

The Done Bingeing PODCAST

EPISODE 13: EMOTIONAL EATING

What does a midnight drive-by and a boss barista have to do with losing weight? Keep listening!

Welcome to *The Done Bingeing Podcast*. This is the place to hear about how you can pair emerging brain science about why you binge with powerful life coaching to help you stop. If you want to explore a non-clinical approach to end binge eating, you're in the right place. It's time to free yourself. You have more power than you know. And now, your host, Life and Weight-Loss Coach Martha Ayim.

Welcome to Episode 13 of *The Done Bingeing Podcast*. I'm so glad you're here with me.

Last week, we talked about how liberating it would be not to have the desire to overeat.

Then I asked you if you were willing to unlearn this desire.

What was your answer?

That may not have been an easy question for you, but it's important that you know your answer—and that you like your reason for answering the way you do. So, let's dig into this a little more.

What is the food that you have the most desire to overeat?

Maybe it's bread—*any* form of it. Toasted, untoasted. With butter or without. A slice from the bread basket, a bun flanking a burger, or crusts dipped into soup.

What meaning does this food hold for you? What does eating this food offer you? Why do you want it?

When I ask clients these questions, I usually get answers like this:

- "It's everything."
- "It makes me happy."
- "It means I can look normal and feel normal when I'm with other people."
- "It makes the hard days easier."
- "It reminds me of my mom taking care of me."
- "It helps me to be more social."
- "I just need it go get by."
- "I deserve it after a tough day."

- I *want* it.

Do any of these answers resonate for you?

However you answer the questions about what your food means to you, your answers are the thoughts that'll keep the desire to overeat coming back. They are the thoughts *anchoring* your desire.

These thoughts seem warm and bright and sunny, don't they?

And they are . . . until the sun shifts and the shadows fall.

Maybe you *love* how bread tastes, how bread feels in your mouth, the way the inside is soft and squishy, but the crust is tough and chewy. Maybe bread represents home to you, comfort, connection, normalcy.

But maybe you *don't love* the bloating that comes after eating it, or the way your gut aches after, or the mental fog that follows, or the fact that if you have one slice you have ten and the inevitable weight gain that comes from that.

What you love becomes what you hate.

And in the coolness of the shadows, in the darkness of the night, you want the sun to return, to burn off the darkness and warm the shadows, to make everything okay again.

And, so, you go back to the bread to call up the sun.

And you feel gripped, right? Like an innocent bystander, yanked along by something you want not to want, by something you'd love not to love.

It's like drive-by desire. And it's a killer. It can kill your dreams. Maybe not at the speed of a bullet. Maybe more slowly and torturously while you watch.

How many times have you said, "I'm only going to have one serving of dinner," but then you come home from work stressed and tired and so you eat two servings, or maybe three?

How many times have you said, "I'm only going to have one bowl of cereal," but then that bowl almost begs you to eat another and before you're done you've eaten half the box?

How many times have you said, "I'm not going to eat dessert," but then you're at a birthday party and the lights go down and the cake comes out, alight with the promise of hope, and you eat three pieces just to keep that hope coming?

It's like you're eating against your own will.

It's like this desire to overeat just happens. It's like it's just a given.

But our desire *isn't* just a given. Our desire is learned. And it can be unlearned.

Three main reasons why we have the desire to overeat are: 1. because we use food to anaesthetize painful emotions, 2. because of how we're conditioned to eat by society, and 3. because of how our dopamine system is hijacked by high-sugar foods.

You can begin to unlearn that desire by understanding how we use food to deaden uncomfortable feelings, how we're conditioned to overeat, and how the neurotransmitter dopamine works.

So, let's take these one at a time.

First, using food to escape emotions.

Do you remember my family's drive to my grandparents' farm that I told you about in Episode 11? I loved that farm. I loved the harrowing rides through the winter blizzards. I loved skiing through the bush and watching the snow delicately articulate every tree branch, every pine needle. I loved the way the trucks on the highway shook the farmhouse windows. I loved how the logs in the furnace snapped as they burned. I loved the old stories, like the one about the man who was the first in town to own a car with windshield wipers. I loved the barn, stacked to the rafters with bales of hay.

I loved my grandparents. And I loved my grandfather. How he taught me to drive the tractor on the backroads. How his false teeth clicked when he ate. How he called my name—he called me, "Marfie." I loved how he *knew* me.

