

COVID: The Emotional Eating Arc of the Pandemic – Insatiable Special Coronavirus Podcast

[0:00:00] AS: I am dropping this episode now as a special podcast before the next Insatiable season in July/August because I've been hearing from so many of you that you're not feeling great in your bodies, you've gained weight during COVID, and you don't want to get on the busy train that was your life pre-COVID pandemic. And, how do we even recover from all of this, especially here in the States? My clients in other countries - while their experiences all are different - have had a much different experience.

When I refer to COVID in this episode, I'm referring to the virus itself + lockdowns + quarantine. While many of us shared a collective trauma and grief experience, there's a lot our bodies need to process that will be different for each of us, based on our unique experiences and how we experienced COVID.

I have clients who gave birth in the beginning of COVID who had to do a 360 with all their birth plans and then had no help the first year of parenthood, clients whose work picked up while they had to home school, clients, who shut down businesses or had to pivot how they made their living.

So it's been A LOT. And our bodies know. They have felt this lack of safety. And maybe your eating like many people, changed. I know some people reached out to me and started emotionally eating for the first time in their lives. For some, their disordered eating habits came back. And for some they got worse. And some have improved in some ways.

I hope this podcast episode will support you for ideas to move you forward rather than thinking a crash diet or cleanse is the only answer to feeling uncomfortable in your body.



And if you like this episode, I am doing a coaching workshop designed to help you get individual clarity and ah-has on your COVID eating. It's May 12 at 1 pm EST. You can sign-up at <https://alishapiro.com/covid-out-of-control-eating-workshop/>.

This workshop will give you a tasting sample of my WAIETN program, which will have a special COVID theme this time and starts in May. Also no-bro marker so this free workshop will be plenty heavy on value instead of one big sales pitch like the bro-marketers do and teach.

WAIETN is a strong warm-up for Truce with Food, which is a framework for post-traumatic growth from food and body issues. In my work, we work to find your radical body truths which are unique, discoverable, profound and liberating. We do this by addressing the root causes of our all-or-nothing eating which I think after today's episode and definitely the workshop, you'll understand more deeply.

Today's episode, we will go through the behavior mental health arc of COVID. One of my amazing Truce with Food group members, Melanie Hodgman, shared with our group research that gives us a framework and thus clarity, about what we just went through.

In reading the disaster phases, including when substance abuse, mental health issues and in our case, out of control eating really escalates, I realized these disaster phases mirror the out of control or as clients also call it, All-or-Nothing eating cycle, we work through in WAIETN.

I'll walk us through how the pandemic trajectory influenced your COVID eating and mental health, as well as how it's influenced outside of COVID.

Because as you'll see, out of control eating is usually a cumulation of stress, which COVID dumped so much more on our plates. And as Dave Chapelle said, "COVID quarantined us with our issues."



Ok, so onto the research. This Disaster phases description and graph, which I'll include in the transcript, is adapted from the US Dept of Health and Human Services. Thank you to Mel again for sharing this research.

Also, I am not saying the severity of the out of control eating cycle is as severe as many people experienced COVID. We all had a wide range of experiencing COVID. We saw this racially. Economically, which the two are tightly interlinked in a white supremacy culture. And I really saw it with my clients who live in countries where their governments care more about them.

Rather, it's a similar framework that can help explain and illustrate the emotional and behavioral arc of being and feeling at risk with so much uncertainty.

Phases of Disaster



Adapted from Zunin & Myers as cited in DeWolfe, D. J., 2000. Training manual for mental health and human service workers in major disasters (2nd ed., HHS Publication No. ADM 90-538). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.



6 Disaster Phases:

Disaster
Impact
Heroic
Honeymoon
Disillusionment
Rebuild

Mirrors Emotional Eating Phases:

Trigger
Gear Up
Be All or Extra
Protected (temporarily)
Embodiment for Insight
Option C: Choose Differently

Disaster Phase 1: is actually the pre-disaster phase. It's characterized by fear and uncertainty.

The specific reactions a community experiences depend on the type of disaster. Disasters with no warning, which COVID would fall under for those of us who never believed it was a hoax, can cause feelings of vulnerability and lack of security; fears of future, unpredicted tragedies; and a sense of loss of control or the loss of the ability to protect yourself and your family.

This fear and uncertainty probably activated old vulnerabilities. For example, a few of my clients who have come to me post-initial COVID lockdowns had food insecurity issues as children and found themselves overeating or bingeing during this phase and buying lots of food because they felt at risk for food scarcity.

For a few, who had experienced past physical vulnerabilities, the physical risk of catching COVID made them anxious. They logically felt low risk and yet, the body was having its own reaction that needed support. I bring this up because so much support for mental health and emotional eating doesn't actually include the body, which is a big part of mental health and emotional eating!



