

Lesson 17: Limiting Beliefs

Hi, everybody. Welcome to lesson 17, Stopping Binging and Going Off Plan. Many people who come to TFM, come to us with a sense that they may experience food addiction. We chose not to focus a lesson in this masterclass on food addiction, because we are not actually a food addiction program, but there many. And if you truly believe that you have food addiction or have been diagnosed with one, I strongly encourage you to seek support in a program that focuses on treating them.

I wanted to share today's lesson with you, because I think that most of us have certainly learned to abuse food or use it in a problematic way. And this tends to interfere with our health and weight loss journeys. This unhealthy relationship with food might involve a particularly problematic food, binging or overconsuming food or eating mindlessly or too frequently. So I invite you to see if you can take some pointers from today's lesson to help you improve your relationship with food and even eliminate some of the more problematic ways that you've learned to use it.

In today's lesson, I'm going to refer to three different books that I believe can serve as great resources in this part of your journey. As with any book, you may find that it resonates for you or that it doesn't. So, you may want to check out these three and see if there's one that you can relate to more than the others, or one that uses language and concepts that really resonate for you. Or maybe you will enjoy all three of them for each of their unique contributions.

Now, the first book is called Rational Recovery, and it's written by Jack Trimpey. And this is actually a book about alcohol abuse and alcohol recovery. But I think that this book is so amazing and could be useful for so many of us here. If your problematic food behavior is not related to alcohol, you can just substitute in that food or behavior like binging, wherever the book refers to alcohol or alcoholism, et cetera.

If you substitute in someone who binges instead of alcohol, or if you substitute in sugar, instead of alcohol, you'll find that the behaviors fit and learning the approach may help you break the grip these things seem to have on you. Jack Trimpey presents a perspective that much of substance abuse recovery has focused on the underlying causes. They tend to look at what's wrong with you. What trauma have you not healed? Or what limiting beliefs do you hold or habitual behaviors that you've not let go of that cause you to drink, in this book. But here cause you to binge or cause you to eat sugar or whatever the challenge is for you. And he says, this focus on fixing root causes first gets us stuck in a really problematic mindset.

He proposes that instead of feeling the pressure to engage in years of therapy, to understand the underlying reasons why we engage in the behavior or expose all of our past issues, we can change the behavior now by understanding it differently and understanding it differently means that we can recognize the desire to do the behavior such as drink alcohol, eat a problematic



food or binge, that it's really about having an urge, and that we need to learn how to identify that urge and not respond to the urge.

Brain Over Binge written by Kathryn Hanson. She borrows heavily from Rational Recovery. In the book, she describes her history with bulimia and bingeing excessively in incorporating Jack Trimpey's framing her bingeing as being about needing to recognize the urge and not act on the urge to binge, she resolved her binge eating disorder and doesn't binge anymore.

And then there's the third book I want to talk about. And that has Never Binge Again by Glenn Livingston. Now, if you've already been with us in the fasting method community for a while, you know I talk about this book quite a bit. I was introduced to this book by one of our community members and I will always be grateful to her for that recommendation. In this book, he teaches readers to change their bingeing, which he describes as anytime you eat something that is not part of your plan. To change these bingeing behaviors by recognizing where that message is coming from, which he refers to as his inner pig.

Now, for anyone uncomfortable with this reference, he is quick to encourage you to find another image or term to replace pig, but it has to be one that's not something that you have positive feelings toward. These books, each help us to really think about the idea that we have an older part of our brain that is responsible for reflexive activities. It regulates things in our body and helps us to meet our survival needs. It contains the amygdala, which is responsible for our fight or flight mechanism. As you may remember from an early lesson that I did. So this part of our brain is really only responsible for safety, protection, and getting our needs met. And it is tenacious about getting needs met, as you probably already know. So this is kind of like the underside of our brain. It's inside, deep inside, and it's kind of wrapped around like this and the amygdala is right in here.

And then we have this newer cortex, this part around this old primitive brain. You'll probably remember I talked about the prefrontal cortex and that's the part of the cortex that's right up front here. So this old primitive part of our brain, all of the authors that I'm referring to today talk about it in a fairly similar way. They use a little different language or a different reference. For example, Jack Trimpey, he talks about it as it's the animal brain. He calls it the beast quite a bit, but it's the animal brain in his book. Kathryn Hansen, in Brain Over Binge also describes it as the animal brain or our lower brain. This newer part of our brain, our cortex, is the part of our brain that controls voluntary movement, language, decision making, rational thoughts and other things as well. This lower part of our brain, this animal brain, the beast, or as Glenn Livingston calls it, the pig has no ability to make rational decisions and has no role in our voluntary movement.

