



Lesson 12: Why We Self-Sabotage

Hi, everybody. Day 12 of the Healthy Mindset Masterclass. I am really enjoying having those of you who have been active in the forum, sharing your experiences, sharing your questions, supporting each other. It's been great to see over the past week and a half, and I hope it continues over these next few days.

Today, we also have our last question and answer session. So, I hope you're able to log into that. And if it doesn't work for you based on time zones or your timing of your schedule, that's okay. It will be recorded and will be made available in the masterclass section on the website and app.

Today, we are going to talk about self-sabotage. One of the biggest reasons we created the masterclass. Over time, with The Fasting Method, this is the key that most people I know have identified why they don't make the progress they want to make, or don't feel as successful as they would like to feel. They identify that they sabotage themselves and then they get really frustrated with themselves for doing this. And it just keeps kind of a vicious cycle going. So, let's talk about it. I also did a healthy habits challenge about this a few weeks ago. So, if you have a chance, you may want to go back and watch those videos as well.

When we engage in behaviors that actually interfere with us reaching our goals, it doesn't move us forward. It actually sets us back, puts us further away from our intended goals. Self-sabotage is universal. We all do it. You are not broken, flawed or weak because you self-sabotage. That is a misbelief that a lot of us have, and it actually sets us up for more struggle and more self-sabotage, because we think we are just weak or just somehow broken, because we can't make these behaviors stick.

So, what I'm going to talk about today is a little bit more about why we do it. It sometimes confuses people, because they are good at following through on things. They're able to complete goals and tasks in other areas of their lives, but maybe not in a couple of specific ones. Clearly, many of you came to this masterclass because with your food habits and your fasting habits, you're struggling with self-sabotage. But people also struggle with self-sabotage in their relationships, whether that be familial or romantic relationships, in their careers, house care, paying bills, those kinds of things, maybe someone has a goal to run a marathon and they keep sabotaging their efforts. So, we see it in all areas of life. We even see highly successful people who self-sabotage.

One of the big things I hear people in our community and other places say, because they get so frustrated that they don't understand, "Why do I do these self-sabotaging behaviors? Why do I interfere with my goals when I know what I want to achieve? I know what my goal is. It's a great goal. And I have all of the knowledge I need. I have the resources. Why do I do this?" Again, if you've been thinking this, please, don't get down on yourself about this. Again, it's totally normal human behavior, but it is something that can be improved.

Having the knowledge, and having motivation, having a clear why, a clear goal, is not always enough. We self-sabotage for a variety of reasons. Let's look back at some of the things we've already discussed that can help us understand why we self-sabotage.

First, I want to remind you that our brain has a primary goal and function to keep us alive. And to keep us alive, one of its main tasks is to avoid threats or what it perceives as danger. So, avoid pain or threat. And secondly then, to achieve pleasure. Oftentimes when it comes to eating foods and eating problematic foods, a lot of us think that it's really driven by pleasure and that we seek pleasure. Most of us really are not that hedonistic. We do have some of that in us naturally, but mostly it's done to avoid the negative, the discomfort. So, not having that food that we want is a discomfort that we want to escape.

So, I think of it this way, if you think of the pain and pleasure ends of the continuum and what we're seeking to survive, I think of avoidance of pain as surviving. It really is kind of a low bar, low level of survival, just having basic needs and avoiding threats. Then, the pleasure principle is really more about thriving, and our bigger goals make this more challenging.

And the challenge for a lot of us with this is that to thrive means to avoid things in this moment that will help us do better in the future. So, a lot of our goals are to feel better, to look better in our clothes, or wear a bathing suit and look good in our bathing suit, or increase mobility, ability to run long ways, whatever we're working on health-wise, that is the thriving part. And our quest for pleasure often interferes with this.

Whereas our seeking to avoid danger or threat is a little less problematic for us, because we focus more on the immediate, but this gets in the way for us, because those things that we seek in the immediate time are generally things that harm us in the future. They help us to avoid discomfort in the current time. So, again, this pain-pleasure balance becomes really complicated.

Having something that we enjoy to eat now, avoids pain now, but creates pain in the future. Having something that we enjoy eating now creates pleasure now and creates pain in the future. So, they're kind of juxtaposed in that way, really problematic for our brain to really work through that difference.

