

## **Food Freedom 1: Stop Monitoring Yourself around Food – Insatiable Season 10, Episode 2**

[INTRO]

### **Welcome to Insatiable Season 10: Research-Based Weight Loss: Rebuild Your Biology + Psychology Feedback Loop**

Have you ever read about the past and thought, I can't believe people actually believed that? In the 19th century, doctors thought that "bloodletting" could cure illnesses and Dr. Joseph Lister was shunned for his thesis and early research proving that bacteria caused disease. While Dr. Lister was being denigrated, Charles Darwin was being celebrated, falsely claiming that women were less intelligent than men. In Darwin's time women rarely went to advanced schooling, they needed to preserve their limited energy for baby-making. The 20th century wasn't immune from junk science and outrageous claims, Domino's sugar advertised a sugar diet as a way to lose weight touting that it had less calories per gram than fat. Cigarettes were also marketed as healthy.

It sounds laughable to most of us now. But only because brave, curious thinkers were willing to question, test, and disprove the status quo and limited thinking.

In Season 10 of Insatiable, Research-Based Weight Loss: Rebuild Your Biology and Psychology Feedback Loop, we'll explore emerging research and viewpoints, now on the periphery, that will make the current mainstream thinking of weight loss as willpower and calorie-cutting look just as misguided as soothing babies and colds with morphine syrup (which was a medically endorsed thing in the Victorian era).



We will explore how taking the steps towards weight loss individually and societally can be a form of resistance against the toxicity and industrialization of our food supply. We'll question the convenience of telling women that weight loss is giving into the patriarchy and male gaze—and how this silences deeper questioning about why we all have gained so much weight and what other consequences come with this physically and mentally.

We will do this by taking an integrated and holistic look at the biological and psychological feedback loop that goes into maintaining a natural weight and how our industrialized society has disrupted it.

We'll discuss how what you eat informs how you feel and your habits which in turn influence what you eat as a constantly self-reinforcing infinity loop.

We'll examine how our culture and thus education and medical systems are not holistic, and results in a siloed view of human biology and health which allows the public and experts to continue to frame weight loss as about willpower and only about food.... and how very convenient this is for those who set and profit from our industrialized agriculture policy.

We laugh about Domino's sugar diet, but the same reasoning still informs our modern dietary guidelines. Even the mainstream is noting that "The Sugar Research Foundation" with the help of three handsomely compensated Harvard scientists in 1967 handpicked studies placing the blame on fat rather than sugar for heart disease. In 1977 one of these researchers would become the Head of Nutrition for the USDA and outline nutrition guidelines, enabling the low-fat weight-loss craze to become a thing, and we'd all get fatter, sicker, and more depressed in the years to come.

If in your gut, you feel there are more important (and potentially revolutionary) root causes to your weight battle or if you want to learn the viewpoint that people will likely have 50 years



now— that willpower and a simple view of calorie counting as the key to weight loss makes about as much sense as giving morphine to babies—this season is for you.

[EPISODE]

Many of us monitor ourselves with food. We evaluate the number of points a food has. We count calories. We have a judgement in our mind between “good” and “bad” foods and “good” or “bad” eating days. It becomes an obsession; we feel like junkies or alcoholics but the drink, hit of choice or nemesis is the brownies in the breakroom or nights alone where we can just veg out with lots of food. We monitor if we look fat. We monitor if other people are fat or thin.

More scrutinization often ends in exhaustion, leading to “I know I shouldn’t but F@\$# it”. In other words, more monitoring is counterproductive. This stress is added to by the reality that our industrialized food system is addictive—and studies and research on addiction show that when our bodies are out of balance, that brownie is a drink to an alcoholic, a crackpipe to an addict. Here, more effort does not equal more reward.

But there is hope, and a way to break these cycles. In this episode, we will grapple with the questions of:

- How do we get out of this monitoring but not executing cycle?
- How do we rebalance our body and brain chemistry while also healing the emotional?
- How do we not restrict, and instead, discern what is right for our physiological design?
- How do we feel satisfied, satiated, and healthy so that we actually feel great in the skin we are in, not just resigned to a body that we’re not really comfortable in and doesn’t feel healthy because we feel like bad feminists or otherwise shamed by the body positivity movement?



What I discovered personally, professionally and academically is that much of our monitoring around food and our weight is a symptom of our autonomic nervous system being on high alert. Our autonomic nervous system (ANS for short) is one part of our nervous system. You are probably familiar with one of the main ANS branches: the fight or flight.

