge blues.

Here's why I love pairing life coaching with brain science to end binge eating: it sets you up for a vibrant life after you stop bingeing. Embracing the discomfort that is sometimes a part of the urge will help you to embrace discomfort that is sometimes a part of life. When you're not afraid of negative emotions and you're willing to feel them without buffering them with food or Facebook or shopping or binge-watching Netflix or consuming porn or alcohol or other drugs, you'll have so much more energy to live your life without apology. We are going to talk about this so much more in upcoming episodes.

But I'm not done yet. I not only want you to welcome your urges, I want you to look *forward* to them. Yes, I really said that.

Why? Because every time you *defuse* your urges by welcoming them, you weaken the unconscious urge-binge pattern.

Look at it this way. Have you ever taken your car to the mechanic only to have it purr like a kitten as soon as she pops the hood? With no sign of that tickety-thunk sound it was making? "But, honestly," you stumble, "I swear it was just tickety-thunking on the way here!" Your mechanic looks over her glasses at you and tut-tuts. She pulls out the hood prop rod and clips it back down into place. And then she lets the hood slam a little louder than was probably necessary.

How's she supposed to help you if there's no tickety-thunk? Just like your mechanic needs the tickety-thunk to fix your car, you need your urge to fix your bingeing. Your next urge is your next best ticket out of the bingeing. You need this signal so that you can teach your brain to respond to it differently.

Each time you get an urge, you get a chance to consciously and deliberately open the door, welcome it in, and let it stay for as long as it intends. This is the perfect opportunity to wire one whole loop in your brain in an entirely different direction—away from the binge.

So, don't get upset if your urges keep coming for a while. They're actually just what you need. Learning to welcome them, learning to look forward to them, will set you free. If this still seems impossible, don't panic. This process can take time, but you're already on your way. And it'll get easier. Your urges will weaken and disappear when you stop reacting to them by bingeing.

So, look forward to your urges: they're going to help you!

When I do this work with clients, I find it so fascinating that so many of them say the same thing: "I wish I'd started this sooner."

When I ask why they didn't, there's usually the kind of pause where I know it's not my silence to break. And so, I wait. The answer is almost always some version of this: "I was afraid." Of what, varies from person to person.

Some people were afraid that ending their bingeing would involve a kind of boot camp or rehab.

Some were afraid they'd truly feel awful and deprived most of the time after being put on yet another diet.

Some feared that I'd be kinda creepy and sales-y on the free mini-session I offer. (I'm not by the way. If I think I can help you stop bingeing then, with your permission, I'll share how. And if you're not interested, that's totally fine. For some people, that one free session is enough to realign them with their goal to stop bingeing.)

Some people were reluctant to trust anyone or anything again after trying countless things in the past.

Some didn't want to be placed in yet another Facebook group where the coach is rarely there.

Some were afraid of taking the step to do the work with me because it had a very different vibration than the work they were doing on their own. They were taking action on their own for sure. They were listening to podcasts, reading books, searching online, and more. But taking the step to work with me was a form of massive action. And for some, this led to the most interesting fear of all. The fear that our work together would actually stop their binges.

So often on my journey to end my bingeing, I swore up and down that I wanted to stop. Then a worthwhile opportunity would present itself and I'd decline.

Now, that made me curious. Why would I say no to something that was probably worth exploring?

I was afraid too. I was afraid of actually finding out who I'd be and what I'd do if I ever stopped bingeing. After all, the bingeing consumed virtually *all* of my life. What would I be left with?

I'd be left with me.

And who was I?

I did not have a clue.

No wonder I was afraid.

So often what we want so badly is on the other side of fear. After more than 30 years, I opened the door, and walked into the fear.

I took massive action.

I made it to the other side.

And it was worth it.

Come with me.

It's fine over here.

And I will be with you every step of the way.

That's it for Episode 8. 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

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