

The Fasting Method #148 - Member Transformation: Mona Boss

Megan [00:00:06] Before we get started with today's episode, I would like to quickly read you our podcast disclaimer.

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[00:01:13] All right. And now we'll get started with today's episode.

Terri [00:01:19] So, welcome back to The Fasting Method podcast. This is Dr. Terri Lance and I'm very excited to be doing this episode because this is a transformation story episode, which everyone always loves. I'm really excited about this one because this is a transformation story that I got to be a part of, kind of, earlier on, and now I'm reconnecting. So I'm very excited to get to hear the in-between parts and anything else that is going to be filled in here. So, without further ado, I'm going to introduce my lovely guest today, Mona Boss, who has been with us since IDM, originally, and then into TFM, and I was very fortunate to get to work with her for a bit as a coach. So, I'm really excited about this. So, welcome Mona. How are you doing today?

Mona [00:02:11] Oh, thank you Terri. I'm very honored to be here today. I'm excited. I'm a little nervous, but I'm excited.

Terri [00:02:18] Hopefully you'll find that, pretty soon, it's just you and I talking, and all those nerves will go away. So, Mona, you and I, I didn't even go back and look, but it's been a couple of years, really, I think, since we had been in contact and since you were coming to groups and things, and I got to see you often in the Community. So I wondered-- lots of pieces and places where you could start with this, but you could start at the beginning and kind of walk us through how you got into that part of your journey, and then the reconnection phase, or wherever makes more sense for you to start.

Mona [00:02:53] Okay. Well, like you mentioned, I started off with IDM and Megan as my first coach. I've had a few of you [laughter] and it's been great. And that was back about seven years ago. At that time, I was pre-diabetic and very overweight still, but I had lost some weight but it wasn't going very fast, very happy with that. So I got into learning everything I could about IDM at the time (well, TFM now) and started-- at first, I kind of did it like a diet like all the other 200 diets I'd done previously, but I had this amazing coach who kept saying to me, "We need to treat this more as a therapeutic behavior or treat it like your medicine." And that is something that has stuck with me for all these years is that it's not about changing just your body shape, it was about reversing the high blood sugars that I was having. It was about dropping weight and really transforming my life in general, changing the way I looked at food, the way I looked at fasting. You know, and I went very quickly from a 12 A1C to a 6, and that was probably within the first three months. I

managed to get off any type of type two diabetes medication at that time and just kind of coasted along for a couple of years. I worked with different coaches, worked on the emotional part, worked on the eating part, started to do better, you know, longer fasts in between. And things just started to roll off, literally, in the weight change. The body transformation happened, the blood sugar transformation happened, and all was good. Then life got busy, a lot of stressors in my life. My father was very sick. I went and lived with him and for 14 (I think it was 14) weeks to be with him until his passing moment. So I became a nurse [laughter], although I'm not a nurse in any way, shape, or form. So things like that that occurred in my life, lots of other things like I mentioned before.

[00:04:57] A lot of things happened all at once, and at that time I just decided that I would slip away from TFM just because I didn't have the time to commit to the Community, and I figured I would just not be part of a membership at this time while I was dealing with other things. But I will say, even though I walked away for a short period (well, two years), I continued and took everything I'd learned from TFM with me. Some of the tools that I first got were like not snacking in between meals, and that was the first thing I started doing was three meals a day, and I did that for about four or five weeks. Then I started to change what I was eating. And that was a huge thing for me because I had been in the bodybuilding world a little bit, worked in a gym, and the focus was eating five or six times a day. So it was a big transformation to go from five or six meals a day to three. So I did that and cut out all the snacking, and that was the beginning of the weight starting to come off. Then I started to add the 24-hour-- I went right away into 24-hour fast. I didn't do the 18 or 16 at that time, just jumped right in three days a week, and I probably did that for six or eight weeks. Then I would up it to 36 and so forth and so forth. And that's when things really started to happen for me.

