

# *The Done Bingeing* PODCAST

## EPISODE 35: SPECIAL SERIES—12 KEYS TO END BINGE EATING, PART 1

*What do lobsters and warriors, songbirds and poets, have to do with ending binge eating? 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 35 of *The Done Bingeing Podcast*.

I have a hunch that you feel competent in many areas of your life.

But I have another hunch that you don't feel so competent, or confident, when it comes to the amount and type of food you eat, or the way you look and feel in your body.

Maybe you have a list of "I wish statements . . ." ? Like, "I wish I could say I'm going to stop bingeing and *actually* stop bingeing." Or "I wish I didn't feel so out of control when urges or cravings come."

Maybe you dream of feeling calm around food and being nourished by it.

Of having one size in your wardrobe that you can count on to fit you every day.

Of putting your time, money, and energy into something besides shopping for food to binge on, finding a secret place to eat it, bingeing on the food, feeling crappy after the binge, and paying for more diet programs or personal trainers to make up for the bingeing.

If that sounds familiar, you're going to love what I have in store for you! I've created a special series on essential steps to ending bingeing or overeating!

You may have noticed that an episode didn't come out last week, and that's because I felt it was time to review the foundations of how to stop bingeing. I missed you, but I wanted to take the time to create this special series, and I hope you'll feel that it was worth waiting for.

After the series—don't worry—we'll return to our exploration of boundaries. Some of you have already told me that you're enjoying digging into the nuances of how we interact with others and of how those interactions impact what we eat and what we weigh. I promise, we'll get back to those topics soon.

Now, before we dive into this special series, I want you to think about something: any of these steps alone might be enough for you to stop bingeing or overeating.

For some binge eaters, easing the pressure to be different is all they need to do. And, ironically, that's when their weight comes off too.

For others, easing the restriction on food is all they need to do. And as soon as they feed their body satisfying, nourishing meals, their lower brain relaxes and stops firing off powerful urges.

For yet others, easing the fear of their urges works right away. And witnessing and welcoming them is all they need to see that their urges aren't actually that bad and are no match for their higher brain.

These are just three of the twelve essential keys we'll be covering in this special series.

Sometimes one key is all you need to unlock a destructive pattern of eating and lay the foundation for a healthy one. And sometimes the whole process of stopping the binges takes more steps and more time. And that makes sense if you think about the fact that if you've been bingeing for a while, the neural connection between the urge and the binge is likely strong.

We're working on weakening that old neural connection that no longer serves you and on building a new one that does serve you. But setting that up can take time and practice. So, try to be okay with exactly where you are on the journey. But also try to stay open to the possibility that your healing might be more straightforward than you expect.

Alright, so let's get going. I'm going to begin this series with just the first key because I really want you to let it sink in.

The first key to ending your bingeing or overeating is this: You've got to have your own back.

To have your own back represents a way of holding yourself. It means to be willing to fight for yourself. This isn't a hypervigilance, but a steady resolve to defend what you hold dear.

I talk about this with many of you in our free sessions, and I've worked with enough of you to know how central this is to healing.

But it was the work of psychologist Jordan Peterson that helped me to understand at a *far deeper level* just how pivotal this is.

How deep?

Well, I'm glad you asked.

How about as deep as the bottom of the sea?

On the sandy land at the base of the ocean, Peterson tells us, reside crustaceans constantly in search of a home. Lobsters seek a headquarters from which they can hunt, scavenge, rest, and hide, especially during the times when they grow and shed their shells, when they are left soft and open, vulnerable and exposed. With other lobsters vying for shelter as well, a suitable shelter holds great value. And when demand for shelter outstrips supply, competition can give rise to brutal territorial fights.

The nervous systems of lobsters are relatively simple and their large and easy-to-observe neurons have allowed scientists to accurately trace their neural circuitry. Although lobsters have existed for more than 350 million years, they have a surprising amount in common with us humans. And, so, the lessons that come from lobsters about the brain and behavior have much to teach us about ourselves.

The chemical make-up in the brain of a lobster who loses a territorial dispute differs from that of the victor's. And these chemical differences are captured by their differing postures—in other words, by the way they hold themselves. Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers in the brain. When a lobster is winning and confident, the ratio of the neurotransmitter serotonin to octopamine increases. This lobster is less likely to give up when tested. This is because one of serotonin's jobs is to help to regulate posture. A lobster with a greater proportion of serotonin will extend itself to look large and forbearing, ready to advance and to fight long and hard.

But the way we carry ourselves isn't just about our physique, Jordan argues, because we are more than just bodies. The way we carry ourselves in our internal emotional landscape also matters. Why? Because, though we might not be fighting for a home at the bottom of the sea, we're still weathering life up here on dryland. And confidence and a way of holding ourselves with dignity matters when life happens and we're susceptible to a different sort of fight—a fight to steer clear of patterns or spins or loops in our lives that threaten to take us down, or to end these patterns if we already find ourselves embedded in one.