I think this pleasure and pain difference is also important when we think about reasons why we give up some of our health or weight goals along the way, and self-sabotage. And it might sound something like this, and you might be able to relate to this, your goal is to lose 50 pounds, you believe that your life will feel better, your body will feel better, you'll have more mobility, you'll like your clothes more. It has all these positive things that we seek. But there's part of our brain that says, "You know what? We've been doing it at this weight for a while. We've got clothes, we're okay. We can and stay here." So, we can live and survive here, and thriving would mean reaching a higher level of success, but that will mean more difficult choices. Hope that that makes sense about how that pleasure and pain, seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain, how that really influence us as far as self-sabotage.

Also remember that our brain prefers things that are known to it. It really does not seek novelty. It can do novel thoughts and seek novelty, but seeking novelty, new things, requires more energy. And especially when we are tired or under stress, our brain will switch over and use neurons that require less energy to fire. And that will be things that we already know, already do, that are already habit, because those seeking novelty require more energy.

Now, this also helps to explain why do we start off well, when we first start a new habit, when you first started fasting, or you first started to change how you were eating, you had a lot of momentum and energy for it. And then as you went, you may have lost some of that. This again goes back partly to our brain. Our brain was doing okay with the novelty at first, but that requires more energy, and we kind of lose that focus, especially during difficult times.

There are so many possible reasons to understand why you self-sabotage. And we all do some pieces of most of these, but you may hear some that really stand out to you as you listen today. Some of the reasons that we self-sabotage are about our thoughts and ways that we think and feel about ourselves and the tasks at hand.

One of the big causes of self-sabotage is low self-esteem. And I know we've all been hearing a lot about self-esteem for many years, but it really is an important factor here. If we don't see ourselves as having worth, being worthy of the goal, worthy of the effort, or if we don't see ourselves as having the abilities to achieve what we're working toward, we are going to be more likely to self-sabotage. We see those goals as less obtainable for us. And if we can't attain it, why put in the effort?

So, a lot of this is also influenced by our past experience. And many of us here have dieted before, we've lost significant amounts of weight before, or we've lost a little bit of weight before and then regained it. So, this unfortunately has served as more reason to self-

sabotage, because we have more evidence that we can't succeed at this. So, this obviously has damaged our self-esteem.

It also has helped create the next cause of limiting beliefs. Some of our limiting beliefs are things we internalize by listening to others and watching others. And I talked about this early on in the first couple of days. But let's say, for example, you heard your mom talk about how difficult it was for her to lose weight and how miserable she was while she was trying to lose weight. You probably internalize some of that, or you internalize other messages about struggles and difficulties and abilities. And you've now taken those in as being facts or just realities to deal with.

These also could be contributed to from our past experiences. Let's say you didn't start dieting until maybe your 20s or 30s, but you've done a number of them, even though it wasn't a young experience, a childhood experience, you could have created some limiting beliefs since that time.

Another big reason, and this is the one that I think of the most when I think about self-sabotage, it's the concept of cognitive dissonance. It's when we hold two things in our mind that are really in contrast to each other, and they're usually a belief and a behavior, or a belief and a decision that needs to be made. So, if I believe that I can't succeed at losing weight, but I have a fasting and eating plan set up for the week, that creates a tension inside of me, because what I'm trying to do is incongruent with my belief about what I can do. And when we experience cognitive dissonance, we really have one choice, and that is we have to change one of them.

So, either we have to change the belief, or we have to change the behavior. Some of you have heard me share this story before, if you've been in the community for a while, but in the beginning of my career, I was a middle school teacher. It was a tough job. And I had this eighth grader who came to my class every day and she didn't participate, she didn't bring materials. It was a writing class, our curriculum at that time was very writing-based. She wouldn't turn in her work, even the assignments that you just had to put your name on them, she wouldn't turn them in, and she failed my class, every marking period. And it just kind of broke my heart.

One day, I saw her in class and she was writing, writing, and writing. So, I approached her and I asked if I could read what she was writing or if she could read it to me, and she did, and I gave so much positive feedback. I said, "Wow, this is great. You are a skilled writer. I didn't know. This is great." And I thought she got kind of excited. And the next day she came back to class, she didn't bring her stuff, she didn't bring a pencil.