Terri [00:06:17] So, Mona, if I'm understanding that was really kind of the initial part of your-- you know, this phase of your journey and working with us at TFM and being part of the Community. And then-- I don't know where you were as far as kind of reaching goal, if you felt like you had kind of completed the therapeutic part, or did that continue even after you left coming to meetings and things like that?

Mona [00:06:49] I probably didn't do as much therapeutic. When I think of therapeutic, and I may be wrong in this, but I think of more of the 42s, the 48s, and the once-a-month longer fasts, and such. I stopped doing those, mostly because I couldn't stand the emotions that I felt when I fasted. Even doing a 24 at that time would just bring me to some emotional state that I couldn't deal with. So I stuck to 18/6 for a long time, and pretty much, still, like even before I came back for two years. Not every day, mostly Monday to Friday because it was easy, and two meals a day. I have lived on two meals a day, with the exception of the odd brunch on the weekend, for seven years I have lived that lifestyle. Very little snacking in between, again, with the odd situation where we're camping with grandkids and I might, you know, have a snack or something, but generally stuck to the no snacking between meals, finishing eating by 7 p.m. at night, those kind of things. Those tools that I took out of the TFM toolbox were with me the entire time.

[00:08:01] You're probably wondering, why have I come back? Well, during that time I was off all type two diabetic medication for the period of time, although I've had to kind of come back on to a little bit because of-- even though I was living this lifestyle, with all this stress in my life, my insulin resistance came back up. My weight has not. I have stayed the exact same weight with a 60-pound (actually close to 70-pound) loss for 14 months. I have not gained an ounce, but I also haven't lost an ounce. [laughs] That's part of the reason why I'm back, not the whole reason.

Terri [00:08:41] So, Mona, one of the things I'm hearing you describe is that-- something that I think we push over and over and over, really settled in for you and became a lifestyle, and, beyond more extensive fasting, the TRE, the eating two meals a day without snacking in between, without grazing, and that that has really helped you in this journey. And so often people are concerned about, "What if I reach my goal? What will I do then? How will I possibly maintain?" Because most of us have experience that, with dieting, maintenance is really complicated. But what I'm hearing you really emphasize, Mona, not only during those 14 months, but much of this journey you have been doing maintenance behaviors and making them how you live your life. So that's where you still are. You're not gaining the 60 pounds back or going back and forth, that you've really been able to stay at that healthier place.

Mona [00:09:51] Yeah, and I never even thought of it as maintenance until I hear people talk about it in the Community again. But it's more about, again, I can't say it enough, it's a lifestyle. People who know me know me well, whether it's people I work with, people I hang out with, my family. I get asked, "Is this the morning you're eating?" you know, "Is this an eating day for you?" I didn't do long fasting while I was away, but I did always follow-- if I wasn't hungry in the morning, I wasn't going to eat, even if a buffet was being offered. So really learning to listen to my body was one of those tools, again, that I learned by doing these actions of TRE, 18/6, not snacking in between meals, and choosing foods that don't cause my blood sugar to go crazy. You know, if I eat high sugar or high carbs one day, the next day it is what I want right now, as soon as I get up. I make sure I'm choosing 90% of the time. Now, I heard an author, and I can't even quote him (who the author is), but I remember somebody saying, "It's not what we do 20% of the time. It's what we do 80% of the time." So I'll be honest and say, probably 80% of the time, this is my life. I mean, this is the lifestyle, but, you know, the choosing the good food and sticking with TRE, it's probably been 80 to 85% of the time.

[00:11:19] I should be happy that I've not gained weight back. One of the reasons why I've come back to TFM is to get back into some therapeutic fasting, and I need the support for that. Will I get a coach? I probably will, because I know I've got a lot of emotional baggage in here, too, so I would probably get back to doing a little bit of coaching. One of my favorite things coming back to TFM is the Community. There is so much going on in the Community. You can pick and choose where you want to be part of and what you need, and it's kind of like going through that toolbox and saying, "Oh, okay, these people are talking about extended fasts," or, "These people are talking about type two diabetes." And that has been a huge thing. And one of the best things about the Community is everybody there knows what you're talking about. They don't look at you and go, "What are you talking about, fasting? Why are you not eating?" There's no judgment. It's just this-- they get it, they understand. And fasting - my new slogan is 'better together than by yourself'. So I don't have anybody in my life that fasts with me other than the Community members at TFM.