Or maybe like me, you weren't necessarily worried about yourself but more about people you care about. My parents were on that COVID cruise you might have read about on NPR in the beginning. They were some of the first people to have COVID. There wasn't a lot of information at that time and they were stranded at sea by the Trump administration and then sent to a military base, then flew home. What was supposed to be a 10 day trip ended up being a six week ordeal.

If we look at this phase from a WAIETN out of control eating cycle perspective, this is the phase where we experience eating triggers. An event or what clients often call stress or overwhelm happens. Yet it's not the event itself - it's the emotion it brings up in us.

In the same way this disaster phase is marked by fear and uncertainty, uncertainty is a massive trigger for all-or-nothing eating in Non-COVID times.

In regards to the word trigger, my client Linsey asked for another word aside from eating trigger. I told her, "feeling at risk", because that to me is what feeling triggered is really about. So if that helps you, when I use the word trigger, think "when I feel at risk".

And we all have different risks we try to protect ourselves from: failure, catastrophe, rejection, judgement, being misunderstood are just a few related to our food and body.

So if we take a look at how what I'm hearing from many of you is: I gained weight over COVID. It's not the weight gain perse, it's what will people think? Will I be judged? That is usually the uncertainty around judgement trigger and risk.

There are three other main eating triggers we will go over in the May 12 workshop but for the sake of you keeping this podcast digestible and uncertainty being a major trigger that's relevant right now, we will stick with this an example.



Also, uncertainty has been my biggest trigger, making me feel the most at risk in my life and thus, my greatest teacher, so I know it well. And I know we can learn to lead ourselves through it versus just eat, which is what I did for 18 years.

This is why I would binge eat before my cancer scans even though I knew cancer fed on sugar. It wasn't logical. It was because the feeling of uncertainty - was my cancer gone? Was it back? If so, was it really bad? was so BIG and I had very little capacity to deal with this overwhelming feeling at the time.

On a more daily basis, this is also why I would eat when I fell off a diet - I was uncertain how this was happening. I felt I knew what to do and didn't understand why I was so disciplined in other ways and couldn't be with food. The longer this dieting-fall off cycle went, the less capable I felt in the face of uncertainty.

So I ate to feel safe, which was the best at what I knew to do at the time. Eating is a form of safety that gets wired in very early. It's in our implicit memory, meaning often unconscious and somatic because we are pre-verbal and don't start narrating our lives - meaning making meaning - until around 5 or 6 years old.

We know we are safe if we are fed and comforted, right? Food as safety is as primal as it gets. So if you know food is safety, you can better work through out of control eating.

So Phase 1 of COVID created fear and uncertainty. And related to non-COVID eating, stress and overwhelm make us feel emotions that feel triggering or at risk for being unsafe. Uncertainty is one of the biggest triggers for out of control, also called all-or-nothing eating.

Then in **Phase 2 of the disaster, the research calls this the Impact phase, which is characterized by a range of intense emotional reactions.** The research says, "as with the pre-disaster phase, the specific reactions also depend on the type of disaster that is occurring. Slow,



low-threat disasters have psychological effects that are different from those of rapid, dangerous disasters. As a result, these reactions can range from shock to overt panic. Initial confusion and disbelief typically are followed by a focus on self-preservation and family protection. The impact phase is usually the shortest of the six phases of disaster.

What I still find so fascinating about Phase 2 of COVID was the range of risk that was felt here in the US when asked to wear masks and a temporary lockdown was ordered.

Some of us were worried about passing it along to others but not worried for ourselves. Some of us were really afraid of catching the virus. Some of us weren't worried at all and felt more stress from huge transitions like homeschooling and isolation.

There was and still is, as we come out of quarantine, such a range of our felt sense of risk. Because we all had COVID and thus have natural immunity in our house and Carlos' parents got vaccinated, we went to Florida to visit them for the first time in over a year. It was like COVID wasn't even happening there!

I think part of the COVID exhaustion here in the States is we all experienced the Impact phase differently.

I think of our essential workers who had to be out in the world with so much uncertainty and fear. So many of our health-care workers died treating COVID patients.

And communities of color who were the hardest hit by this because of racism. Let's put our empathy caps on and think about the intensity and duration of fear there.

There was a Qanon infiltration of the white wellness world during all this that as my anti-racism teacher Desire Adaway says, "Sounds about white."



In white wellness and health-care, there's a lot of preaching about personal responsibility. And when we have a certain level of privilege, yes, this is true. One of my greatest teachings in my life was how much more power I had to heal my body than I ever knew. And, I had access to the resources to make that happen. And even then, we only have so much control.

But what public health here in the States calls "social determinants" of health, which is when your zip code determines your health more than individual choices, is an academic term for racism.

For example, communities of color are more likely to live in high air pollution areas. And we know air pollution played a massive role in who got COVID, as COVID viral loads increase where there is air pollution.