Bingeing can be understood as one such loop—a positive feedback loop, albeit a destructive one.

Let's take the example of Claire, who relishes binge food—from pizza to Pop-Tarts and everything in-between—too much for her own good.

Today, Claire is feeling stressed about a work deadline and, to take the edge off, she starts out with one bowl of cheap ice cream. Before she knows it, she's had six—all in under 20 minutes.

Her insulin spikes and she feels amazing at first. There's the pleasure experienced on the taste buds of her tongue. There's the sensations of textures in her mouth and throat, the satisfying filling of her stomach, and the quick onset of energy followed by a soothing, numbing mist. Things are looking pretty good at this point, right? But now she stops because she can't eat any more. And a different set of sensations ensues.

The insulin spiked in Claire to control the sugar that flooded into her body. Whatever we eat gets broken down into glucose in the blood at different speeds and in different amounts, depending on what we eat. Glucose in the blood needs to be managed by insulin, which drives glucose out of the blood and stores it as fat for later use.

Now, Claire's not feeling so great. There's no more pleasure in her mouth and throat because she can't eat anymore. Her tummy that was feeling satisfyingly full now feels sickeningly bloated. In fact, she's got a stomach ache, and some gas to boot—which, my eight-year-old son would point out, rhymes with the word, "toot." A headache is beginning to throb, and all that energy has vanished in a poof and she's close to comatose. The mist has now thickened into a fog that makes it hard for Claire to think and she can't focus enough to finish her project for tonight's deadline. Now, she's really scared.

Claire's stomach ache and headache, her heartache and heartburn, make it difficult for her to sleep. And, so, she starts the next day without enough sleep, still feeling sick and stressed. On top of that, the volume of sugar she had yesterday has primed her brain to scream for more today, and so she has a day of heightened cravings. Claire wants to bring back that lovin' feelin'. So what does she do to postpone what doesn't feel so good right now? She has another bowl of ice cream.

And, now, we've got trouble because the ice cream *works*. It works to ease the discomfort, at least for a while. Now, we have a "cure" that causes the problem and, as Jordan points out, a positive feedback loop has been born.

Maybe Claire keeps bingeing because she *can't* stop. Maybe she doesn't have the money for fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy fats, satisfying proteins. Maybe she has to hold down three part-time jobs with no security that amount to 60 hours a week yet keep her income below the poverty line. Maybe she must do at least this because she's a single mom who must do her best for her and her daughter. Even if she had the time to walk and get fresh air and ease stress in a healthy and natural way, her neighborhood has no sidewalks. And even if her neighborhood did have sidewalks, it wouldn't be safe to walk on them in the hours after her work shifts.

Now, maybe Claire keeps bingeing because she *won't* stop. Maybe she thinks she can't handle the experience of urges or emotions, or that she shouldn't have to. Maybe she feels that it shouldn't be this hard or that she shouldn't be on this journey at all. Maybe she forfeits any of her own knowledge, instinct, or experience, thinking she's no match for the words of those with many letters dangling after their name, who insist on breakfast, or three meals plus three snacks, or lots of healthy whole grains or any number of rules, regardless of whether or not they actually work for Claire. After all, she thinks, "What do I know? I'm not a doctor." Maybe she gives up ahead of time and turns away from viable options to get help.

If Claire's capacity to fight for herself is constrained by these narrow views, she will not be able to call up a ferocity inside with which to protect herself from a pattern that is destroying her life.

But what if Claire *does* respond decisively, one instance at a time, to the best of her ability, to the influences that keep her cycle of eating spinning, deeper and deeper in a sludgy ditch—even if she doesn't win every single time?

What if she says, "no," to the directive to eat a breakfast of low-fat, sugary cereal with skim milk when she's not remotely hungry?

What if she says, “no,” to the vibrant billboards along the highway broadcasting images of steaming muffins and coffee?

What if she says, “no,” to the urge rising within her when she sees donuts in the lobby of her office?

What if she says, “no,” to the temptation to numb the anxiety of today’s presentation with a few candy bars from the cafeteria vending machine?

What if she says, “no,” to diet food when she’s finally good and hungry for a hearty meal?

What if she says, “no, thank you,” to the offer to buy cookies for a colleague’s son’s school?

What if Claire says, “no,” again and again to what doesn’t serve her?

As she does so, she is laying claim to her territory and defending it. She is defining what is inviolable and what will not be violated—at least not without a fight.

Claire is in her power, cultivating a sense of competence and confidence and calm.

Here’s what happens when Claire’s not in her power.