To me, this was a great example of cognitive dissonance. That feedback that I gave her was so incongruent with how she saw herself as being unable to write, unable to succeed, she

had already kind of set a path that she was going to fail and me giving that feedback was so incongruent with that, that she couldn't maintain it. So, she had to change either her self-belief or the behavior. So, she changed the behavior back to her old ways.

So, I'm really just trying to emphasize here that cognitive dissonance is a big motivator for self-sabotage. When we have more than one competing desire or need, the brain struggles even more. So, when we have, I really want this food, I know this food is really bad for me, and getting this food is really difficult. We have three difficult things to try and kind of hold together, and this is often where we will self-sabotage. We will give into the easier of those options. And that often is to engage in the behavior that sets us back.

Another big motivator of self-sabotage is fear of change. So, as we are trying to change behavior and making behavior and habit changes, our brain is holding back a little bit. Our brain gets a little on edge about this, and it would prefer to keep things the way it already knows. Interestingly, this isn't something bad that our brain is doing, but if you think about evolutionarily, why would our brain do this? New things, so novelty, new situations, exploring, learning new things, to the brain, means opening oneself up to risk.

So, again, go back to ancestors, going outside of the cave meant the possibility of running into a lion or a bear, whatever, a threat, not having food, being separated from your group or your tribe. So, change is just experience as kind of a threat to the brain. And here we are, modern times, working on all of this self-growth and changing things, and our brain resists that, at least to some degree, why do we self-sabotage? What motives it?

And there are a lot of ways that we have gotten into the habit of thinking that create great opportunities for self-sabotage and these are all cognitive distortions. So, they are problematic thinking patterns that we've learned to do. We learn to do them as a coping mechanism or a way to survive in a difficult environment.

These cognitive distortions are things that you're probably familiar with, but I'll go through them. So, one is, if we have a perfectionistic way of thinking, if we expect perfection from ourselves and from others, this leaves us very little room for not succeeding, not doing everything 100%, being very tightly bound around our boundaries and around what we expect of ourselves.

And then also that leaves us very susceptible to a crash when we don't meet that perfectionist standard, which we are not perfect. We're human, we're imperfect. But when we hold a perfectionistic expectation, it's easily not met. And then that lowers our self-esteem and creates more reason to self-sabotage.

Another cognitive distortion that we often make, we over generalize things. So because something happened once, we believe that will happen again, because we saw someone

else do this, we believe this is how it will work for us. So, we over-apply information to all situations. So, if we say something like, "Well, last year at Thanksgiving, I ate all food, that was off my plan." And then we just assume we're going to do that again today.

Let's say, for example, you have been used to eating desserts and treats and maybe some more problematic foods for you on holidays. And you have some holidays coming up. And to over generalize, you would say, "Look, I always do this. I've always done this before. That's what's involved in holidays for me." So, the assumption is that you'll keep doing it. So, you're overgeneralizing, it's happened before, it will happen again.

Another cognitive distortion that a lot of us do, and that is mind reading, believing that we have the ability to predict what other people are thinking about us. Now, some of us might experience this around our weight. We think we know how people see us. We think we know what their assessment of our body is. We think that if they're looking at us during a meal, that they're thinking negative things about what we're doing or how we're eating, and this gives us rise to feel negatively about ourselves, to feel incongruent with our behaviors and self-sabotage.

I already talked some about limiting beliefs, but they are cognitive distortions, and really important ones to work on. Many of us have an internal saboteur. So, an internal voice that is looking for ways to sabotage us. So, we have this internal voice that tells us we can't succeed, that coaxes us into doing certain behaviors. But mostly because it undermines our sense of self.

All-or-nothing thinking is a very important cognitive distortion that a lot of us struggle with. I had planned to do a 42-hour fast. I ate something a little while ago. Now, I might as well eat whatever I want, because I already blew it. I already broke my fast. I failed and I might as well do this. But if we can see it as more, look, I broke my fast early, I ate some healthy food and now I'm going to keep going with my good plan, that doesn't need to hold us back. But when we get caught up in that all-or-nothing thinking, we self-sabotage, because we feel like we've blown it now.