Terri [00:12:35] I love that saying because, as most of us know from lots of other resources, community and connection are so vital. They contribute to our health, they contribute to our mental health outcomes, our physical health outcomes, everything. And so for you to give yourself that connection again, of having others to be in this journey with, seems really significant for you.

[00:13:02] One of the things that I've noticed, Mona, is-- I don't even know how long it's been, a few weeks, a couple weeks? Right away, it's almost like you can't help yourself but

to connect with these people, and join in in the meetings, and give feedback, and offer support. I've seen your hand come up. I've seen you jump in to give people-- and I only get to see you in a few groups a week, so I'm sure this happens in other places too. But it's really amazing how quickly you're just right back in the mix of it and offering your support and your insights to people.

Mona [00:13:37] That's an interesting comment because I-- to me, I don't think of it as me supporting them so much, although I do understand, it's certainly a two-way street, but it's really the more involved in the conversation you get, the more you get out of it. That's just-- you know, we learn so much from one another. The first couple of meetings, I just sat back and listened and it just excited me, even just hearing, you know, not the same stuff necessarily, but just being around people who are like-minded or trying to be like-minded because they're just starting into the fasting, and meeting some wonderful people who have been, like me, around for a long time. And we connect on a different level because, yep, we've been here, but we're still here. We're not going anywhere because it's not that we-- I don't think of it as a crutch. I think of it more as friendship. Even though we'll probably never meet some of these people face to face, but you develop lifelong friendships from community. It takes a village. It takes a village to get through this stuff sometimes.

Terri [00:14:41] Absolutely. So one of the things you've highlighted is-- maybe I'm throwing this term in here, but it's kind of you've used a lot of maintenance strategies along the way so that you didn't kind of go back and forth with the weight gain or weight loss, and you mentioned, you know, life situations that have kind of wreaked some havoc, maybe, on your glucose numbers, even though the weight didn't come back. And I think that, in and of itself, is another important thing for people to know. A lot of people come to us with weight loss in mind, but there's a whole other piece of this journey that is just about all angles of wellness and health - metabolic health, you know, physical health, mental health, all of these things. And so I really hear you, again, not so much that you're on the same weight-loss journey that you were on then, but really focusing on the health portion of this journey for yourself. Does that fit for you, Mona?

Mona [00:15:42] It does. It absolutely fits. I think with all the, you know, the different stressors and how we deal with stress in our lives, although you're not gaining weight, you're eating healthy, that your insulin levels are still doing that thing. And I don't know, I know there's different belief systems and, you know, if you have somebody who's had diabetes in your family, you're destined to it. I'm not sure that I'm 100% convinced about that, but I do believe that insulin resistance seems to be something I can get back really quick. [laughs] It's one of those things where-- and I've said this to my husband, too, that, for the rest of my life, I need to not ignore that part because it is important that everything needs to be balanced - emotional, physical, diet. So coming to a community that understands that - it's just one of those things in my life that I felt like I needed back, the social part of it as much as the education. Things change. I know, even with TFM, you know, when I look back to my original handouts and what is being handed out now, there is more and more research coming out all the time. Dr. Fung and Megan are both very up on their research, so, you know, those kind of things are very helpful, as well, in staying-- you know, doing everything I can to make sure that I stay healthy. You know, when you talk about being healthy, I often think, "I want to have wellness. I want to be well." And healthy is kind of in that same pillar, but, when I think of a healthy, well-- being in wellness, it's not having extra weight, it's not having to be on any kind of medication for diabetes or weight loss or anything like that. So that is kind of my newer goal, is just maintaining. You know, and I'm getting older, so I want that longevity, the healthy lifestyle of being able to run with

the grandkids and those kind of things. So it's a whole gamut of things that fit into that wellness and what I think wellness looks like.