She eats the cereal when she’s not even hungry and begins her day with an insulin spike, which will store the glucose as fat and prevent her from releasing the fat that’s already on her body as fuel.

Then she has a sugar crash and a hot muffin and coffee seem like just the things to turn that around.

Then there are the donuts in the lobby and she thinks, “Why not, after all? They’re here today and they’re free and they’re not there every day and why should I have to say no? Isn’t it normal to be able to eat a donut when you see a donut?”

Then there’s the growing fear of today presentation, that has been heightened physiologically by multiple insulin spikes and dips, which decrease emotional stability (Peterson, 2018, p. 18). Two Mars bars promise to take her galaxies away from all that.

Then, when physical hunger finally comes, she opts for a diet meal of carrots and broth to make up for the day so far.

Then there are the cookies she buys even though she doesn’t want to because she thinks she’d be rude if she should didn’t.

How is Claire feeling now? Probably resentful and exasperated and disconcerted.

Now, what if Claire saw this resentment, exasperation, and disconcertion, in their full intensity, as a sign that something or some things need to be changed? And what if she decided that she will fight to change them, that she will dare to sense her own fierceness?

Here’s what: She will foster, despite some necessary losses along the way, a deepening honor for herself, a stronger confidence in her ability, a growing commitment to her resolve.

Perhaps there was a time in Claire's life where bingeing made sense. Maybe life was too unbearable, or maybe she simply learned a pattern from the way food was pushed on her in multiple ways.

But Claire's bingeing isn't serving her now. And if she stays passive in the face of countless pressures to eat food she's not hungry for and that will not nourish her, she is essentially collapsing into the posture of a defeated lobster.

At this point, Peterson tells us (p. 25), several things happen, including reduced serotonin production in Claire's brain. This will leave her more vulnerable to negative emotions and less able to access positive ones. It will leave her more likely to fall again into the bingeing cycle rather than to fight for the freedom she seeks.

But Claire can create a different positive feedback loop—this time, one that authentically serves her.

The case of the lobster illuminates an important lesson—that fierceness matters and can begin to turn the loop in a different direction.

When Claire feels that fierceness, she will hold and behold herself with dignity, and begin to set things in proper order, one action, one attempt, one failure, one lesson learned, at a time. And she will begin to face these actions with a *willing* resolve, not with a *passive* resignation—and that can make all the difference. An urge to binge shifts from being something to be feared and stopped to something to be welcomed and witnessed. A bag of chips when she's not hungry shifts from an entitled reward to a waste of time.

Claire has stepped forward with a willingness to defend and define herself. She is willing to live big instead of small. When she holds herself with dignity, when she has her own back, she is willing to do hard things in the name of a freedom that's so worth it. Doing so will help serotonin flow to the receptors that desperately need it, and to bring with it its calming effects.

Claire's fierceness will cultivate her sense of confidence and competence, which will inspire her to keep going even in the face of the strongest craving, even in the face of the toughest emotion, and honor her dream of a binge-free life. And, now, Claire has built a new positive feedback loop.

Jordan points out (p. 21) the straightforwardness of our anxiety systems. They assume that whatever we run from is a genuine threat. And they get their proof of that from our very act of running away. But with this new feedback loop, Claire isn't running away, she's facing toward. And as she does, she undermines a fear that could carry her off on another binge.

So much of the inspiration for this key and this episode, I owe to Jordan Peterson and his first rule for life: stand up straight, with your shoulders back. I haven't applied his insights about broader topics to our focus of binge eating with nearly the elegance that defines his work. But you can enjoy that elegance yourself, and the many fascinating lessons to be learned from lobsters, by reading his new book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*.

If you take just one thing away from this first key to end binge eating, I hope it is this: It is no small thing to be willing to fight, and to assume a posture that captures that willingness—even if it is an internal, emotional posture that you alone are privy to. To be willing to defend what is precious, to be willing to have your own back, will change the very chemistry of your brain and will make it more likely that you will achieve what you long for.

On my own journey to end my bingeing, I knew that despite the temptation to give up, I never could. I fought, sometimes fiercely, for something I coveted deeply—freedom from bingeing and everything that came with it, including freedom from the extra hundred pounds, the stomach aches, the heartaches, the loss of control, the sugar comas, the rotted teeth, and the raw throat.

I knew again and again that I wanted to stop bingeing.

I knew that there was more to my life and that bingeing held me back.

In time, I stopped turning away from all that I needed to know.

In time, I started to feel challenging emotions that had regularly led to my binges. And it isn't always obvious which emotion might be the most triggering. My biggest trigger was pride. I knew that when pride filled me, terror lay in wait, though I didn't know why. I needed to know what was so dangerous about success for me.

In time, I pushed past discouragement and tried new ideas. I took a chance on myself again, and then again, and again.