Two other very common cognitive distortions are focusing, dwelling on negative thoughts. So, how difficult it is while I'm fasting, how much I miss eating with everyone, just focusing on the negatives, even focusing on negatives about myself, my thighs are so big, can't wear the clothes I want to, just focusing on all those negative things.

Discounting the positive, and where I hear that come up in this community is when people talk about some progress, some steps forward. And what they talk about is that almost like it's not good enough progress because they had help or it was easy because they did this, but it's not always going to be like that. They discount the fact that they've achieved positive things. And I've talked before about this, as far as word choices, even when we say

things like, "I only did a 24-hour fast," we're discounting the positive of that, "I only did 18/6s this week." We're making that sound like it's not positive. So how does that help motivate my brain? It doesn't. And it will help me self-sabotage over and over.

Another one that a lot of us do is fortune telling, a little bit like the mind reading, but this is believing that we can kind of predict what's going to happen in the future. And I hear sometimes people, they almost say this in a what if way, "If I do this, then this will happen. If I eat this, then I'll eat more. If I fast and break my fast at this time, then this will happen."

Now, unfortunately, they almost never fortune tell that positive things are going to happen. They generally fortune tell negative things. So, again, how would this motivate our brain to keep doing the challenging steps that we're asking it to do? It doesn't, it says, "Well, if the result is going to be something difficult, or painful, stressful, I'll stop here."

Personalizing, and I would say even over-personalizing. So, let's say, for example, you go to the office and a couple of people walk by you and they don't talk to you, to personalize that, to start making sense of it as, that must mean I'm unpopular, they must be mad at me. Making any negative things that happen, or you perceive that might be negative as being something about you, people's behavior often has actually little to do with us and much more about their own situation and what they're experiencing at that time. So, personalizing can make us feel lower, shakier and can make our motivation even more wobbly.

And then the last one in this category is really catastrophizing, one of my favorite words. So, this is where we take an event or we take something and we blow it out of proportion. We make it into a catastrophe. Your boss says, "Hey, I'd like to talk with you after lunch." You catastrophize it, this means, "I'm going to be let go." Or we not only just overgeneralize, but we blow it up into having really bad meanings.

And we do this a lot with fasting, I think, when people say things like, "I plan to do two 48-hour fasts this week, I did a 24. Now, I'm going to gain back all of the weight I've lost." They went from one fast being short to suddenly they're going to regain all of their weight, that is catastrophizing.

So, these things lead us to self-sabotage because they tell our brain things are not going well, they can't go well, I can't do this. And as you remember from the first couple of days, when I talked about the paradigm shift and the self-talk, our brain is listening to that. And if we're telling it that what we're working on is impossible, it won't work for it. It will help ease us out of it actually. So, self-sabotage walks right in.

Self-sabotage is also really driven by two primary fears, or we can kind of conceptualize it this way. And the two I would have you think about are the fear of failure and the fear of

success. Sometimes, when you think of doing a new thing, you might be focused on the potential for failure. I think of this as the more common of the two, that we worry about the failure and think of the success as something we consciously worry about less, but I'm going to talk about how I think it actually plays a big role in self-sabotage.

So, in general, when we think of fear of failure, influencing us to self-sabotage, I would think of it in a couple of ways. One is that we take ownership of the outcome. And many of us struggle with a lot of things, because our mind requires a large sense of control. Now, sense of control is not a negative thing. I'm not talking about our perceived being a controlling person or over-controlling, but it's natural for us to want to have control. Our brain seeks that actually.

In this case, when we fear failure as a possibility, we look at it as, "Listen, I'm not really sure I can lose this weight. I'm not really sure I can resolve this diabetes diagnosis." That feels a little threatening. Our brain does not like, again, the unknown. It doesn't like the possibility that something might not work, that it's put effort into. So, we think, in some way, "Well, I would rather know that it didn't work because I didn't do the necessary steps."

Now, unfortunately, we often say afterward, "Oh, it's my fault. I didn't do this." So, again, that makes us feel worse about ourselves, but there's part of us that feels almost a little relief that we owned the outcome rather than leaving it up to chance that, "Maybe this strategy really will work for me." That is scary to the brain to have to just kind of have faith and hold onto this belief that something is possible.

