



Behavior Change

Hi, I am Terri Lance, one of the coaches here at The Fasting Method after years working as a psychologist. I am starting this behavioral course by introducing you to a few keys to successful behavior change that can help you build skills to ensure that your way of eating and use of your fasting abilities become life-long strengths and become second nature to you, rather than a “program” you do for a period of time. We have all learned that making significant changes to what we eat and how much we exercise does not equate to sustainable health and weight management. Most people come to The Fasting Method knowing they are going to have to change certain behaviors if they truly want to reach their goals. At first this seems challenging but perhaps exciting, it feels good to be taking positive steps toward our goals. But so many of us lose momentum quickly because the behavior changes required can seem overwhelming. They often require us to really have to change behaviors we have held firmly to for decades, that are traditions or rituals, and maybe even hold cultural meaning. We have created long-standing habits and emotional responses to our habits and patterns that continue to reinforce them. These behaviors, habits, and patterns might even seem unchangeable. But I assure you, we can all make progress to replace old habits and patterns that seemed to serve us well at certain times but in actuality caused our metabolic issues to be what they are today. They have resulted in our challenges with excess fat, a few extra pounds or obesity, as well as our medical conditions of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, prediabetes or type II diabetes, cardiovascular issues, and many others.

Deciding to change how we eat, meaning what food, when, and how frequently, involves a bigger journey of behavior change than what many of us thought we would need to do to lose weight, improve our health, or both. Unfortunately, these processes have been marketed in ways to make them look easy and as if they happen overnight. We have all seen the ads for “diet pills” that supposedly can ensure you will lose 70 pounds in the next six weeks. And most of us have been lulled into expecting rapid results with little to no effort on some level. Of course this is attractive! But what happens when we enter the process with these expectations is that we are quickly discouraged when we don’t see those immediate results--pounds do not fly off our bodies or our metabolic markers don’t respond rapidly. Not only is the lack of immediate results discouraging, but also tends to reinforce for many of us that our goals are NOT possible for us. We are somehow broken, flawed, weak, or genetically cursed. I assure you, the results are not evidence of any of these ways of negatively assessing ourselves.

So how do we change these behaviors that have brought us to the place? In reality, behavior change is a process, not an event. And the changes people are working on when they come to The Fasting Method are ones that can be quite simple in theory but once we engage them, we find the layers of habits and mindset and emotions that underlie a more complex picture than just “fast and then eat whole unprocessed foods”. We don’t begin a process at the conclusion, we begin at the foundation and build the behavior change one step at a time, like scaffolding. The challenge is that we have to slow down our expectations and find ways to reinforce our slowly building positive momentum.

Both motivation and positive outcomes are built through action rather than just falling out of the sky. It’s through our consistent attention to the strategies of fasting and eating appropriately that we begin to see the changes occurring. As many authors have explained, if we assess our success or progress by focusing on the end result we are seeking, it is rather complicated to build momentum. If we want to lose 75 pounds and three weeks into making changes in our fasting/eating plans, we have lost two pounds and all of our clothes fit the same, it is easy to become discouraged because our desired goal has not been met. This feels amotivational and often this is where people abandon their efforts--clearly what they are working hard to do isn’t worth it because it’s not working, right? We all know that weight loss takes more than a few weeks, but by focusing on our end result as evidence of success, we just can’t see it. Instead, it is vital to reinforce the steps we take rather than focusing on the desired end-result as success. Of course it is important to have these end-result images in mind as they help move us forward because our mind works to create whatever we tell and show it. But while on our journey to reach these end-results, we need to acknowledge and give ourselves credit for the small steps we make that move us forward and closer to our goals. So, when you experience hunger pangs while working toward a 24 hour fast and instead of feeding your body food at this time, you decide not to eat because you know that this is a positive sign your body will now work on burning body fat, you have achieved exactly what you want to happen. This effort of breaking the old response of feeding your body food as soon as you get some hunger signals needs to be acknowledged to reinforce this as a positive behavior that you are learning to incorporate, and one that is moving you toward your goal. Saying some words of affirmation like, “Yes, I just helped my body heal”, or “Nice job, I chose to help my body find body fat to burn” are ways you can positively reinforce the behaviors you are learning to use in place of old behaviors. I have worked with clients and community members who have done a little victory dance, or a fist pump, or even colored in a red heart on their calendar--any way to celebrate the steps they are implementing to make new habits and patterns and move toward their goals successfully.

These affirming celebratory reinforcements rely on another important part of behavior change. Emotion generally carries more power of influence than just our thoughts (though our underlying thoughts create our emotional responses). I share this because I often hear community members express frustration that they know so much about what to be doing and the negative consequences of their old behaviors, but just can't seem to follow through, even with all of this knowledge. Keep in mind that much of our eating behaviors are linked to current emotional states and anticipated emotional states when we consume the food. Whether we are feeling bored, scared, angry, frustrated, lonely, or sad, we want to feel "better". Logic doesn't satisfy this desire. So knowing that eating a particular food or at a particular time is going to activate insulin and put you in fat storing mode, often doesn't stand a chance to overcome your desire to feel less lonely for a brief moment. Therefore, the positive emotion that comes from the celebrating of the small steps you are taking helps to influence your emotional state, leaving you less likely to have to turn to old patterns for that effect. This is why mindfully acknowledging positive steps and even telling yourself that you feel good about your choices or behavior is so important.

In the coming videos in this behavioral series, I will share some more specifics about emotional eating, cravings, bingeing, self-sabotage, and other topics. I will also focus on how to transform and optimize your mindset to help you reach your goals. This is definitely another side of the journey we all are undertaking, and I believe a crucial one to experience lasting success.