The chronic stress of environmental pollution weakens the body. And not to mention how this pollution causes inflammation and thus weight gain. So yes we heard a lot about how obesity's role in COVID deaths - but obesity is often a root cause of intense systemic blocks to health like air pollution, food deserts, working two jobs and still not being able to afford healthy food because the US government subsidizes the most unhealthy crops to make them cheaper, racism in health-care itself. I could go on. So many communities don't have as much control over their health like some of us because of racism.

The systemic, daily insults are massive. And please know, many people in these communities are doing all they can to be healthy.

I really want us white people, who are the majority of my clients and audience especially to understand how ideas of "good" and "bad" neighborhoods originated in racism and yet, aren't the whole truth, especially when it comes to our health. As Desiree said just last night in Freedom School, which I highly recommend if you want your mind blown wide open, is one of



the biggest lies of whiteness is that it works for white people. And understand whiteness is a belief system, not about white people perse. Big difference.

So here's an example of how whiteness doesn't benefit white people:

When we as white people have usually never had to question the system, say health care in this case - we are more likely to trust doctor's, including when they say "we don't know" or only look to our individual choices because part of whiteness (not a skin color but a belief system) is believing everything is about individuality.

In just one example of a dozen I could now give, if you are white and you or your child struggle with asthma like I did as a kid, I guarantee air pollution was probably a cause affecting your "good" neighborhood too. It certainly was in my "good" neighborhood.

And rather than understanding we all breathe the same air, we are more likely to trust doctor's, including when they say "we don't know" and take an inhaler, like what I did as a kid and into my early 20s.

There are people who know. It just might not be who we are listening too.

And of course we need short-term solutions like inhalers. Or to get off milk like what helped me reduce some of the intensity of my asthma.

But if we don't use those as a bridge to addressing root causes, we end up with air pollution only increasing, as we know from the climate collapse, and collective health decreasing here in the US, with COVID being an acute example of this.

Air pollution influences asthma, autoimmune illness, cancer, heart disease - I could go on. It will effect all of us - not equally - but still affecting all of us and will continue to get worse until we join together to realize we all share the same air.



So back to COVID and how depending on our individual and community lives, we all had a different intensity and duration of fear and uncertainty.

When it comes to WAIETN and the emotional eating cycle, Phase 2 is all about the intensity and duration we feel our triggering emotions. This will determine how out of control and for how long our eating is causing us pain. For example, it could be the difference between bingeing for three days versus overeating one night.

In WAIETN and Truce with Food, we use a wave analogy. Emotions are like waves. They are always going to happen. Sometimes those emotions are big and at high tide, they are coming all the time.

So it's not about never getting in the ocean to surf. We need to learn the skills to surf these emotional waves so we feel capable and confident, rather than be deluged and tossed and turned to the shore where we have a wedgie and sand in our but and vagina's! This is when we turn to food.

As Laura McKowen, Insatiable guest and author of *We are the Luckiest* says, "Life doesn't get easier. We get better."

An example of this is when our lives are burning us out and so we are chronically feeling behind and exhausted. Most of us are uncertain on how to carve out sustainable work lives. The uncertainty of how to keep this up, how to take care of ourselves, how to make it better, is a definite eating trigger. Especially the longer it goes on - duration - it gets more intense as our bodies wear down and can't handle the same stresses like before. We actually become desensitized to things like sugar the longer the stress goes on and need more and more to feel the same rush we get from sweets in this case.



So imagine you're struggling with burn out because you are uncertain how to make your work more sustainable - the ocean becomes high tide all the time.

And then a hurricane happens and creates even higher tides- say, your child has to stay home from daycare because they are sick or work is stressful on top of its existing intensity, eating becomes a safe refuge from constantly being thrown to shore with a wedgie and sand in our bathing suit.

So if our eating triggers are intense and constant, when something like COVID or any other stress happens, our eating will be more intense because we don't have the energy, clarity or skills to work through these new waves and are more likely to eat.

And the more it feels like chronic high tide, the more likely we are to binge than overeating or overeating only at night perse.

As Heather, an IG friend sent me this poem from The Deepest Messages account, "How I handle difficult situations in life: "Let me eat something first, then I will think about it."

However I want to note: this is where out of control eating gets tricky. If we binge or overeat say on the weekend, we might say "nothing stressful happened today, I was super relaxed." However, this out of control or stress eating cycle is still active. It's not always about what came immediately before you ate or binged...it's a discomfort of being at risk that builds overtime. This is a holistic understanding and layer of complexity that most emotional eating models that I've seen don't address. It's the old "death by a thousand paper cuts" metaphor.

So Phase 2 in Disasters is all about Impact and how that increases our emotional reactions based on our real or perceived sense of risk.