This is very important. So what this primitive animal brain has to do instead is that it has to convince your cortex, the newer part of your brain to do the actions for it. Glenn Livingston, in Never Binge Again, he talks about how this is pig squealing to get you to do its bidding for it. It wants what it wants, and it wants you to do it now before you have time to engage the human brain and make a better decision. And so it makes this loud pig squealing noise that's hard to ignore. We listen to it and we take action. If the pig says, we need to eat a muffin or we need to

eat now, or we need to binge, we take that step because we see this as coming from part of our brain and that these two parts of our brain are connected.

So if I'm hearing it coming from inside me, it must be from me. I must be flawed or broken or wired incorrectly if I'm hearing this. Both Glenn Livingston and Jack Trimpey really do a good job, emphasizing how the beast or pig works in such a way that it convinces you that you won't survive without obtaining that thing or doing this behavior. So think about it. If you have an urge to binge or an urge to eat highly palatable toxic food, that part of your brain, that beast is telling you, you have to do this. You have to have this food. Now, if this animal brain learns that you don't respond to its demands, it learns all kinds of different ways to convince you. It might tell it to you very nicely.

It'll say something like, look, I know, you've had a really rough day, you deserve something that's comforting. Go ahead, eat those cookies. You can worry about fasting tomorrow. So it might sound really gentle. It doesn't sound like it's being abusive or misleading or deceiving, but it actually is. The goal is for you to learn, to separate out these two parts of your brain, the higher brain versus the lower brain. The true self versus the primitive self. The beast from our human brain. Although we do have some information coming from this kind of rudimentary part of our brain, what we have to do is learn to separate them out and recognize them. Be in our rational brain and be able to see these urges to eat this particular food or to eat a certain amount of food or to eat while we're fasting. It's an urge that is being communicated to us by this other part of our brain. And this part of our brain cannot make us move to get the food.

So it has to motivate the thinking part of our brain to do that. And most of us have, we've spent 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years listening to the beast or the pig squeal and doing what it asks and thinking that this is somehow our weakness. It's just us. It must be. I really don't want to lose weight, or I really don't care that I'm diabetic and I'm getting scared about it. We think there's something wrong with us that we keep doing these habits and behaviors, and make these decisions that are misaligned with our actual goals. So separating it out. You have your rational brain. This is the true you, but it gets messages from the other part of the brain that will certainly steer it off course. Now this primitive brain is very instinctively driven part of the brain that wants what it wants right now and makes it threatening if it doesn't get, it does not actually have any care of future consequences, just immediate relief.

So if your rational brain says, oh, I know that eating that makes my glucose go high for the next day and a half. The primitive part of the brain says, I don't care. You need to get us to the kitchen. Go get it. Go get it now. All three of these authors write about the importance of figuring out how to separate out this part of our brain, naming it something different, identifying it differently, recognizing that if it's telling you to eat the things that are problematic for you, or if it's you to binge, that you have to be in your human brain to decide to act other than how it's communicating to you or commanding you. This primitive brain will watch for opportunities to get you to act as it wants.

It will lie. It will deceive you. It will remind you of your most vulnerable fears or concerns. And if it succeeds in getting you to do what it wants, which it probably has been doing, it lights up the

reward centers in your brain, further reinforcing these behaviors and making the next steps even more challenging. Now I want to be very clear. I don't think that we should totally discount why we get these urges, but in the moment when they're happening, understanding where that urge came from or why or thinking, do I really have to resolve this relationship with my mom in order to change this? I don't think that's our best use of our energy at this time. And I'm biased because of my time as a psychologist. But I do think we all would benefit from continuing to understand what are our limiting beliefs?

Can we work on changing them? I also believe in the power of positive thinking and healing, and healing trauma. Not just stuffing it down or ignoring it. And I don't think that we have to wait to change our eating behaviors until we've resolved all of those things.

Now, two of these authors talk about that as one of their concerns with the kind of traditional addictions approach. Therapists and treatment programs often focus on healing the inner wounds first, telling you that you don't have control over this. You're powerless to this. And that there is something wrong in you. And once you can accept that, then you can work on managing it. These authors really talk about how their approach is that it's not about managing it, it's about really separating it out and recognizing, that's not me. That's a different part of my brain that needs me to respond this way to get its relief.