What we tend to do is we tend to do some ego protection. We would rather say, "I didn't win that game because I didn't practice enough," versus maybe having to say, "My skill level isn't as matched to that opponent." So, it would be easier for us to kind of protect ourselves rather than have to own that something wasn't accessible to us, or that we maybe struggled to do it.

Also, to avoid shame or embarrassment. If I say, "I know I'm supposed to be fasting and I know eating these foods is better for me, but I've been eating a lot of these things and I'm okay with that." We might be doing that to protect ourselves so that, again, we don't find out that some other outcome was possible or that we couldn't achieve it. And we don't have to feel shame or embarrassment.

Now, my hope is that we would all start to practice not feeling shame and embarrassment about this anyway, and letting ourselves feel empowered to take that risk. But that's a big leap, and our brain tries to protect us from that. So, self-sabotage incurs.

The last piece of today's talk about why we self-sabotage is the fear of success. Again, for a lot of people on the surface, this makes no sense. I know my goals, I have good goals. Why

would I possibly not want to achieve those? There are reasons why our brain and our patterns of thinking actually do fear success, even though it's something that we really want.

For many of us, we don't necessarily believe we are worthy of the success. Again, if we have limiting beliefs that tell us that we are less than, not enough, or something negative, getting close to goal starts to rub up against that in an uncomfortable way. For some of us not... If we don't believe in our own abilities enough, we also might experience the imposter syndrome, where we think that our success is not going to happen, and more likely people will finally realize that we're not able to do what they think we are.

Most of us are seeking things in our goals that we believe are going to make us happy, but that's a big unknown. And for many of us, being happy is an unknown thing. As we've talked about a number of times now, our brain tries to avoid the unknown, so this creates some tension.

Now, one of the things that I have seen in our community of reasons why success might actually throw people into some self-sabotage. One is that success may mean I have to get to know myself differently. I've known myself as someone who is 300 pounds. That's how I know how to think of myself. I know how to navigate the world at that weight. What if I weigh 175? I don't know that person. I don't know how I will navigate life in that body. And it feels so almost foreign to us, that feels threatening to the brain and the brain would rather slow that down or stop that process from happening. So, self-sabotage.

Another way I see this working in our community is that sometimes the goal, if it's related to weight loss, it triggers some old trauma responses, if someone has any negative, maybe any sexual abuse history, or trauma, that they learned that their body either was not their own, or they learned that it got attention that made things unsafe or uncomfortable for them.

So, for some people at this stage in life to go through a big transition and change how they look in their body can mean getting some additional attention, that maybe for some people would feel like positive attention, but for some of us may feel threatening. So, any type of sexual energy, or flirting, or something like that, might trigger old kind of trauma responses if that had ever been used against us in the past.

On the surface, people always think, "I want to get there. I have so many good thoughts about being in that body." But there's part of our mind that's resisting it. So, if you notice that you're sabotaging a lot, I do encourage you to check that out and see if there might be some things that you actually resist or fear based on what would this success look like.

For some people, I also think success means, "I am going to have to keep working on this then." Let's say my goal is to lose 100 pounds and I work hard to lose 100 pounds, what will life be then? How will I have to work to maintain that? And that might sound a little bit overwhelming or daunting. Again, I know it may sound strange that fear of success could hold us back, but I see it quite often. And I think it's a lot more natural than we think.

Tomorrow, we're going to talk a little bit more about some strategies, some things you can do to interrupt your self-sabotage. I'm also going to be putting some handouts in the masterclass for you. So, you can do worksheets or do some journaling on some specific topics to help you with this. This is a skill that we're going to have to practice for quite a while. It's not going to be one that you can do once or twice and change.

Remember that most of our habits of thought and behavior habits are longstanding. We've done them for a long time, and to stop our self-sabotage, we're going to have to really unravel them and build new ways of thinking and new ways of behaving. So, it's going to take a lot of practice. So, tomorrow we'll go over more of that. I hope to hear from you in the forum, take great care and I'll see you tomorrow for day 13. Bye, everybody.