

The Done Bingeing PODCAST

EPISODE 25: RISKING HUNGER

What do a farm and a fence have to do with your hunger? Keep listening!

Welcome to *The Done Bingeing Podcast*. This is the place to hear about how you can pair the 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 25 of *The Done Bingeing Podcast*.

In the last episode, we talked about identifying hunger and about distinguishing between physiological and psychological hunger. In this episode, we're talking about allowing yourself to get hungry in the first place.

The reason we're taking some time to explore hunger is because rediscovering a nourishing fullness begins with the willingness to first be empty. In other words, you need to risk hunger. With a history of bingeing or overeating or chronic dieting, hunger may be something that you no longer let yourself experience often. It can feel uncomfortable, sometimes even terrifying.

It's important to distinguish between hunger and deprivation.

Deprivation in one form or another is associated with most dieting approaches. And because bingeing and compulsive overeating often come on the heels of dieting, deprivation is probably something you're quite familiar with. Not surprisingly, you may resent it.

The assumption that deprivation is necessary for weight loss may sometimes come from a shame-based approach to dealing with people who binge or who overeat or who are overweight. Or it may be a well-intentioned, though mistaken, conclusion drawn about what is needed to address overeating and excess weight.

It's important, however, not to make sweeping generalizations about deprivation. Deprivation may be a fact if you're following a diet that doesn't allow you to eat sufficient nourishing and satisfying food.

But deprivation may also be a thought you have about a way of eating that actually *is* nourishing and sustaining but that only responds to physical hunger, not emotional hunger. In other words, you may

think you're depriving yourself if you've committed to only having a regular serving of cake when you've made that choice from your higher brain and not to having half a cake whenever your boss pisses you off.

Why would you have a thought like, "I'm being deprived if I don't eat however much I want of whatever I want whenever I want?" Because that's the way your brain is currently wired. It's an easy, effortless, automatic thought that runs on habit. A thought like this will likely lead to fear, resentment, or anger, which then set the stage for emotional eating.

Building a new habit of eating enough wholesome food to satisfy you when you're physically hungry will require a commitment to awareness and to epic self-care to make sure you're addressing your other needs in ways besides reaching for food. Instead of thinking, "I'm deprived," you might opt for a belief like, "I will *totally* take care of my physical hunger with food when it comes, but, right now, I'm fine" or "I don't need food because I'm not physically hungry, so let me try to figure out what I really need right now." These are thoughts that are more likely to lead to curiosity or compassion—just what you need to inquire into what's *really* going on for you.

If you can bring a mindful awareness to deconstructing the experience of hunger—to what it feels like and how its intensity changes—it will soon lose some of its power and become more of a neutral sensation, a simple message that it's time to eat soon.

A healthy respect for our bodies entails listening carefully and responding appropriately. That means getting hungry and eating in response. That means allowing emotions and responding thoughtfully. Both tasks require self-regard—the willingness to pay attention to what's going on and to give yourself what you truly need.

Your experience of hunger is as unique as you are, so stay gently curious and listen in for your cues.

When it comes to reconnecting with physical hunger, some people report having lost their hunger signal altogether. This may be for a couple of reasons.

Several of my clients lost their hunger signal after bariatric surgery, although their appetite did tend to return several months post-surgery. When this happens, some find it helpful to look for other signs of hunger, beyond what would typically be signaled from the stomach. For example, the first signs of lightheadedness, a slight weakness, or a mental fog might be ways to track other early signs of hunger until signals from the belly return.

It's possible that you don't get physically hungry because you still eat for psychological reasons rather than for physiological reasons without even knowing it. If this is the case, continue to pay close attention to the distinction between physiological and psychological hunger. This will help you get more in tune with physical hunger, as will addressing emotional hunger with strategies besides eating. It takes practice, so be gentle with yourself and don't give up.

Sometimes at the root of continued eating for psychological reasons is the fear of hunger that I mentioned earlier. When you feel physiological hunger, you may have a thought like, "Not that again, I hate that feeling" or "Well *this* sucks, I'm trying to lose weight" or "Oh no! There is so much conflicting

information, I never know what to eat” or any number of thoughts that lead to fear or panic. Fear and panic are emotions that set the stage for yet more emotional eating to make those feelings go away.