I don't have to do that. Glenn Livingston and talks about not listening to that pig squeal. Recognizing it, but not acting on it. Recognizing when I say, "Oh, those cookies are on sale and this would be a really good time to get those." That's not my rational brain. That's the pig telling me that. That part of our brain doesn't really care for us to succeed. It wants us to survive and thinks that it needs whatever our substance of abuse is in order to survive. Our animal brain does not think about consequences or consider our long term goals when it's demanding something. It's kind of like a tantruming child. When you have a whole long grocery list that you need to get, and they throw themselves to the floor of the grocery store when you walk away from the candy aisle. No awareness of your goals, no awareness of your needs, just focusing on what they want.

When we get super stressed out, distracted, or sleep deprived, this primitive part of our brain is likely getting pre activated because this is its opportunity to sneak attack while we're less able to decipher where the brain messages are coming from. So we need to understand this. We need to understand that it is not me, that isn't my real self care need. It's this old faulty message. And I'm the one who can do something about it. Only our rational brain, our cortex actually has reasoning abilities. And it's the only part that controls our voluntary motor activity. So if you catch yourself saying, I don't really know what happens. I just find myself standing in the kitchen with an open cupboard. That's because you've learned to listen to that beast. And this is the process where you need to work to interrupt, to allow time to engage the cortex and make the decision from the part of you that does care about your goals, not the part that wants immediate gratification.

As you can tell, I love these books, and I think they can serve as powerful keys to helping you navigate your journey and diminish your struggles with problematic food behaviors. I think it's

helpful for all of us to dig in and do some deep work. I wouldn't have become a psychologist for all those years if I didn't believe that. But I also think that this tool can be super helpful. Remembering that I don't have to have all my relational patterns worked out to recognize I'm having an urge to eat junk food. And I don't have to listen to that urge. It's plain and simple. I think it would be important later that I might go back and work on some of these relational patterns, but I don't need to have those resolved in order to use this fairly simple strategy to stop myself from engaging in those self destructive behaviors. But I think using these concepts could be really helpful for all of us.

I want to talk a little bit more about something else that Glenn Livingston talks about in his book, *Never Binge Again*. The idea of giving ourselves some food rules. And I know oftentimes when I say rules, some people start to tense up, maybe roll their eyes and distance a little bit. Not me. I don't like rules, but these food rules, I think, are really important tools that we all can use. If you think back to my lesson on habit change, I talked about how making habits that you're working on part of your identity makes the goals and the things that you're working on ways that you want to live your life. This also makes them stick and makes you follow through on them more. So if I see myself and want to see myself as someone who eats whole food, unprocessed food, maybe low carb or whatever it looks like for me, then that has to be my identity.

And then I build the habits that support that. So making some rules that make that doable and helped me to avoid the things that take me off that path is really an important step. So let's say, for example, I do really well with eating my whole food, unprocessed. Everything that I buy at the grocery store is healthy for me. But most days when I'm on my way home from work, I stop and I get a diet soda. And then I'm in the convenience store, a gas station, where they have bags of chips and cookies and protein bars and treats. And I grab those. But I don't buy problematic food at the grocery store. So my meals are all really good, healthy food. The behavior of buying those food like substances in those convenience stores or gas stations or whatever, that's really incongruent with my identity as someone who eats whole food, who eats healthy.

Most of us have learned to justify this problematic food decision because maybe it's convenient or well, I have to stop and get gas anyway. In order to change this, we can make food rules. Like, I never buy food outside of the grocery store. Or making it more specific. I don't buy food like substances when I go to gas stations, convenience stores or pharmacies. But setting some food rules that set parameters for you that make it really clear is what I'm really focusing on. If I say, I really think I want to eat this right now. I know right away, that's the pig voice. Because my rule is I don't eat that. So the pig is going to try and convince me it's okay. This would be a good time to do this. Now, some of the rules that Glenn Livingston talks about are rules that begin with kind of, I never. So I never eat that particular item, or I never eat past 8:00 PM.

Some rules can be always things that you do and want to do at all times. Like I always start my day with a glass of water. So those are some fairly common ways to think about rules. Always and nevers. But then there are going to be some rules that require a little more thinking, because to say that I always do this, or I never do this is a little bit too extreme. So you may need to have some exceptions. Like, I only eat two meals a day, unless I'm on bake and then I can eat three, but no snacks. So maybe thinking of it is that I need to have a kind of a

contingency plan for special events. Or if I say something like, I fast three days a week, unless I'm on vacation or visiting friends or family. And then I make adaptations to my schedule that are still on plan. Being specific enough to recognize I can't just make the rules loosey goosey.