And there's also another, lesser-known but equally important branch of our ANS called the social engagement nervous system (SENS), which scans for psychological safety. For our purposes here, think of psychological safety as having our needs met. To have our needs met, we have to feel like we belong.

This is why it can be unhelpful and impossible to integrate advice like, "don't care what other people think". It goes against our physiological design or need for each other. We need to care what some people think because this helps us to be interconnected and feel like we belong..... Now, who those people are is the question!

If we think our weight is a problem, we often feel chronically psychologically unsafe and "different" (i.e. we don't belong) because we feel at risk for things like judgement, rejection, disappointment. We've been sold that thinness is this catch-all answer to minimize these types of risks. For example, if I was thin this [dating, my relationship with my sister, finding how to offer my talents] would be easier.

And, let's be real, thin privilege does exist—and it builds up this story. Yet it's also true being thin doesn't mean a struggle-free life - thin people go to therapy, have debt and struggle with feeling like they could have more meaningful lives and relationships.

Now, most of us don't go around feeling "socially at risk" because it's not a particular feeling but rather a way of being in the world where we are trying to be "good" or "do the right thing", not just with food but our life choices.



Whether we are worried about what we ate, said or did, we are most likely feeling at risk in some way - you are wondering if what you did was good or bad, right or wrong as to not look bad... and you don't even realize that you're doing this. Internally we are prone to believe that looking bad leads to isolation and aloneness. And evolutionarily, from a health and survival standpoint - we needed a squad out on the tundra! Or at least someone to build a shelter if, like me, you aren't very handy.

So how does this show up today? Have you had a high school reunion or wedding coming up, and you feel like you need to lose weight? This is an example of feeling "at risk". Whether it's the pictures that will be shared on Facebook or how well you are doing with your life compared to others, there's a judgement risk. What will people think of me at this weight? Because if we think our weight is a metric of how great our life is, we assume others will too. And culturally, we've been conditioned to think being thin means discipline and thus, success.

But rather than asking "do I even care if Todd from high school thinks I've done something with my life?", we focus on weight loss rather than why we aren't 100% content with what we are doing with our own life. Because when we are in alignment with our values, we have a solid sense of belonging to ourselves first and then others and our SENS doesn't need to scan for psychological safety.

Our fight-or-flight and SENS - our physiological and psychological branches of our ANS - are an infinity feedback loop - to keep us holistically safe. When we feel threatened - real or perceived - they are activated and we experience this as self-monitoring or analysis.

So to repeat, self-monitoring around food and our weight is a symptom that your ANS is activated because you have physical or psychological needs that aren't being met.

So what specifically turns on the alarm bells of these two branches?



Let's start with the physiological threats, which the fight or flight branch is for. It is more ancient and is still reacting to old evolutionary threats: famine or a saber tooth tiger. Think of us as a 1.0 model - evolution is a pretty slow process and there haven't been any software updates in the past 100 or a couple of thousand years of agricultural and then industrialized society. I want to focus on when the body registers a famine and how it activates our "fight or flight" response for this episode.

The body assumes famine mode, which is also fat storage mode and activates our fight-or-flight response for three root causes:

1. Being overfed and malnourished. This is a recent phenomenon of our industrialized food system. Here, we are eating enough calories but our body doesn't have the right nutrients to do all it needs to do to keep the lights on and our food supply is now organized so that we are having an addiction response to foods that throw us out of balance and ultimately damage our physical and mental health. **Calories and nutrition aren't the same.**
2. Not eating the right foods for your body. There isn't one way of eating that is best for everybody we all have unique nutrient needs based on our genetics and the environments and experiences we have been exposed to, you may be hearing the term more of "bio-individuality" to describe this. Here, you might get enough nutrition but the wrong kind.
3. Cutting calories too drastically to lose weight. While it works in the short-term, long term the body will bounce back with voracious hunger because it doesn't know food is plentiful and creates new nutrient deficiencies and nutritional imbalances. This makes dieting itself one of the biggest root causes of weight gain as research shows that both undereating and overeating suggest to the body we have a famine...either go find food



or metabolically, it's time to store fat because we don't know when food is coming again.

Specifically, researchers identified a protein, RAGE, that shuts down animals' ability to burn fat in times of bodily stress. Who says researchers don't have a sense of humor? Bodily stress includes: starvation and overeating. Historically, overeating signaled to our ancestors bodies that food was scarce, making gaining weight a survival mechanism. If we think of seasonal living, this is what used to happen to our ancestors in winter and what many animals do currently before they hibernate.