And with emotional eating, the more at risk we feel, the more it feels like it's always high tide (a chronic stress) or a hurricane comes in and makes the tide even higher or more intense than we know how to surf. And our eating intensity (i.e. overeating or bingeing) and duration (for how many meals or days or weeks we feel off track) will match our felt sense of risk, as we eat to feel a sense of safety.

Ok, now onto **Phase 3, which the researchers call "The Heroic Phase"**. It is characterized by a high level of activity with a low level of productivity. During this phase, there is a sense of altruism, and many community members exhibit adrenaline-induced rescue behavior. As a result, risk assessment may be impaired. The heroic phase often passes quickly into phase 4.

We can look to our health-care, essential workers and amazing community members. 412 Food Rescue, which is helping to eliminate food insecurity and reduce carbon emissions from perfectly good food being in the garbage (their founder Leah was on Insatiable way before we were doing seasons), here pivoted their operations to help families and kids who needed food.

There was a lot of good that was happening, especially because the Trump administration was negligent and recklessly irresponsible.

This is where many of us as individuals not in these roles stayed home, wore our masks, tried to support small businesses, tried to make the most of having kids at home or for my clients who are business owners, they got creative in pivoting their businesses or artistic careers or tried to enjoy the downtime. We might have donated our time, money or effort to various causes.

When it comes to WAIETN out of control eating phase 3, this is when we go into battle mode with food and life if we don't know how to work through our triggers. In the free workshop on May 12, I'll go over the three different battle modes. Again, sign up at alishapiro.com/covid-out-of-control-eating-workshop.



This is when we GEAR UP or go into “All” mode from the all-or-nothing eating cycle which again, is also the out of control eating cycle. Same cycle, just different way clients describe their relationship to food. Or as some of my non-US clients say, “FULL ON”.

What “All” means depends on your stress reaction patterns. This is how you might be feeling right now if you gained COVID weight: let me pick the BEST plan or do this over-the-top 30 day challenge! SUMMER is in a month for us in the Northern Hemisphere.

And just like the heroic phase of a disaster is unsustainable, so is the ALL mode we go into in the all-or-nothing eating cycle.

I see this happening right now with those of us who believe COVID is real. We are mostly collectively in the accommodate pattern as a society, which all-or-nothing view is seeing things as either/or.

Either be a hero and get a vaccine or you are putting yourself and others at risk. And...that’s all we need to do to reduce our COVID risk!

What about sure, get the vaccine if that is the right choice for you AND let’s change the Farm Bill, which gives billions of dollars of subsidies to Corporate hedge funds who own industrial farms that produce soybean, corn and sugar, which makes processed junk food cheaper than it should be?

COVID deaths were related to a lot of the conditions caused by processed foods. Not just the inflammation of our bodies. Also the environmental pollution this system creates.

COVID isn’t going anywhere. Why not address other ways to support all of our immunity not just for COVID but all the other conditions that would benefit from our collective being



healthier? We can do vaccines for those who want them AND make other changes. It doesn't have to be either/or. It can be AND for more sustainable solutions.

And as I said above, the unfair and enraging way this disproportionately affected communities of color is because of racism. I've heard nothing about addressing the systemic racism that allows companies to heavily pollute certain neighborhoods yet affects all of our water and air.

I don't want us to fool ourselves into believing a vaccine is enough or the only public health shift we should be accommodating and rallying around. In fact, in this round of WAIETN: COVID edition, there will be a module added at the end of how we can personally change for collective impact. I want us to capitalize on this moment on a social justice level.

In non-COVID times, if we look to the uncertainty trigger, we might have just binged or got on the scale and have seen it as much higher than we were expecting (which was my case when I was at the doctor's almost one year post pregnancy and got on the scale for the first time since having to weigh in at the hospital before giving birth).

We feel really uncertain: How do I get this under control? What is happening with my body?

A non-COVID example in my own life is when I thought I was being a "good" cancer survivor by accommodating my oncologist's plan for monitoring my cancer risk for secondary cancers from my treatments, specifically breast and thyroid cancer.

I thought I was being the "good", accommodating girl to have my MRI's and oncology appointments. Because this was a pattern of mine and how I related to medical and diet authority at the time, I also thought I was doing a "good" job of taking care of all my diagnosis by trying all the different medicines that for me, weren't working.



But I kept trying thinking medicine is how you are “good”! And it can be for some people. It just mostly wasn’t working for me, which only added to my uncertainty. No wonder my eating was out of control!

The problem with this ALL, extra or perfectionist way of being, eating included, is you can't keep it up or it takes all your energy to keep it up, which isn’t rewarding, and it has major blindspots.

For example, I had no idea there was so much else I could be doing for myself in terms of diet, lifestyle and emotional healing to feel more safe around my cancer experience and improve my relationship with my body.

Thinking either I listened to the doctor’s OR I was being irresponsible blinded me to all the ways I could be responsible outside of this either/or, all or nothing mindset.