Terri [00:17:48] Absolutely. You know, Mona, one of the things I was curious about (and I'm smiling as I say this because you and I mentioned it at the top of the hour when we first got on here, but I also saw some conversation going on in one of our group meetings about this) is you have a photo of yourself on a very nice new motorcycle. And I'm just curious, is that something that you would have done a few years ago? Is that a part of life that's kind of reopened to you now, with the health that you've been achieving and the maintenance of the weight loss? Did that kind of reignite or ignite this part of your experience?

Mona [00:18:34] I'm going to say no because I've been riding since I was a 16 year old.

Terri [00:18:40] Nice.

Mona [00:18:41] So, then I had babies, and then I went back to riding 20 years ago. I used to ride a big cruiser because I was very overweight and I felt that I didn't fit comfortably on a littler bike. So I guess, yeah, part of it-- I've always been riding, but this bike is more of a sporty-- not really sp-- kind of sporty, lighter bike. I didn't need the big, heavy bike to hold my weight anymore. So, yeah, I guess, yes, it's part of it, but I've been riding for a long time. And this bike is a lot of fun. It's a little bit more zippy and I fit into it because I can keep my knees bent and, you know, I don't have this big belly in the way anymore. So, yeah. [laughs]

Terri [00:19:26] So, riding has been part of your life for a long time, but it's still evolving in how you do it and what machine you're using. That's great.

Mona [00:19:35] 100%. Yeah, sometimes it's about what you fit. I'm also short so I'm limited to some bikes, but always rode a heavy, big, cruiser-style bike because I was over 200 pounds and felt like I needed-- I didn't want to be falling out either side of the bike, so I wanted something that fit. And then, as I got smaller, that bike just felt huge to me, so I decided to sell it and get something that I could get away with.

Terri [00:20:05] That's great.

Mona [00:20:06] Yeah.

Terri [00:20:06] I'm going to kind of circle back to a topic that we mentioned earlier because you highlighted something that I think so many of us, in the journey of improving our health or changing our body shape and our weight, often struggle with pursuing the goals, maintaining the consistency of the behaviors when life gets in the way. So you mentioned a whole number of factors in your life, all kind of converging at the same time, and I would say if there's one common theme that I hear the most in our community and as a coach is that people are doing great until something really big comes in, or a couple of really big life stressors or life situations come in, and it's a lot harder for them to kind of maintain. So, I think you've already kind of shared behaviorally what you did. You stuck with TRE and, you know, you stopped the longer fasts, but you still paid attention to what you were eating and doing TRE. But I wonder, from a mindset place, how did you not let all of the old habits and all of these new things kind of unravel and go back to where you were during this period of time where life was a lot to manage.

Mona [00:21:33] That's a challenging question on a couple of different levels, but I think it was mostly-- you know what it's like when you get in your car and the first thing you do is put your seatbelt on? If you do things long enough, they become a consistent part of your behavior every day. So I think that, kind of, when you're not having to think about it anymore, it becomes-- TRE becomes part of the lifestyle or the healthy choices, you know, in a cafeteria or such. I think it almost becomes instinct because, when you're under that stress, two things could happen. You either kick into that behavior where you automatically put your seatbelt on or you go into the really bad behavior that you used to have, which would be-- and I call it 'bad behavior' because it was-- my instinct when under stress would be to go to the store and get as much junk food that I could get down my throat in a very short period of time. And there are times where, yeah, I might choose to eat something more for an emotional reason, but I usually can stop myself. And there are things I learned from different coaches, like, "How am I going to feel if I eat this right now, even though I'm upset?".

