

Ep #14: All or Nothing



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Natalie Brown

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This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 14.

Welcome to *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you're a successful woman who is ready to stop struggling with your weight, you're in the right place. You'll learn everything you need to know to lose weight for the last time in bitesize pieces. Here's your host, certified life and weight coach Natalie Brown.

Hello everybody. Once upon a time, I ate sugar nonstop. I could literally go an entire day eating nothing but candy and treat. Not a vegetable in sight anywhere. I knew sugar was bad and that eating it all day every day wasn't serving my body or my health, and was contributing to my weight gain. But I just wanted it all the time.

I tried to go cold turkey again and again, cutting myself off completely, saying I could eat zero sugar for a month or even a week. But I would usually only be able to go one hour, to be honest. The story I told and believed about myself was that I would always crave sugar, I would never be able to stop eating it. And I would therefore never be able to lose weight.

Can you relate? This is about as all or nothing as it gets. It's what I want to talk about today. Any of you identify as an all or nothing thinker? I can see all of your hands raised and heads nodding out there. This is such a common mindset amongst all of us chronic dieters.

Extremes, black and white, all or nothing. It's how we set up our eating plans. It's how we gage our success, and it's what keeps us stuck. Let's talk about what it looks like, why it's a problem, and what to do about it, shall we?

All or nothing dieting usually looks like all the chocolate or no chocolate. All diet Coke all the time, or no diet Coke ever. Like me, all the dessert or no dessert. All the salty snack foods or no salty snack foods. All the veggies or zero veggies, except fries, if you count them as a vegetable, which some of us do. I get it.

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Isn't this healthy, Natalie? You might be asking. All those foods are bad foods and I shouldn't eat bad foods if I want to lose weight, right? That is some more sneaky all or nothing thinking as well, that foods are either good or bad. And what it creates is confusion and deception.

Because chocolate doesn't taste bad, if you like chocolate. It tastes good. And when you eat it, you get the reward in your brain of a waterfall of dopamine and other feel-good neurotransmitters, which sends the message that this was a really good choice and we should do it again as soon as possible.

That dopamine reward happens when we participate in a survival ensuring activity. When we eat anything, we get a little mist of dopamine and some other feel-good neurotransmitters that say good job, you're ensuring this organism survival, way to go.

This reward tells us that eating was a good idea and that we should do it again. Dopamine is also released in anticipation of one of these survival ensuring activities, once we've experienced it. So now we not only get a reward when we do it, but we are being gently motivated to take action to get it as well.

When we eat sugar, the reward response is compounded. So rather than a mist of dopamine, we feel a waterfall of dopamine and our brain is like, wow, that was a super important food and we should do whatever it takes to eat as much of it as we can get our hands on.

That is what's happening. No wonder we're eating it all day every day and seeking it out so often, right? It's a pretty mixed message when we're telling ourselves that chocolate is bad because it doesn't taste bad. It doesn't feel bad. Everyone who eats it doesn't gain weight, so it makes it pretty hard to believe it's bad.

And yet, they say it's bad for us, that we shouldn't eat it if we're trying to lose weight. But we really want to and we really like to. And we do anyway. And then we beat ourselves up for being a terrible person who eats bad

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foods. This was part of my problem too. Sugar was bad but I loved it and ate it all the time, so I must be bad for eating it, was kind of where my logic went.

The truth is no food is inherently good or bad. Food is just food. Just ingredients, nutrients, molecules that we ingest. That's it. It has no moral value. Different foods have different nutritional value and different effects on our individual bodies for sure. And we have taste preferences and cultural food traditions and regional specialties and family favorites.

But the food itself is neutral. What's good to you may be bad to me and vice versa. And the most important thing to look at is not what we think about the food but what that thought is creating for us.

If we try to think about foods as good and bad in order to try to manage our desire for them, we end up fighting against ourselves, saying both, we can't eat the chocolate, it's bad and we're trying to lose weight, and but it tastes so good and I want it.

This usually leads to us white-knuckling it and not eating any chocolate for a few days or weeks, and then going "off the rails" and eating massive amounts of chocolate for three days straight.

In addition to these black and white food rules, we also have some black and white thoughts about success and failure. We look at our eating as either perfection or disaster, which means that often, we don't even want to start a plan because we're afraid of not being perfect at it.