So I would feel some relief after my scans came back clear or when I felt hopeful about a new anti-depressant or diet (at the time, I was still heavily in diet culture). I was following the formula prescribed by authority, which I was socialized to believe, was the safe, right thing to do and it gave me a temporary feeling of safety and relief from my uncertainty trigger.

I felt like I was doing all the “right” things and being responsible about my health and wellbeing. But, this ALL phase with its blindspots only worked in the short-term.

So in Phase 3, in disasters we go into our own version of heroic mode and when it comes to out of control or all-or-nothing eating, in WAEITN, we identify how and what “ALL” mode we go into based on our stress reaction. Which then takes us to Phase 4.

In **Phase 4 of a disaster, researchers call this the honeymoon phase.** It is characterized by a dramatic shift in emotion. During the honeymoon phase, disaster assistance is readily available.



Community bonding occurs. Optimism exists that everything will return to normal quickly. As a result, numerous opportunities are available for providers and organizations to establish and build rapport with affected people and groups, and for them to build relationships with stakeholders. The honeymoon phase typically lasts only a few weeks.

I'm not sure we ever had this collectively in the US because of the lack of leadership and gas lighting. There were certainly pockets of this. It wasn't all-or-nothing.

On an individual level, you might have loved working from home and no longer having a commute. Maybe you found new at home workouts you loved. Maybe loved spending more time with kids. Maybe you knitted masks for community members and felt really connected to your community. We might have cut out sugar and started loading up on Vitamin C, D and zinc and veggies to support our immunity.

Maybe as some of my clients realized, you "came out" as an Introvert or loved not having the choice to run around everywhere.

Also, it's OK if you didn't feel this way or have this phase. We all had our different COVID experiences and stresses. This is of course a general collective arc and yet, because of how at least here in America our society is so unequal and our federal government didn't give a shit about us, many people didn't experience a honeymoon phase.

Many people had to keep society going and were more at risk with their jobs. Some people didn't have access to health-care.

For us, Carlos and I already worked from home. I was already taking care of my and Eça's health in a holistic way (I can't control Carlos!).



Yet, I was a brand new parent and barely sleeping. New parenthood was a hard adjustment for me. I'm not even sure why. It just was. And then because I made the rookie mistake of spending more time planning my labor and birth, my idea for how we would manage childcare was way off base.

So we already didn't have enough childcare and then lost the great support my Mom was because of her six-week COVID cruise ordeal, including the stress of my parents (and my aunt and uncle) having COVID. I personally never felt a honeymoon COVID phase because of the transition to becoming a parent and the childcare challenges it created.

So it's OK if you skipped over this phase or if you had a honeymoon phase. No right or wrong, just awareness of your experience and that of others.

From a WAIETN and out of control eating lens, this is when we get the short-term benefits of being in that "ALL" stress reaction pattern.

In non-COVID times, this is when we go on the restrictive diet or protocol and feel like "it's working", meaning weight loss is happening yet of course, we feel restrictive or your bloat goes away and your mood improves if you're doing something like a gut healing cleanse.

Often when clients come to me they can't muster the energy to be "All" anymore or they want something that isn't diet culture and will support them to feel better than they are now in their bodies. Or they've done the elimination diets or functional medicine approaches and either can't stick with it or aren't getting the benefits from it because their gut issues are not longer food related, it's emotional related.

So, Phase 4 is the Honeymoon phase for disasters and out of control eating. This is where we experience the benefits of our heroic measures or with eating, we feel the plans we have are working, and usually they do in the short-term but it's really hard to keep these approaches up.



Then **we move into Phase 5, which is the disillusionment phase.** Researchers says it's a stark contrast to the honeymoon phase.

During the disillusionment phase, communities and individuals realize the limits of disaster assistance. As optimism turns to discouragement and stress continues to take a toll, negative reactions, such as physical exhaustion or substance use, may begin to surface. The increasing gap between need and assistance leads to feelings of abandonment. Especially as the larger community returns to business as usual, there may be an increased demand for services, as individuals and communities become ready to accept support. The disillusionment phase can last months and even years. It is often extended by one or more trigger events, usually including the anniversary of the disaster.”

So in Phase 5 we are disillusioned. This happened probably for most of us as weeks turned into months of lockdowns here in the US.

And this is when researchers see substance abuse and mental health issues arise.

There's an intensity to our emotions and the reality that we can't keep a lot of the things we were doing in the heroic and experiencing in honeymoon phase up. As with honeymoons, the novelty wears off.

I saw how as people lost jobs and businesses were forced to close, the food banks couldn't keep up with the demand and how many people were going hungry. I saw my clients burning out with not a lot of choices available to them. I saw how the isolation was taking its toll and many of the ways we normally take care of ourselves, like with the gym or social events, were cancelled.