I always do this well, unless I don't really want to, then I don't. That's going to get us into trouble. And a lot of us probably already have some rules like that. We say we don't do it, but anytime an exception comes up, we do it pretty willingly. I encourage you to think about, are there some rules that you could put into place for yourself? It's important to state them clearly and specifically. Some people might make a rule like, I don't eat anything out of a package or a bag. Sounds like a pretty useful rule. Now for me, that's a little confusing. Do you mean you don't eat anything that comes out of a package or a bag or you don't physically eat it out of the package or the bag? Because, that animal part in my brain wants to find a workaround around that rule.

So making them clear and specific is really important. Glenn Livingston talks about this a lot in his podcast episodes, if you want to listen to those, and really helps people to narrow down their rules. Because some of us say things like, I won't eat anything. That's sweet. Again, sounds like a pretty good rule. And then you might catch yourself or someone else might say, wait, wait, wait, wait, sweet things is a really big category. Do you mean you don't eat sugar laden desserts? Do you mean fruit? Do you mean sodas? What do you mean when I say I'm not going to eat sweet things? Maybe you're someone who's going to allow berries a couple times a week. Well, you can't just say I'm not going to eat sweet things then. So making your rules really specific. I guarantee you, if you have some general rules that you make for yourself, the pig, the animal brain, the lower brain, the beast, whatever you want to call it, is going to thank you for making those rules really unclear.

Because it will say, what I mean, you said you weren't going to eat sweet things. This is just fruit. It's going to find the loopholes, the workaround. It's going to find to wiggle out of your rules. And it's going to look for ways to catch you up in your rules and convince you otherwise. It's a little like a teenager. They know what they want and they know to keep asking and pestering you and keep upping the ante on how annoying they're request can be. And they come up with all kinds of ways to convince you it's okay, all kinds of promises of what they'll do over the weekend to make up for it, et cetera. Something that I want to encourage you to consider is that much of the eating and fasting behaviors that you're developing are fairly new for you. And therefore may be more difficult to remember or enforce when your primitive brain is acting up.

You might hear a thought process inside your head like, I'm having an urge to do something. I've gotten reinforced for doing this. And I've gotten some relief when I do this. But then I feel bad afterward. I don't like the consequences, but I don't feel like I can do anything to change it. But we absolutely can change it. The inspiring thing about Kathryn Hanson's book, Brain Over Binge, she talks about that she doesn't even have urges anymore to binge. So it's not as though she has to keep fighting that urge forever. It gets kind of extinguished when you're not reactivating it. Habits extinguished when we're not reinforcing them. Best way to get a habit going is to repeat the behavior over and over again. And likewise, the best way to stop a habit is to stop the behavior. Stop reinforcing it.

The last thing I want to share in this lesson is about the importance of your recovery strategies when you do go off plan. Because we're not perfect, but instead human, and struggle at times, it's important that you have a mindset to address recovering from going off track. First and foremost, I think it helps to not pathologize yourself. I think so many of us struggle with these things because we feel like we're to blame. We're smart people. Why do we keep doing these same things? I find that setting your mind on recovery, rather than perfection, is key. I encourage you to think about how you address going off course in other ways, besides eating. For example, let's say you're driving on a 300 mile trip, and at about 125 mile, you feel your vehicles start to shake and bounce. And you realize that you have a flat tire. You have to stop, pull off the road and you can't really drive back to your starting point because your destination's really important to you.

But you can't get there if you stay off course with a flat tire. What do you do? You fix the tire. Or you contact an automotive service to come and repair it. But what most of us have learned to do when it comes to our eating behavior, when we go off course, food selection wise, or having a fasting aid and feeling like eating is that we go back to our car and we get a giant knife, and then we come around and we slash the remaining three tires. Now, we can't make any progress. You're left feeling stuck. What a defeating feeling. But this can be averted by focusing on how to get back on track, doing the necessary repair and getting back in the car and moving forward. You're not going to be perfect in this journey, but my hope is that you will give yourself the grace to face challenges and correct course whenever needed without shame or blame and giving in to defeat.

Now the action points for today's lesson. Number one. Identify specific strategies your primitive brain uses to get you to act on its desires. So what does a pig squeal do here? What does that animal brain say to you? What is the language it uses? What are the excuses? How does it command things? And number two. Set two to three firm food rules or parameters that you will follow to help you avoid the impulses to binge, or to go off your plan.

I'd like to invite you to please feel free to process any of this lesson in one of my weekly community meetings. And those are at three o'clock Pacific Time and six o'clock Eastern Time. Or in our private thread in the community form. And don't forget if you haven't already registered for the last Q&A session of this masterclass that takes place tomorrow, you can still do that. And you also can send it in your questions to masterclass@thefastingmethod.com. Take good care everybody. Bye bye.