In time, I stayed curious about why some things worked and about why some things didn't.

I became willing to be thrilled with every baby step I made toward recovery.

I became open to watch the thoughts that floated through my mind and to step up to challenge those that didn't serve me.

I learned to stand in compassion for myself while I held myself to account for choices I knew I no longer had to make. It was a delicate dance, but one well worth learning.

I learned that I was worth feeding myself decent meals.

I came to believe that a life without bingeing was possible for me, that I had power and a voice, and that I should use both, even if it scared the pants off me.

And I came to believe that I had to find faith, in the midst of uncertainty, that though I didn't know why I was on this journey, there was something I was meant to see while I was on it.

I wasn't looking for a fight, but I had to be willing to have one.

It's not that it was an entirely arduous journey, it wasn't. It's that I needed passion on the path.

This journey isn't just about the eating patterns you want to leave behind, it is also about the ones you want to create.

This journey isn't just about what you want to cut out of your life, it is also about how you want to fill it.

It isn't just about what you want to stop, it is also about what you want to start.

It isn't just about what you want to let go of, it is also about what you want to reach for.

What are you doing that's working? What's not working and what are you going to do about it?

What do you promise you'll do when you stop bingeing or when you lose the weight? And why don't you start doing some of that right now?

What are your goals? What are your dreams? What do you long to achieve?

Who are you? And who are you meant to become?

What do you believe in? And what will you fight for?

You need to know.

You are already here, listening, learning, trying, and tweaking.

You're here because you haven't given up.

Why is this so important?

Because so often in my free sessions you tell me that giving up is exactly what you feel like doing.

But you still listen to the episodes and you come to the sessions. And I'm in awe of the vulnerability and courage you bring to those calls. It may not be easy to spend this time with me. And that's a good thing. Why? Because it gives you practice at showing up for something that scares you.

Why might it be hard to book a free session with me?

Maybe because free things have a bad rap and come across as a little creepy. There's got to be a weird, icky, awkward, salesy spiel at the end. There isn't by the way.

It's for sure not because you don't have the time. Oh, you do. If you've got the time to shop, binge, and crash, you've got the time to talk.

So, why might 30 minutes with me really be hard to sign up for? Here's why:

Because it's a step toward massive action to end your binges.

Because you may sense that freedom from bingeing and overeating might begin when you pick up the phone—and *that*, ironically, may be what you fear the most.



What comes up in these sessions is *sometimes* that you fear that you can't stop bingeing, but *more often* that you fear that you can.

What I most hear from you is that your bingeing keeps you silent, your bingeing keeps you small. You may be living silently with a soul that wants to scream.

And I so get it. This was basically my experience as well.

One of the most influential writers in my life was Audre Lorde, who described herself as a black, lesbian, feminist, warrior, poet. I never forgot four sentences she wrote in the mid-1980s, after being diagnosed with cancer:

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. . . . I was going to die, if not sooner than later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.

I knew from those words that part of my journey to end my bingeing would be, had to be, a journey to start to speak. And I couldn't speak with a mouth full of food and a heart full of fear.

So much about binge eating is about feeling powerless and afraid.

Although I don't binge anymore, I am still finding my power and I'm asking you to find yours.

I am still finding my courage and I'm asking you to find yours.

I am still finding my words and I'm asking you to find yours.

It's one thing to be afraid. It's another to be frozen.

If you're frozen, remember that the thaw will come, as surely as the end of winter.

A songbird's flight north in the spring, Peterson tells us, resembles in many ways a lobster's fight for territory. What to our ears are songs of beauty and serenity are actually warnings and claims of dominion. As Peterson writes, "A brilliantly musical bird is a small warrior proclaiming his sovereignty" (p. 2).

Find your song and sing it.

Name your dream and defend it.

Running away teaches your brain that there is something dangerous and worthy of fear on the path.

Collapsing into ambivalence and indifference isn't really being on the path at all—or it's about as effective as having one foot on a solid path and one in a mucky ditch.

You have the option of staying on the path and defending something beautiful and precious.

To do that, you need to behold yourself and hold yourself, both *inside and outside*, like you're willing to fight for it.

That's it for Episode 35. Thank you for listening. If you want to put the essential keys to stop binge eating into action, I've created the Done Bingeing Group Coaching Program, to help you do just that. Everyone needs a coach, but not everyone knows it—until they experience what that really means. I've mastered coaching concepts through training, teaching, experience, and in working with people just like you. So, if you're ready to take the next step in your journey to end your struggle with bingeing or overeating, go to [www.holdingthespace.co/group-programs](http://www.holdingthespace.co/group-programs) and reserve your spot today!

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](http://www.holdingthespace.co/book). And stay tuned for next week's episode on freeing yourself from binge eating and creating the life you want.