Activating our fight-or-flight nervous system drives up hunger and cravings while simultaneously storing fat.

Here's how: physiologically, when the F&F branch of our ANS is activated, our body releases stored glucose so we can fight or flight (stored glucose is the food we've eaten before) because whether it's a famine or saber tooth tiger, girlll.... You need your energy.

In today's world, we don't have to go out and find corn or kale, we have corn and kale chips and our breakfasts or meal the night before likely had more starch and sugar than could ever have been found in the natural world, further confusing your body and hunger signals. So say you eat breakfast and you find yourself already hungry at 10:30 or you have cravings at 3 pm. Most of the time this is from not eating the right foods or enough food. Many people don't eat enough during the day and are super hungry at night. They then overeat at night and keep the cycle going because they don't get hungry for breakfast and the cycle continues). Whether from not enough food or the wrong foods, your body senses the emergency of malnourishment and turns on its fight or flight system so you will go find more food, —it's an emergency to be malnourished. Because you don't need to use a lot of energy to find food, you eat again and whatever energy isn't used to go find food is now floating around in your system. This excess energy feels like a winning lottery ticket to your body which stores it as fat!



And the double kicker is you've now emptied your energy stores, making us hungry or "craving something" because we have to replenish these stores for the next fight-or-flight event. We experience this as chasing blood sugar highs and lows and an increase of fat storage.

You feel like you're a bad dieter, you continue to monitor your food and society tells you you have a willpower problem. #infuriating. Or maybe body positivity tells you you have better things to do with your time than watch your food and weight. I agree AND also think that it shouldn't be a struggle to feel good in your body and if you are, you might be eating out of alignment with your physiological design. Your body is lovingly trying to get your attention and ignoring these feelings as certain interpretations of body positivity may encourage you to do may not be honoring your body and yourself the way the movement intended. We don't need to spend more time on food or weight - we need to spend quality time figuring our bodies out so we can set it and forget it. Because when you eat the right foods - quantity and quality for your body - the monitoring and thinking about food goes down drastically as does often the scale.

So what are the right foods for our bio-individuality? I have found the work of Dr. Nicholas Gonzalez to be a foundational framework for guiding clients to start to really hear their bodies own biofeedback.

His work focuses on balancing or calming our autonomic nervous system. Dr. Gonzalez was a renegade force in the health world. He was originally an investigative journalist and turned these discernment skills for the truth into a medical career where he was keeping pancreatic patients alive for 25 years with his protocols when Western Medicine ran out of options.

His nutrition guidance came from understanding that when it comes to our autonomic nervous system, some of us are sympathetic dominant (fight or flight), some of us are parasympathetic (rest and relax) dominant and some of us are balanced. I'm going to give a very high-level



overview and how I've adapted this for people who aren't dealing with cancer but may have a chronic health issue like Hashimoto's or depression/anxiety:

The goal in his theory is to harmonize our nervous system with the right foods in the same way Ayurveda is about harmonizing your dosha or Chinese medicine about harmonizing where you have energy stagnation.

For those who are sympathetic dominant, their bodies are more acidic. A vegetarian diet will stimulate the parasympathetic and suppress the sympathetic, which is what these people need as their fight-or-flight gets activated more easily. These are also people who under stress and imbalanced with their diets, are more likely to project their anger toward the outside world. A well-known example of this is Donald Trump, who as we know he likes Burgers, Fries and diet coke. I'm not saying a vegetarian diet is going to heal all he has going on...clearly...no food has that much healing power...but that's an example of someone extremely out of balance.

For those who are parasympathetic dominant, they need a higher animal and fat content diet - which we think of as more paleo or keto today - to stimulate their sympathetic system and suppress their parasympathetic. Under stress, these people are more likely to emotionally turn inwards and blame themselves and thus get more depressed than angry. They are often the artists, like musicians, entrepreneurs or creative, strategic thinkers who are visionary leaders in their non-profit and for-profit roles.

Those who are balanced, do best with a mix - what we think of as Mediterranean to keep their balance going.

Each nervous system type has a different blood sugar sensitivity. For example, parasympathetic dominant people tend towards hypoglycemia and brain fog. This is me: if I don't have animal protein or fat at most meals, I "Crash" and get very spacey.