[00:22:56] Sometimes, in the crisis that you're in-- and I didn't have just one crisis at once. Sometimes there were two or three things happening that, now, the doctor calls PTSD because there was so much happening at once. There were times where I would fast for 20 hours unintentionally, but it was because I wanted to avoid the pastries or those items that would be the comforts to me. Now, comforting is a nice cup of coffee or tea with heavy cream. [laughter] So I have other tools that I can pull from the toolbox. If you need to eat something-- you know people, often, when you're under stress, say, you know, "When was the last time you ate?" I'm okay. I've got lots of storage here. I'm not going to die if I don't eat. So I think that those kind of things, it's like you just kick into-- you're so focused on the stress that's happening in your life, you don't really don't have time to think about anything else. And that self-care kind of kicks in after the storm settles. And then that's when you go, "Okay, well, I got through that okay." And you will. You will survive those things without binge eating, which was always my behavior. You become empowered when you do it the first two times. You know, like, "Hey, I got through this really high-stress morning." I had a high-stress morning today and I got through it without breaking my fast. I drank my black coffee, much to my chagrin, but [laughter] it does help to kind of like, just refocus yourself, take a minute, take a breather, go outside for a walk, and think about what you're giving up if you break those things. Does that kind of answer what you're asking me?

Terri [00:24:40] Absolutely. I often refer to, something that you described as, you know, making it your identity, but even maybe more significant than it being your identity, it is your lifestyle. It is your way of acting. It is your choice patterns, just like you said, when you get in the car, if you automatically put on your seatbelt. Many of us don't think about that anymore.

Mona [00:25:04] It's natural.

Terri [00:25:05] Many of us don't think about brushing our teeth in the morning because we've been doing it for a really long time, it's a daily routine. Do we ever miss it? Do we ever forget? Sure. But for the most part, it's right there. And I hear you really describing that, that even during really high-stress times or during crisis times, even, coming together, if you have those behaviors solidly set in, they don't have to be done consciously. You just kind of unconsciously do them. So, you know, this goes back to the power of habit. You know, that's a book title, but, you know, that just how powerful our lived habits become, and if people really focus on that during this journey. "I want to make eating good food and eating in a timely way, meaning eating at planned meal times and with whatever, you know, pattern that fits for me," that can carry you through those really difficult times. But,

as you said, you also seemed aware at that time, at least sometimes, maybe, too distracted to fall into them, but there were times where you had to check yourself and say, "Is doing that old behavior going to help me feel better right now?" And you've done this long enough to know it won't. "I will actually feel better if I'm well. If my body is well, if my brain is supported, if, you know, all of my systems are working, I will actually be better able to handle these stressors that are coming at me right now, rather than using some old behaviors or old foods that actually take away from my ability to manage what's going on right now."

Mona [00:26:54] And your wellness, to take away from your wellness. You find, throughout the years, too, that you find ways to deal with those stressors that are-- stressors are often things that are out of our control. There are things that arrive on your plate that you didn't expect, you didn't know how you were going to deal with, but you just-- you become resilient when you practice just getting through them. My daughters always say, "Oh, mom, you're so resilient. The stuff you've been through." But, you know, part of that is just learning new behaviors that, you know, seven years ago, doing things for me to free myself from the stress. I do 30-minute HIIT three to four times a week. I put on boxing gloves and I go on punch bag, follow a circuit, kick and punch. And those are a really good release of endorphins for me that really help with stress because, when you're done working out, you get rid of those stressors.

[00:27:48] Wind therapy is another one of my absolute favorites. If I've had enough and I need some Mona care, I'll go ride my motorcycle. Not this time of year yet, but soon, in the summer, wind therapy-- and anybody who rides a motorcycle will totally understand what that is. With the wind in your face, you become so free from those negative thoughts once you get out and breathe and smell everything that you go by when you're on a motorcycle. So those are-- for me, wind therapy and working out are two really good, healthy habits.

[00:28:20] I also like to do other things like color when I'm frustrated or, you know-- and I buy coloring books that have swear words on them. [laughter] So, you know, I do adult coloring. [laughter] These are things that I have found that help. I heard somebody in one of the groups (I think it was on Saturday morning) saying, "I need to keep my hands busy." So she knits, and I'm like, well, that's very true. That's why I sit-- if I'm-- in the evening and I want to watch television, I color. I have my adult coloring book while I'm watching TV because it keeps my hands busy.