And they found that one year anniversaries can trigger an extension of this phase of disillusionment, which was last month in March. So if you were feeling really disoriented in



March and your eating was really off, it might have been an increase in your sense of disillusionment.

So because of this disillusionment, which is in large part because can't keep our heroic or "all" efforts up and in the case of America, the Trump administration was essentially gaslighting us that COVID was even real let alone there wasn't a lot of national level leadership that could have made things so much better, and we experienced such a long lockdown phase and cases and deaths were rising because an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

And...we need to hold the AND. This might be an unpopular opinion because I know most of my clients are independent or progressive leaning but the disillusionment phase was exasperated by the media, which here in the States, exaggerated the risk because "if it bleeds, it leads...particularly to Corporate profits in the form of advertising dollars).

Real scientific dissent has been censored. The overall risk has been completely over-exaggerated and progress that has been made wasn't broadcasted here as much.

I don't always love Bill Maher as I've become more "woke" as the kids used to say and yet this segment to me was what I want to hear from people who identify as left or liberal! The majority of Liberals have a completely over-exaggerated risk of COVID hospitalizations, COVID in children, etc.

When we traveled to Florida last month, I met a traveling nurse in the airport and she said the media was completely exaggerating the truth. And I know sometimes we put people in Trumper camps who question COVID at all but I promise you, she wasn't a Trumper - she was a Black woman, putting her odds of being a Trumper at less than zero.



The data we have, as it becomes available shows this. If you want to understand this in more detail, highly recommend watching Bill Maher's "Give it to me Straight" doc new rules segment. Google it. It's worth the watch. I'll include it in the show notes here.

Circling back, either way, because of these forces, we've had a long disillusionment phase and it's been a low point for a long long time.

For many people, the disillusionment phase is when the stress from isolation from those you love, security risks like that of finances or realizing you don't like your partner, or no childcare reprieve and being ZOOMed out...you name it, this is when your eating might have felt really out of control. Again, it makes sense when you understand food is largely about safety.

When the waves are so big for so long, you often have to just surrender. It doesn't mean eating is your only choice. And this is a tricky thread for me here because I don't want you to judge yourself if your eating was shit. Living like we had to in lockdown for so long is not normal, it's unhealthy and it's hard.

AND, now that we are starting move out of this, and eventually have more breathing room, there can be other ways we manage our stress aside from food.

In the WAEITN out of control or all-or-nothing eating cycle, this is when we crash and burn from being ALL or EXTRA with food restriction and life choices.

Trying to be the best, the coolest, the hardest working, the most perfect - whatever has gotten us success in life, becomes our kryptonite. For my Chinese medicine fans, you know in TCM, the extreme of yin or yang turns into its opposite.

In my work, the ALL turns into nothing. We go from over functioning to under functioning or perceiving we are under functioning.



Hence, my example of getting sick last June. I got sick in part from being so burn out (over-working and being over-extended), and was leveled for a week of illness and then it took me most of the month to regain my strength. I went from over-functioning to under-functioning. I bounced back better from COVID, probably because I had tweaked my diet to eliminate most of my insomnia and we hired a Nanny so I was healthier when we all caught COVID.

So not only do we have the stress of “falling off” with food and life, we also now have the added stress of the judgement and shame of falling off when we tell ourselves we are behind or have failed - this is both with food, our bodies and life.

The pain of the trigger + our self-judgement makes those emotional waves even more intense. It will overwhelm us mentally and in our bodies.

So we numb. We distract. We Chuck IT, F@#\$ it eat.

In WAIETN, we learn how to be compassionate when we feel we’re in the NOTHING part of this cycle so we can effectively move through this discomfort without food.

You’re often in this phase if you tell yourself, “I need to be gentle with myself” and that is overeating and watching Netflix when you don't want to be doing this (if you genuinely want to, awesome). You’re having to be so gentle in this way because you have been so not-gentle. You are essentially balancing through extremes.

In other words, in WAEITN, we learn how we can create a sense of safety and fulfillment with our triggers (which often feels like confidence and courage) without being “All” so we don’t land in the “nothing” space.

And it means supporting the body here too, not just thinking “I should be over this” or “I don’t have it as bad as others”. There is a place for having gratitude and looking at the bright side as



they say. But if you try to bypass this at this point in the process, it's what is now trending as toxic positivity. You will keep repeating the same out of control eating cycle.

So many of you might be in this phase still. That is OK. It's really hard to see what's happening if you don't know where and how to look. And again in the States, especially for parents and marginalized folks, it's been a super challenging year.

If we don't rush past this phase, we can learn to feel into this muck to actually gain insight into how to make choices that support our bodies, health and the lives we want to be living.

Part of being in this phase and what we do in WAIETN is we look at our nervous system reactions and how to support our systems to relax so we can have more perspective on how we want to respond to our stresses differently.