If you're interested in more specifics and why I find this dietary theory and the multiple decades of research it's based on so compelling, a great book to start with is Nutrition and the Autonomic Nervous System: The Scientific Foundation of the Gonzalez Protocol. I know we have a lot of medical professionals who listen to the show and this is a book that is more for a practitioner lens than a consumer lens.

What I first learned for myself and where I like to start with clients is focusing on what type of proteins work for them. This helps clear the waters as the biofeedback system can get so muddled when we aren't eating the right foods for ourselves. And it's a great way for clients to start understanding the quality of our macronutrients - proteins, fats and carbs - matter as much as the quantity.

And again, this is connecting how what we eat affects our energy and moods. This is about feeling good and making life easier for ourselves, not to be good to please other people. To be healthy in our world today, many of us who have to eat a certain way for our health and have to learn to place what we need in importance over what other people think about the way we eat! It can feel isolating, not people-pleasing, but there is a way to do it that feels right for you that we'll discuss throughout the season and that is a building block of the Truce with Food Process.

I experienced this in the late 90s, much of mainstream thinking was that cancer survivors needed to eat vegetarian to keep cancer at bay again. So I started with fake soy dogs and patties. But I was always hungry and thought that pushing through hunger was part of the game. But my body intuitively knew the more nuanced dietary theories of today like Dr. Gonzalzes that show blood cancers like mine - Hodgkins, leukemia - actually do better with meat and fat diets...ketogenic today.

As South Beach rose in popularity and I was failing at my weight battle as a vegetarian, I tried this diet and learned the importance of blood-sugar control. With this diet, I had so much less



hunger and sugar cravings with meat as protein compared to all the fake vegetarian protein I was eating. I also realized that if I had a tofu dish, I was still hungry and just categorized tofu as not filling me up and now I understand why: it wasn't registering with my body.

But at the time, I just knew I needed to add meat into my diet because it dawned on me, if I feel healthy today, I eat less sugar, and this improved my chances of being healthy tomorrow. This realization was even more powerful than my knowledge that cancer fed on sugar, which could not stop me from bingeing upon it with unbalanced blood sugar.

That is what worked for me. Whereas I had one client, we will call her Sara, not her real name, who is more sympathetic dominant. She is a classic sympathetic dominant: Type-A, Partner at a big law firm, two kids, husband, some side-hustles, always on the go. And her nervous system supports this type of lifestyle.

She intuitively felt better with more vegan and vegetarian foods. When we started working together, she was following a celebrity nutritionist who was correct in advocating for blood-sugar balance and the nutritionist's plan was to include meat to do this. However, based on the Gonzalez protocol and even more emerging research which shows foods like meat raise people's blood sugars to different degrees, a one-size fits all to blood sugar balance doesn't work. We've worked to fine-tune her natural intuitive biofeedback loop by getting her back to a more vegetarian diet with some tweaks because the autonomic nervous system balance framework is on a continuum and most of us aren't purely vegetarian or keto or Mediterranean.

Previously, a reinforcing "feel-good" cycle never occurred to me or most of my clients because we think losing weight and getting healthy is about discipline, deprivation, and monitoring.

Discovering if you need animal protein or not is a foundational piece to hearing your biofeedback loop. This will begin to balance your autonomic nervous system and reduce your



food monitoring. I'll share with you an easy way to figure this out for yourself at the end of the episode.

Ok, that was a lot of science. So let's hear a word from our sponsor.

Now, switching gears or branches to the SENS branch of our ANS. This is more recent evolution (and we are talking thousands of years recent). This part of our nervous system scans to see if we are socially safe, i.e. do we belong? We needed to belong as we evolved because we wouldn't have survived without each other. Imagine being a one-woman band out in the tundra or desert or as a Mom. You weren't gonna survive!

What's interesting here is that when we perceive we are socially safe, our fight or flight system is turned off and we prevent that entire hunger-craving-fat storage inducing cascade. This happens when our social and emotional needs are met.

However, when we've been through trauma, our focus often has to shift to make sure others social and emotional needs were met and so we've continued those patterns and behaviors today. 90% of us will experience Trauma and many of us won't realize it. Trauma isn't just being assaulted, it's also being bullied, worrying about our children's safety in school from gun violence, a toxic boss, a bad breakup or divorce and a list of other things that we've normalized.