And when my grandfather left this earth, I wanted to go with him.

I didn't go with him. But for the 15 years that followed, I did the next best thing. I tried to bring him back to me with steaming mashed potatoes, just the way Granny made them, and with spoonfuls of butter and pools of gravy just the way Grandad ate them.

Then one day, I realized Grandad wasn't coming back. Not with one more potato. Not with one more pound of butter. Not with one more bucket of gravy. He was gone.

And, so, I had a choice. I could feel my sorrow fully. Or I could keep trying to dull it with mounds of warm, buttery, softness.

In the end, I chose sorrow. And, d'you know what? It hurt. A lot. But, it didn't stay forever. And when it was present, it didn't pierce my heart at full intensity all of the time.

The way out was through. And to go through, I had to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

My desire to overeat had helped me to numb my grief.

I'd been using the pleasure of eating to avoid the pain of feeling.

We can use food to distract, to cope, to run instead of to stay. We focus on the food, on the eating, and on the pain of gaining weight so that we don't have to feel whatever emotion is there in that moment.

The emotions we run from vary from person to person.

Some of you come to my free sessions and you're overeating because you feel lonely.

Some of you come and you're overeating because you feel angry.

Some of you are overeating because you feel stressed, restless, or unsettled.

Some of you are overeating because you feel accomplished, happy, or simply okay.

And isn't that interesting, that we can feel uncomfortable with *any* emotion?

And isn't it interesting what overeating offers: an analgesic.

When we overeat, especially with food with little or no nutritional value, we're often eating to deaden our emotional pain.

When we eat nourishing, satisfying food, we're eating to enliven our body, with a commitment to being alive to the truth of our experience, even if it involves emotional pain.

It's important to know the difference.

It's the difference between eating for deadness versus eating for aliveness.

It's the difference between eating to die versus eating to live. And many of you already sense this because you come to me terrified that you're insulin resistant or that you're on the precipice of diabetes. And I can so relate. I was so scared I was eating my way into diabetes, too. Some of you already are diabetic and you come to me because you know that being able to let go of bingeing and overeating could save your life or, at the least, radically improve it.

It's the difference between living a lie and living the truth.

I lied to myself for 15 years by bingeing on mashed potatoes drowning in butter and gravy. I told myself Grandad was still with me, that I didn't need to double over in grief. My world wasn't shattered. Everything was okay.

But what was the truth? The truth was that everything was okay, but not in the way I thought. The truth was that Grandad wasn't with me anymore. He was gone and he wasn't coming back. The truth was that I'd had my grandfather for the first 32 years of my life—a stunning gift shared by few. The truth was that doubling over was exactly what I needed to do because I had a thought about my grandfather's death that made sense. My thought was, "He's gone and I miss him." The grief that flowed from that thought was normal and healthy. Not something to be snuffed out. There'd already been a death. Another wasn't required.

And what was I trying to snuff out anyway? What was grief?

My grief was, like any emotion is, a collection of sensations in my body. My head hung, like it was too heavy to lift. My face stung from the constant tears. My shoulders slumped, my throat swelled, my chest ached, and my tummy twisted.

Yes, it hurt. But each time I let an ocean of tears convulse through me, the next surge wasn't as high. And with each cry, the tears subsided into more of a lapping of waves gently rocking up and down a sandy shore.

Now, I've intentionally given a graphic description of one of the most intense emotions because I want you to see that it was still just a bunch of bodily sensations.

And it's not like the potatoes took away my grief anyway. Grief was always waiting for me on the other side of that bowl of potato purée.

So, I want you to really think about this. If you overeat to try to dull emotional discomfort, what is it that you don't want to feel? See if you can name that emotion. Try to describe the emotion as a group of sensations in your body. Then ask yourself if you'd be willing to feel these sensations if it could set you free from overeating.

Emotional eating can be eliminated. How? By training your brain to believe new thoughts about the real role of food and the real truth of your experience.

You need to find out what you currently believe about overeating by paying close attention to why you overeat. When I was overeating pot after pot of mashed potatoes, I was believing that eating could somehow bring my grandad back. That thought anchored my desire until I intentionally chose a new thought that served me.