In the workshop, I'll be talking about a few of the reactions that most people don't discuss. It isn't just fight or flight reactions. And if you've felt disoriented, frozen or apathetic, you'll definitely want to understand this somatic reaction.

So in Phase 5 of disasters we are disillusioned and major mental health, substance abuse and disordered eating occur as we are in the muck of our reality.

And in the out of control eating cycle, we are disillusioned from the plan and stress in our life - both diets and our overachieving, perfectionist or EXTRA COOL plans, as we end up in the "nothing" discomfort from falling off of the never sustainable "I can't keep this up ALL or EXTRA.

So what come after disillusionment? Definitely some soulful soul searching questions if we want there to be genuine individual and collective change.



This bring us to the final Phase, which is Phase 6 and researchers call the Reconstruction phase. It is characterized by an overall feeling of recovery. Individuals and communities begin to assume responsibility for rebuilding their lives, and people adjust to a new “normal” while continuing to grieve losses. The reconstruction phase often begins around the anniversary of the disaster and may continue for some time beyond that. Following catastrophic events, the reconstruction phase may last for years.

So, I think many of us are starting to enter this phase. I know some of my clients are vaccinated, some have had COVID like me or some are cautiously and carefully getting out in the world while they wait on more vaccine data to come in.

Recovery is going to take some time. And, I hope we don't go back to normal. Normal was quite unsustainable.

This is where we have an opportunity. Both individually and collectively to make sustainability and the fulfillment that comes with sustainability part of our lives.

This can start by even recognizing we need a recovery period. To feel, reflect and integrate on WTF we went through and how it changed us. To honor how much our bodies are holding.

I think a lot of us are looking for a feeling of relief. Or questioning when will I not feel scared to hug someone again? Or go to the gym? Or my forever question now is “when will I catch up on sleep?”

Or we don't want to go to sleep on the social change we want to see in the world, including we want to make sure we know what is ours to do and that we aren't just reacting to all the emotion on social media.



But being invested in our individual and collective recovery is something I think we need to pay as much attention to as we did the media coverage of the pandemic.

So here is where we can learn how to choose differently. And we can start by acknowledging we need a recovery period.

One thing I read in the Lily, which is the Washington Posts feminist new highlights is that we need to create closure ourselves with this period because there will not be a clear, formal ending to the coronavirus.

They quoted Amanda E. White, a counselor and founder of the Therapy for Women center. She said “Commemorating the end of something allows our brains to make sense of it.”

She suggests creating your own ritual to mark what you’ve been through - whether that’s celebrating a big milestone, or recreating a holiday you missed with family. It might have been like some of my clients who missed out on their own baby showers or kids birthdays or Christmas. Isn’t there somewhere that does Christmas in July?

Another thing we need to do is tend to our nervous systems. They have been through a lot. Krista Tippet, the host of OnBeing had Kristin Runyan, on who is clinical psychologist and a nervous system expert.

The whole episode was about what’s happening as we feel the immediate threat of COVID die down and how now our bodies feel they have a chance to get out of fight or flight. But again, some of us went into different reactions that I’ll share in the workshop.

Anyway, she was saying a few things we can do to send our bodies signals of safety are music that brings us to happier times. And scents: a scent that takes you to a happy place. Love the



smell of vanilla. Makes me think of Christmas time as a kid - way before I knew about Round Up, gluten intolerance and gut health and calories - and made Christmas cookies with pure joy!

In my upcoming workshop, I'll also provide some other ideas to support your nervous system and important questions and ideas for new ways of choosing for your life so we can really integrate the lessons and values we want to embody moving forward so you can rebuild in a way that supports your eating, health and life. Both individually and collectively.

On the WAIETN out of control eating cycle, this is where we learn to choose in alignment with our values and needs rather than get triggered into the same cycle again. In other words, we put ourselves out there for what we want versus protecting ourselves from potential risk.

To use a sports metaphor, we start playing to win rather than trying not to lose. In leadership vocab, we start leading our lives rather than managing them.

Because not only do we want to eat well to build our immunity and have resilience for COVID and all the other viruses here and yet to come, but we are missing out on so much potential - both in building our capacity to transform discomfort and to be creative, including with problem solving, when life says, "SURFS UP."

Show you an example of this Recovery and Rebuilding phase with a client example:

My client was about 7.5 months pregnant when COVID lockdown happened. All her birth plans get thrown into the air. The birth center she was planning on going to, which is right next to a hospital if something were to go wrong - which made her feel safe because she takes an integrative approach to her health, told her they were trying to make decisions with the data they had, but for right then, no partner or doula. And wearing a mask during labor which having gone through it, I can't imagine. No to mention the fear of getting COVID while pregnant - we had no data on any of this.