But our trauma doesn't destine us to unhealthy coping patterns or behaviors, we can also use it for post-traumatic growth. To do this we need to shift the focus to first belong to our own needs, wants and values, which takes us from protective patterns like black and white thinking to creative and generative choices and outcomes.

For example, can we say how we honestly feel? Can we eat what is right for us but different for our family - and be met with empathy and respect for our choices? In body positivity and intuitive eating, the focus is on feeling safe in our bodies, regardless of what they weigh.



I agree AND, I think we need to go further to address the original root causes of why our weight became so important because there are most likely, unresolved trauma and belonging issues and thus patterns and behaviors that isolate us, preventing the belonging we need to grow into ourselves.

When we truly belong, we are seen and appreciated for who we are, gifts, talents and wounds. It is in this place, that weight doesn't matter. If we feel "not enough" or "too much", we don't feel safe in who we are and thus, our SENS is monitoring what other people need, perpetuating a vicious cycle of depriving ourselves of what we need while building up that weight loss is going to help us be the real, most powerful us.

When our belonging is in question - like when we wonder if we look heavy (which assumes our weight determines if we belong or not) or assume we are rocking the boat for asking for what we need at work, our SENS is now activated, which also turns on your fight or flight, which turns the dial on your monitoring up even more. And the more the dial is turned up, the more anxiety you will feel.

This monitoring extends to wherever and whenever we aren't clear if we are socially safe - new exercise place (is everyone judging me), horrible or new boss, new job, dating. Depending upon your story, when an identity you feel keeps you safe is challenged, will call it "stress" or "overwhelm" and for those of us who use food, will often use that to cope because we haven't developed the resilience skills we need to manage stress and pursue the life opportunities and experiences we most deeply want.

We give that imagined power of resilience to weight loss, telling ourselves, "this will be easier if I was thinner." Feeling like skinny is magic is giving our power to weight loss instead of cultivating resilience which is what truly facilitates more ease in how we live our lives because



we aren't destabilized by every curve ball that happens and we can go the distance in what we want for our lives because we know we can rise to the challenge.

For example, I was trying to get Eca to nap the other day after 4 hours of interrupted sleep from the night before and I caught my silhouette in the window. And it occurred to me the old me would have thought, "oh this will be so much easier once you lose all your pregnancy weight" and the healed me is like, nope, having a new born is challenging, I'm new to this mother identity and I need to focus on getting more resilient with this challenge, not lose weight.

So we need to love our bodies and take back the power weight loss has in our life where it's not about food or our weight.

In my work, I discovered that what activates our SENS is our story about what it takes to belong where we want to belong - whether that's meaningful work, in relationship with people we want to be in relationship with, or even feeling comfortable (i.e. that we belong) at the gym.

And in the same way we think we need to be deprived and work so hard to eat well and lose weight, we think belonging is about monitoring to make others comfortable, happy, and/or keep the peace. In this process, we often ignore our own needs.

Even if you identify as a rebel like me, there's ways to be a rebel, right? For example, for much of my life, I identified as a tomboy. This was different than the other girls I grew up around.

And so I would always talk sports with guys because I thought that's what they wanted to talk about. But the night I met Carlos, I wasn't trying to get him to like me so I didn't feel like I had to make "good" conversation. Instead, when I learned he was working for AARP and on social security, Medicare Part D, we started talking politics and social issues which is really what I love. He later told me part of why he asked for my number was because of how active my mind was. And I find it hilarious that Carlos isn't a sports person at all. My SENS wasn't activated because I



wasn't in a defensive, "I need to prove myself" position and by actually conversing about what I loved to think about we created a different kind of connection than had I tried to talk about sports.

I didn't have the language or understanding to realize that in uncertain situations, where my story was active, I was ignoring my needs and stereotyping others so they would be most comfortable or happy.

When our story is active, we will feel unsafe and experience more monitoring not only around our food and weight, but of others and what we perceive they want and need.

So we do all this monitoring but because we are paying attention to our food and not these invisible patterns and behaviors, we keep thinking food is our problem.

For example, when I was in my Corporate job, national and international travel were particularly ripe times for my stress eating. I promised myself, "I'll get back on track when I'm not traveling so much".

Looking back, because again I didn't know my story was active when I was telling myself this, it is shocking to me as someone who has always felt confident in a lot of ways, to discover how much I monitored myself in situations that challenged an identity that I had about myself. I was conscious I was monitoring my food but unconscious my "stress" was about feeling like I belonged in a job that looked good with international travel and incredible responsibility for a young 20 something.