Remember at the beginning of this episode how I asked you why you wanted to overeat certain foods? Your answer to this question will reveal the thoughts anchoring your desire. Maybe your thoughts are like the ones I mentioned:

- "This food is everything."
- "It makes me happy."
- "It makes me look normal."
- "It makes the days easier."
- "It reminds me of mom."
- "It lets me be social."
- "I need it."
- "I deserve it."
- "I *want* it."

For many people, overeating is unconscious. It's so programmed that we're not even aware of why we do it. That's why I'm asking you to pay close paying attention to the foods you overeat and to why you believe you need them.

Paying close attention to why you overeat may not be that enjoyable. Your brain may resist it. It's like, "We don't need to pay any attention, this way of eating is so easy and breezy."

But consider this for a moment. If you're a coffee drinker, recall of the last time you made a cup of coffee. Did you have to think deliberately about every single step of the process? Probably not.

Maybe you pulled out your dark, airtight container of beans from the cupboard, where you were sure they'd be protected from moisture, sunlight, and heat. You'd already carefully selected freshly roasted beans with a sheen of oil on them. Then maybe you poured just enough into a burr grinder dialed into a setting you've honed for your favorite brew—espresso. You grind the beans fine but not too fine, and tamp them hard but not too hard into the portofilter. You've already invested in a machine that will accurately heat your filtered water so it's not too hot to make sour coffee and it's not too cold to make bitter coffee. You've warmed your coffee cup with a few splashes of boiling water, swirled 'round and then tossed down the sink. You twist and lock the portofilter into place, pull the water through for two seconds, then wait. Then another 20 seconds or so until a caramel-colored, tiger-striped crema floats on top.

Now, do you have to tediously dissect every step in the process in this detail every time you make a cuppa? Not likely. Why not? Because, to a large extent, it's become *automatic*. Yes, you still need to pay attention to the amount of beans you grind into the portofilter and how hard you press them, and to how long you pull the water through them, but not to the same degree you did in the beginning when you were still refining your skill.

But what did it take for you to get from Nescafe's Encore instant to brewing a fine espresso?

My guess is a whole lot of focus, practice, evaluation, correction, and precision. And now knocking out an espresso like a boss barista is no problem.

That's what I want you to do to turn your overeating around. I want you to pay attention. And what will help you to observe with intention and neutrality? The compassionate witness that is born of self-regard.

I want you practice experiencing your emotions by being open to feeling what they're actually like in your body.

And I want you to consider about what you'd need to believe to eat the way you *want* to eat, regardless of what you're experiencing emotionally. Here are some beliefs to get you started:

- "I can learn to handle my emotional life."
- "I want to be the kind of person who isn't afraid of feeling a feeling."
- "I want to learn to run toward my emotions, not run away from them."
- "I want to be curious about what an emotion actually feels like in my body."
- "I can be social by being and talking with friends and family without overeating."
- "I'd rather tell myself the truth that I'm not happy at my job, than lie to myself with a loaf of bread."
- "I want to stop feeling nailed by Nutella."
- "I want my life to be so full and vibrant that Pop-Tarts don't compare."
- "I'm pointing myself in the direction of excellent nutrition."

Do any of these thoughts resonate for you? If so, great! Use them and practice them. And if they don't, come up with thoughts on your own that do. That you truly can believe.

I want you to get to the point where these thoughts are just as easy and breezy, just as automatic and effortless, as "I *want* it" or whatever thoughts you currently hold that lead you to overeat. To get there, you're going to need to practice like a barista perfecting a brew.

You've got this. And you've got me. If you want a head start on turning your overeating around, sign up for a free private coaching session with me. I offer three free sessions per week, and they book up fast.

Why do I keep inviting you? Because I have a feeling that your brain is telling you this: "It's not gonna work." "It's no use." "I've been doing this for too long." "I don't have the time." "It might be hard." Why would your brain tell you these things? Because it's used to thinking these thoughts. They're easy and comfortable.

But comfort is the enemy of change.

Discomfort is harmless, but you have to be willing to feel it.

The road to your dreams is paved with discomfort.

You can make it.

But here's my question:

Are you willing?

That's it for Episode 13. Thank you for listening.

It's one thing to learn these concepts on an intellectual level, but applying them with the direct one-on-one guidance of a coach gets you results so much faster. If you're done with bingeing, click the link in the show notes to sign up for a free private session and see how coaching can help.

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.