



Your Mindset: Creating One that Helps With Real Behavior Change

When looking at the process of creating new habits and changing your relationship with food and your body, it is important to address your overall mindset, limiting beliefs, and word choices. One of the books I think everyone could benefit by reading is Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol S. Dweck, PhD. In this highly regarded resource, she reveals how our success in almost any area of our lives can be significantly influenced by the ways in which we think about our abilities and talent. She describes that there are two mindsets, a *growth mindset* and a *fixed mindset*. Developing and implementing a growth mindset is the key to success in accomplishing whatever we strive to achieve. A growth mindset is characterized by: 1) a belief that our abilities can be developed through practice, effort, and dedication; 2) seeing challenges as opportunities to learn from and continue to develop our abilities; 3) curiosity in observing others' success and questioning how to apply this learning; and 4) a willingness to focus on the process of development rather than solely on the outcome. This is a common theme you will encounter with me in our program.

On the contrary, a fixed mindset is characterized by: 1) a belief that our abilities and talents are inherent traits we are either born with or not, and that they cannot be developed; 2) seeing challenges as reasons to accept limits in our abilities; 3) seeing others' success as confirmation that they have abilities/talents that we do not; and 4) a focus on outcome as the only measure of success. I encourage you to pay attention to how you talk to yourself and others about your fasting abilities, challenges you encounter, what successes you see others experiencing, and how you assess success. If you hear fixed mindset messaging, write down how you can reframe them from a more positive growth mindset approach.

Because one of our mind's responsibilities is to give us what it thinks we need and want, we must be very careful about the words and images that we provide it. A few concepts I hear so many people use when it comes to their eating and fasting are statements like "I get to eat today!" or "I can't eat today!". Though these are simple statements, they carry an emotional charge of excitement or frustration. The first encourages many of us to shift into overeating or indulging in problematic foods; and the latter often inspires resistance, feelings of deprivation, and even some panic that triggers our primitive brain to fear that we will starve. Of course, we

all know that this is not the case, but our brain is charged with the task of survival and ancestrally this was threatened by the potential for starvation. So instead of using these simple but emotionally charged statements, I encourage you to use words and images that reinforce that you are using healthy eating and taking breaks from eating to create a well balanced system of healing, rebuilding, and burning excess body fat. Another problematic way to focus on fasting and eating healthily is describing it as difficult, unfair, or unfulfilling. Your brain will hear these descriptions and work to find a way to avoid the tension by getting you to break your fast, eat trigger foods, and likely binge or defy any of the pieces of knowledge you are learning to implement.

Another mindset habit that I find many of us need to revise is our use of food as a “reward” for doing well, accomplishing a goal, or getting through a challenging time. You may even find yourself falling into the habit of “rewarding” yourself for completing your fast or eating well for the week, by overeating or eating what we often refer to as a treat. This is often a learned strategy of bribing or celebrating through eating in ways or choosing foods that actually harm us or interfere with our success. When I say that, it is probably easy to hear that this is no actual “reward”. I encourage you to explore other ways to celebrate or acknowledge your accomplishments to highlight feeling good rather than a pay-off or bribe for taking good care of yourself. Remember, these behaviors are supporting goals you set and outcomes you value, so following through with them and creating your success can be the ultimate reward but needs to be acknowledged along the way.

I also strongly encourage you to reframe the old dieting mentality that so many of us still hold onto, even if not consciously, --that this should be a quick fix or that it is a temporary change. Implementing all of the knowledge you are learning or already possess regarding fasting protocols and strategies, meal timing, and healthy food options, can feel overwhelming and discouraging when you encounter the reality that your mind and body take time to make these changes and to heal. If I could give you any advice and comfort at this moment, it would be to take a deep breath and trust the process. Human nature resists change and you are looking at incorporating a lot of it, so buckle up and reframe how you are looking at the steps forward. You are on a journey, not enacting an event that will miraculously change everything you have learned to do and reinforced for many years. Making changes that are doable and realistic is your best path to reaching your goals. This means you will likely need to break down the knowledge you have gained into more bite-sized segments. Expecting your brain, physiological processes, and life patterns to change rapidly spells frustration and almost guarantees lack of progress for so many of us.

You might be wondering then, “How do I break this down into segments of change I can navigate with success?” I encourage you to think about building new behavior and thought

habits, while you are extinguishing old behavior and thought habits. So rather than making 15 dietary changes or completely overhauling everything overnight, focus on just a couple of important pieces at a time. This will vary depending on where you are in your overall health and weight journey, but a great start would be building the habits of: 1) drinking water throughout the day instead of juice and sweetened beverages, 2) transitioning meals to include whole food protein and fat sources instead of heavily processed foods that are high in carbohydrates and damaging oils, and 3) eliminating snacking or grazing by only eating as part of a meal. This is enough change to stretch you early in your journey without requiring rigid compliance to things that your body and mind are likely not ready to fully embrace. If you are a bit further along in your journey, you may have identified certain foods or eating habits that you know are interfering with your consistently making progress. So you may be ready to focus your behavior changes more specifically. But wherever you are in the process and whatever behavior changes you are addressing, acknowledging that the process takes time is a way to set yourself up for more successful and lasting behavior change, rather than drastic measures you can only endure for a brief period of time. Most of us have tried that, only to succeed briefly and then revert back to the patterns we never actually changed and see our success as fleeting. Your health and weight loss or management is an ongoing journey, not one that you engage for a few months. Truly changing your life as far as your health and weight requires your openness to letting go of old beliefs and habits, while creating new beliefs and habits that support the new you and sustain the success you seek.