In large part because I had no idea what identities I was trying to protect! In my mind, I just thought that I always try to do the "right" thing to be successful. I had no idea "right" and "successful" were opinions I held, not an absolute truth of what is right and successful. In the case with my work travel, I really didn't belong in that environment. Not because I couldn't



hack it, but because it was a mismatch of values and so I felt distanced from the common vision and goals we were all working towards. I felt out of place, not in an insecure way but just distanced and disconnected from others. My stress was “this job looks so great - and it has its benefits - and I feel out of place here...like am I the only one not drinking the company Kool-Aid?”

But I had always been the “good girl”, which I defined as doing what was responsible. I always took on the challenge. This included the honors college at Penn State, the challenging corporate job, even moving to Paris when I didn’t speak French - I took a lot of risks in the areas I felt confident in and was generally applauded and rewarded. But not so much the areas that I didn’t have a lot of practice. So I couldn’t understand that I was feeling very different in these environments. And it was a chronic tension which is why I would eat when I was stressed or bored from work...it was the same root cause, just dressed in a different outfit.

That was where my story was the most active for me. Going to IIN, my first nutrition school, was unconsciously challenging this story and my “responsible” identity. I had to sell my car, it wasn’t going to further my Corporate career and it was very “Woo” for that time in my life. Yet going there, my eating got better, even with that NYC travel and exhaustion from sleeping at my friend’s pull out couch and hearing constant NYC traffic outside throughout the night, because it connected with my values of curiosity, love of learning and rebellion.

So it wasn’t about my job stress, it was about not belonging first to my values, which led to not feeling like I belonged at work. And again, I had a ton of friends at work but belonging is deeper than being liked or connected. It’s expressing our values and being seen for those values.

For others, this lack of belonging will show up in their social lives.

So for example if you feel like you’ve been “good” all night at a party and then you have an awkward conversation with someone, you might suddenly feel like you can’t say no to the



dessert table. You may think it's because you love dessert, but if you look deeper you might find it's because you now have all these doubts about if you said the right thing.

Or if you are going to a party you totally don't want to be at, where you feel totally out of place because you no longer drink, you might start monitoring what you can eat there from the start because the uncertainty and doubt about how to be sober around drinking people. The uncertainty is chronic and thus, so is the monitoring of food.

In the same way we often turn to pre-packaged foods, when we are in our story, we turn to pre-packaged choices that we learned were safe, most likely as kids or teenagers, rather than the parts of ourselves that need to be seen and respected.

And remember, if you are parasympathetic dominant, i.e. do better with paleo or keto diets, you will be more likely to turn inward on yourself when you are in your story, making story revision work vitally important in preventing a depressive spiral.

I'll give you two client examples of successfully satisfying their SENS system to prevent their fight-or-flight system from being activated:

1. A client I'll call Lindsay moved to a new town for a job. A few friends she made at work were her initial social circle there. These two friends were vegan. When out with them, she would order a vegan meal because "I just don't feel like getting into it with them about how I feel better with meat." She was accommodating their perceived needs of "only eating with other vegan people" to avoid perceived judgement and not getting her needs met.

Her homework was to order a meat dish, which is what she needed to keep her blood sugar balanced while out to eat with them next, sharing what she discovered about her need for meat after trying to be vegetarian, and her interest in buying from sustainable



farms. This resulted in a great conversation about bio-individuality and even one friend sharing that her sugar cravings have been out of control since she went vegan. Bringing this side of herself to the group facilitated a deeper sense of safety in the relationship that she felt then at work and socially.

2. Another example if from a client I'll call Gina. She had been accidentally copied on an email where she was mentioned and some sexist things were said. She could feel the adrenaline or fight-flight stress response as she read the email. She wanted to say something. But then she wondered, "would she rock the boat?" or "Am I being too sensitive?"

It bothered her. Normally she would have eaten to procrastinate on how to respond. She identified that when she feels like she "just needs something" food-wise, she's usually avoiding making a choice.

We were well into our work together and now she recognized she was avoiding honoring her need to rectify the sexist assumption. She waited a day to respond so she could think more clearly and respond diplomatically about the sexist remarks and better ways of thinking about her and other women. She sent the email to the person who had made the remarks and he was grateful for her clarity and saw her points. Acknowledging what was true for her deepened their relationship, versus causing more conflict which was her fear based on her story. Not only does she not feel funny around him at work, they are actually a better team together, which heals and reinforces her new story where it is safe to have her needs, i.e. her voice, heard.