Terri [00:28:51] That's right.

Mona [00:28:51] So... Tools.

Terri [00:28:52] It's probably the biggest reason why I do so many online jigsaw puzzles because, in the morning first thing or in the evening, those are times when, you know, if not occupied, my hands want to go into the cupboard, or into the refrigerator, or into a bag or a box. And so keeping them busy I think is brilliant.

[00:29:11] And I love that you've made this reference to the toolbox. And you and I kind of joked before we came on here that one of the things I think you described is that you basically put so many tools into your toolbox that you now have options. You don't have to use the same tool every time, and you don't have to use all the tools at once, but you have this array of tools that you can then decide how to apply in what situations.

Mona [00:29:41] Those are huge. And the joke is, of course, I could wear a tool belt with all the tools, but we try to use one or two, and there are, there-- and the more you read and listen to people in these meet-- in these group sessions or in the Community, so many people have great tools that they use that you think, "Hey, that's a good one." You know, things like being present when you actually eat. I have a bad habit of turning on Netflix while I'm eating lunch if I'm alone. Somebody reminded me that that's not always a healthy thing to do. It's better to be present. Not that I'm going to put my fork down necessarily between each bite, but being present and enjoying the colors of my food and the sensation as I eat them, or the smells. Another tool, again, like I said, so many tools that I receive from TFM and the Community, really.

Terri [00:30:34] All right, so Mona, I'm so appreciative of you being with me today and getting to have this conversation with you and so excited to get to reconnect with you. I like to always check in-- I'd like to say I do this repeatedly, but I don't remember how I asked it in the last episode that I did with someone, but I'm really curious, based on how we've kind of talked about different phases of your journey and things. What advice would you give yourself in the early part of this process, knowing what you know now? And, you know, that same advice, obviously, to other people out there who are at a different phase, even, in their journey. What are the biggest kind of tips, maybe two or three big tips that you would give?

Mona [00:31:16] First of all, thank you very much, Dr. Terri, for inviting me on. This has been kind of fun chatting.

[00:31:22] My first tip would be consistency. Stick with the consistency, drop the timelines, and work on yourself for you, not for a date or a specific timeline. Stick with it. And as you stick with it, be patient. Some of us-- I was a slow changer. Things happened slow for me, except for the A1C in the beginning - that was the quickest thing that happened. But as far as body composition and stuff, these things took time. And at that time I wasn't working out a lot. I was just counting on fasting and eating and moving my body a lot less than I do now. But stick with it. Be consistent. Be patient with yourself.

[00:32:04] Be kind to yourself. If you have a day where you slip, you slip. Let it go. Start the next morning. Don't get caught up in the, "Ugh!" you know, "I ruined it. I may as well just go ahead and eat all this stuff now." Yeah, the beautiful thing about a new day is it's a new day. It's a new beginning every day.

[00:32:24] Read as much material as you can. Stay with the Community. Enjoy-- you know, find like-minded people. Like-minded people, we do things better together. You know, find a fasting buddy. Find a family friend or somebody who wants to support you in this stuff, but finding like-minded people. And even if you just have those as your secret friends [laughs] in the Community, that's okay, but having those like-minded people. Some of us are more social than others. I'm a social butterfly, but those supports and, even if I just sit and spend an hour reading or 50 minutes in a meeting, listening to other people share, there's always something to take away from that.

[00:33:06] So those are my tips.

Terri [00:33:08] Very good. Well, like I said, Mona, I'm so appreciative of you being here today, and I'm looking forward to getting to learn more and more about this part of your journey as I get to see you in meetings and things. I'm sure that many people are going to resonate with what you've shared today, so I really appreciate you taking this time to do

this, to give back to the Community and to others who are in this journey as well. So thank you and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Mona [00:33:37] Thank you.

Terri [00:33:38] Yeah. You're welcome. Well, everyone out there, if you have enjoyed listening today, I just want to invite you to leave us a review. We look forward to bringing you another episode soon. So, happy fasting everyone and take good care.