So basically uncertainty on steroids. And what's interesting is in our work together, we worked on self-doubt, which triggered her story and being at risk for failure and rejection. Now uncertainty is different than self-doubt because it's coming from outside forces yet it can certainly stir up our self-doubt. But because we had been working together at that point for about a year, she didn't eat out of control. She was able to get below the protective all-or-nothing thought process that uncertainty triggered in her and really hear her intuition, not the stormy, choppy panicked thoughts that were trying to protect like they did in the past.

This enabled her to find her Option C, which A) was follow the birthing centers protocols or B) go to a hospital, where now they are treating COVID and have to follow even more stringent protocols, which again, for some people, might have made them feel safer. But it didn't for her.

She ultimately decided to do a home birth, to which her husband was like WHAT? WE AREN'T HIPPIES! He was supportive though once he wrapped his head around it. She had to find a midwife, make sure her Doula felt safe which she did and had a very empowering home birth.

Her self-trust went through the roof and has now opened up so much more resilience and power that she might not have experienced had she eaten her way through and thought she had to settle on two unsatisfying choices for her.

I want to emphasize that it's all about choosing in alignment with our own needs and values. Not a right or wrong. Some people might have felt the birth center was still the right choice for them. Others the hospital. It's important that it feels aligned with what you need, want and your body is telling you.

In my own life, this is when I started realizing there was so much I could do to feel more in control of my health trajectory, emotional health included. As that happened, I didn't binge before cancer scans and while waiting on results. And I don't do that to this day when I've had



some major uncertainty hurdles, like cancer scares, infertility diagnosis or like a colonoscopy this January that was seven years overdue after I had polyps seven years ago (actually had zero polyps this time which speaks to the power of diet and lifestyle to help with cancer prevention!).

It's when in the face of life's uncertainty, I did have some choices that weren't dieting, which at the time I had totally confused weight and health. This blocked me from making me feel safer in my body and life. Not only did I gradually end my out of control eating, I started getting more savvy with my body and life and how to live the dreams I most wanted to experience.

So in this space of choosing differently, where we will still feel the emotional waves, but now we know how to surf, we get to experience the upside of uncertainty, what I think of as awe. I still get emotional every time I think of how close I was to never having Eça.

This is where when we take the road less traveled with our bodies, we realize discovering our unique, profound and liberating body truths is worth the effort.

I also want to emphasize that this doesn't mean everything works out how we want it to in the end. I have a lot of clients who are struggling with infertility for example. Things with our body don't always go like we'd like. No matter how hard we try. How much we know. This is why uncertainty makes us often feel so at risk. The body is one of the greatest mysteries. We know so much about it and we know so little. So I want to put that caveat here in the recovery and rebuild phase and also have us understand why uncertainty makes us feel unsafe: the truth in life is there are no guarantees.

However, we can make the choice to try and risk opening our hearts up one more time and seeing if we can continue to learn and get closer to how we want to experience life when we know the full range of our choices.



I want all of us to make choices knowing a wider range of choices that are available to us, including how we will approach things like our own burn out and social justice change, so we can individually and collectively recover from COVID and the stress triggers that are keeping us eating out of control and preventing a more satisfying life.

If this interests you, free workshop to understand your own individual emotional COVID arc and eating on May 12 at 1 pm EST. Register at <https://alishapiro.com/covid-out-of-control-eating-workshop/>

Go through these 6 phases with questions to prompt your own individual clarity and beginning steps to choose differently so you can cultivate the self-trust when the emotional waves in our life get intense. This allows us to better hold out for what we really want in life or as Dr. Susan David says, that resonated with a lot of my clients, have our own backs.

This leads to an increased sense of safety so you don't have to turn to food. And with that increased sense of safety, you can take the risk to catch the waves or go after the dreams that you really want to experience. Not just about building more safety. We build safety so we can take risks!

So I hope this podcast gave you a sense of the emotional trajectory many of us have been on and a few ideas of how to recover and rebuild from COVID and emotional eating.

Quick Recap:

6 Disaster Phases:

Disaster
Impact
Heroic
Honeymoon
Disillusionment
Rebuild



Mirrros Emotional Eating Phases:

Trigger

Gear Up

Be All or Extra

Protected (temporarily)

Embodiment for Insight

Option C: Choose Differently

A few tips and tricks for this recovery phase: a ritual to mark the end and take care of your nervous system by sending it signals of safety like music that makes you happy or scents.

And if you're feeling the craving for a more sustainable, saner approach to food and life and want more ideas to support yourself in your recovery, join us for the COVID: Roots of Out of Control Eating workshop on May 12 at 1 pm EST at <https://alishapiro.com/covid-out-of-control-eating-workshop/>

Or in WAIETN LIVE: COVID edition, which opens for registration May 10-17. Special early bird: save \$200, free FFC (\$175) and three months post WAIETN (\$180).

Take care of yourselves, your bodies and each other everyone.

[END]