Becoming aware of our story and patterns and then thoughtfully and intentionally making different choices and responses helps us belong to ourselves. This and sharing with others puts the SENS at ease and results in less social monitoring of ourselves and others and will prevent the fight-flight-fat storage cascade in our bodies.



Long-term, weight loss as “the answer” decreases as we make life easier and more fulfilling independent of what we weigh. When we have enough of a sense of belonging or psychologically safe, we actually become body neutral as our bodies aren’t really central to how we interact. We can feel positive, negative or both about our bodies depending on the day, and it’s not going to affect how we approach the world. Ironically, this also makes it easier to lose weight and feel healthier in your skin.

So rather than trying to find a better plan to organize our food - like a different diet or learning more about nutrition or dismissing our food obsession as unhealthy and part of diet cultures tentacles for us to feel unworthy - we need to address the root cause and learn to balance or calm our autonomic nervous system’s fight or flight and SENS branches so we stop being on high-alert or monitoring our food and bodies all the time.

A first step to do this physically is to try my guided breakfast experiment that is in the show notes. Here I walk you through an exercise to try to breakfasts, one without animal protein, one with. I have developed this for my clients as a starting point to understand where they are on the Vegan-Vegetarian-Paleo-Keto continuum. and to identify what to look for in your own biofeedback loop to help you evaluate what works best for your body instead of subscribing to pre-packaged ideas of good and bad foods.

From a story perspective, next time you are in a social situation where you feel like your weight is a “thing” ask yourself “where do I feel at risk for saying/doing/being the wrong thing?” and the wrong thing will be what’s different from the “norms” of the situation, making you feel out of place. And remember it could be the values, like I found in my Corporate job.

Or for example, on a more daily basis, if you are at the gym and find yourself monitoring your body. In what ways do you feel like you don’t belong? Are you wondering if you can keep up in the group exercise class? Do you think you should stand in the back to not be noticed versus wanting to be in the front where you can see and hear the instructor better? Are you



wondering if you don't know how to use the machines correctly? Or not wearing the right "gym gear" for that type of work-out?

Simply becoming aware and connecting this monitoring to feeling socially at risk in this way is critical. Many of my clients are confident or secure in certain areas of their life. It's a shock for them to see how often they have these doubts beyond food and their body. And if you want a bonus homework assignment, ask someone how to use the machines. Take a break in the group exercise class when you need it. Stand in the front of the class so you can hear and see better. Or leave early if you have to. Whatever you want to do and feel like you "shouldn't" or "can't" ...try it and see what happens! Each time we choose to show up as we are and discover it's safe - i.e. nothing happens or a trainer enthusiastically gets to explain how a machine works because they love supporting people in their health goals - we retrain our SENS to be less defensive and more discerning about where it is safe to be who we are and who we are becoming. This doesn't happen overnight but develops over time with practice, just like a muscle. But unlike a fad diet, it's a skill and way of being that won't be lost once learned and will help you move towards a more ease around your food, health, and weight.

## Conclusion

Monitoring our food, weight and selves is a symptom our ANS is activated.

Our ANS has a fight or flight branch and a Social Engagement branch. The fight-or-flight is activated when we are malnourished yet overfed from processed foods, not eating the right foods for our body or cutting calories too drastically for too long. The SENS is on high alert when we feel socially unsafe or at risk for judgement, rejection, etc, which is often what we are afraid of when we are uncomfortable with our weight.

This lack of physical and psychological safety -real or perceived - turns on the fight-or-flight-fat storage cascade.



To begin to calm your ANS and reduce how much you monitor your food, weight and self, eat the right macronutrients to start to calm famine trigger. Starting with whether or not you need animal protein can help to provide significant clarity in your biofeedback loop.

Practice becoming aware of where you feel socially at risk or unsafe by noticing when you monitor yourself and others. This is a clue you are in a story about what it takes to belong where you want to belong. Even rebels need belonging!

Regardless of how confident you feel, begin to connect your weight and non-hunger food monitoring to your story. Ask yourself “where do I feel at risk for saying/doing/being the wrong thing?” and the wrong thing will often be what’s different from the “norms” of the situation, making you feel out of place or alone.

Tune in next week and episode where we talk about how to start recognizing your needs and choices, especially because they are often hiding in plain sight when we discuss, **How to Get Back in Control of Food.**

[END]