But what if the next time you felt physical hunger, you instead thought something like, “Hunger is just a signal, it’s not an emergency” or “I’m willing to be curious about what hunger feels like for me” or “I’m learning how to fuel my body in a way that responds appropriately to hunger” or “Just because I want to lose weight doesn’t mean that I’m not allowed to eat” or “Hunger is *exactly* what I need to train my brain to respond to a physical rather than an emotional hunger.”

Thoughts like these may create feelings of security, calm, confidence, and competence. These are more likely to inspire you to take actions such as waiting for hunger to appear and being ready with nourishing food when it does.

You may remember that my grandparents lived on a farm in Northern Ontario. It was 400 acres that flanked a two-lane highway, most of it lying on the east side, stretching out in broad meadows and arching over rolling hills.

Granny and Grandad owned a red, 1947 Massey Ferguson tractor. Grandad would hitch a wooden wagon to the back, and load it up with a couple of bales of hay so my brother and I would have a comfortable ride. He’d drive us carefully across the highway, over the creek, through the gate that warned against trespassing, and past the old house whose roof sank steadily toward the earth with each visit.

Once we’d dipped over the first hill and lost sight of the turquoise-shingled farm house with the pink front door, I was lost. One meadow looked like another, each new hill so much like the last one, and the trees that towered on either side of the trail left me awed and stunned. But Grandad knew every turn, every hill. And he took us deep into the bush.

If the beavers had re-built their dam and flooded the trail, we’d need to stop, unhitch the trailer, and tie the chains on the back of the tractor to the heart of the dam and haul it apart. If the trail was passable, we’d continue on to the final hill, gearing down and sputtering up, until we made it to the top and edged toward the railroad tracks.

Grandad always had precautions, fail-safes, and fallbacks that he instilled in us at every visit.

The first was a ritual for crossing the tracks with no crossing signal. To the south was a curve in the tracks that turned quickly and disappeared into the woods. To the north was a hill that lifted swiftly to the sky. That meant, Grandad had told us many times, that a train could come from either direction with little notice, it’s engine muffled by trees or land. In a collision between thousands of tons of hurtling steel and two kids, a grandpa, and a rickety tractor, there was no doubt who would win.

Grandad would stop the tractor before the tracks, turn it off, and look in both directions. If he saw nothing, he’d get down, kneel by the tracks, and touch the closest rail. If he felt nothing, he’d put his ear to the rail. If he heard nothing, he’d get back on the tractor, start it up and go.

The second was a fail-safe if the tractor didn't make it across the tracks in time. "What would you do, Marfie?"

"I'd run, Grandad."

"Yes. But which way?"

Sometimes I really thought Grandad had lost his marbles.

"Away from the train."

"No," he said. "Not away from the train. If a train hits the tractor, it will bash it into a million pieces and send them in which direction?"

I paused. "In front."

"Yes, mostly in front. You run toward the train, no matter how scared you are. If it's coming from the south, you run to the south. If it's coming from the north, you run to the north."

The third was a fallback plan in case we got lost in the woods across the highway. "Remember," Grandad said, "there's the railroad to the east and the highway to the west. If you get off the trail, look for the fence—it runs the full length of the farm from the tracks to the highway. Once you find it, don't let go. If you hit the tracks, turn around. Follow the fence, Marfie. It will always take you home."

You have all the marbles that you need.

If you can't find hunger, stop the ride of life long enough to look for it.

If you don't see it, feel for it.

If you can't feel it, listen for it.

Lean into the hunger, knowing that you'll respond with food your body needs.

Let hunger be your fence, a compass to guide you back to yourself.

That's it for Episode 25. Thank you for listening. *The Done Bingeing Podcast* is helping people to reduce their bingeing and overeating, and to find out who they're truly meant to be when they live their lives fully. Ratings and reviews will help more people find this podcast and get the help they need. So, if you're getting something out of this podcast, I would be honored if you'd be willing to take the time to leave me a rating and review. Just go to www.holdingthespace.co/itunes-review for easy-peasy instructions on how to get it done. Thank you so much!

Thanks for listening to *The Done Bingeing Podcast*. Martha is a certified life and weight loss coach who's available to help you stop bingeing. Book a free session with her at www.holdingthespace.co/book. And stay tuned for next week's episode on freeing yourself from binge eating and creating the life you want.