If anything less than 100% is 0% but you eat 90% of what is on your plan, your all or nothing thinking disregards all of the choices you made that did align with your goals, to focus on the few that didn't. The 10%. If you wanted to eat six brownies but you ate one, your all or nothing thinking will still chalk it up to failure.

And when you throw in the towel as a failure, you usually eat the other five brownies anyway. All that stopping and starting, a few steps forward, a few

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steps back ends up keeping us stuck in the same spot. Sometimes you'll hear the all or nothing showing up in other ways as well.

Like, I'm not buying one new thing for myself until I lose this weight, or I will never be able to lose weight, or it is impossible to eat what's on my plan on the weekends, or I always sabotage myself. You're either on or off. You're doing it all the way or not at all. You're successful or you're failing.

But what about everything in between? This is what the all or nothing thought error ignores. All of the grey area in between the black and white. It fails to consider any other way of looking at things. There's only one way to be, one way to eat, one way to succeed. And everything else is wrong.

Most importantly, everything else is personal. The black of the black and white, the nothing of the all or nothing is directly connected to your worth and value. It's not just that you ate the bad food. It's that you're a bad person for doing it. It's not that you failed to eat perfectly on plan. It's that you are a failure.

And when you feel bad and like a failure, you don't find comfort in carrot sticks, but in carrot cake instead. Seeing your weight loss in terms of all or nothing, of black and white, it's not a win-lose mindset. It's a lose-lose. There is no confidence built, no progress recognized, no learning, no real celebration.

Even when you're winning or succeeding, you're always on the lookout for the other shoe to drop, which really means on the lookout for you to eat something off your plan and therefore fail. So even when you're winning, you're not feeling the joy and the peace of winning. You're feeling the fear of your own judgment of yourself that will come if and when you fall down.

Your weight loss efforts are not lost with a brownie or even five. Eating brownies one day does not sabotage your weight loss goals and bring you back to square one. You believing you failed because you ate the brownie and subsequently throwing in the towel and eating all the things for three days, that will have an effect on your weight loss.

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So how do we start to think in the middle? To see the beautiful shades of grey in between the black and white? First, I think it's important to know how to identify when you're stuck in all or nothing. The most obvious sign is the presence of the words always and never.

As well as words like impossible, perfect, disaster, out of control, completely, totally, ever, mess, everyone, no one, as well as any references to wagons or rails. Then these three steps can help you kind of start to see the middle.

Step one is explore other options. What would someone else think or say about this? Is there another way to look at this? Am I seeing this from all angles? What are the pros and cons of both sides?

Step two is do a reality check. Is there evidence that supports this opinion? What the facts? Could this assumption be challenged by anyone? Are these situations where my belief isn't happening?

Step three is switch the grey-colored words. When you find yourself using some of the extreme language of all or nothing thinking, stop and ask if you can find some moderate, grey-colored words instead of the black and white ones to describe the situation.

You can also try replacing or with and in the sentence and notice how it changes the feeling of the sentence, as well as the accuracy of it. Like, how can you succeed and fail? It's also important to change the lens through which we are viewing ourselves.

Part of the pain of all or nothing thinking is our attributing our worth to what we do or don't do and our focus on the negative about ourselves. A simple exercise I love is to take a minute at the end of the day to list three things you did or accomplished that day. And then think about the positive beliefs they reveal about you.

This connects your actions to your values and starts to show you, if you're willing to see, how all of your actions are evidence of who you choose to

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be. Let's dip back to the example I gave you at the beginning of me eating nothing but sugar, and let me tell you how I applied this to start seeing it differently.

I used lots of all or nothing language around this issue. Nonstop, entire day, nothing but, all the time, bad, always, never. It was pretty clear that I was stuck in all or nothing thinking about this issue and it was not serving me at all.

One of the things that really turned my all or nothing thinking on its head was the question, are there situations where my belief isn't happening? So believing I never stopped eating sugar wasn't true because that wasn't happening at night.

I wasn't getting up in the middle of the night, nor was I hooked up to an IV of sugar. So I wasn't eating sugar all the time. There were seven to eight hours every day that I didn't even want sugar, which meant that seven to eight hours of the day, I was a person who was capable of not eating sugar.

Do you remember on Dumb and Dumber, if you've seen it, when Lloyd asks Mary what the chances are of a girl like him and a guy like her ending up together? And yes, I mixed that up on purpose. That's what he does. Her response is, "One out of a million."

And his response to that is, "So you're telling me there's a chance." This is the kind of other angle, other perspective I'm talking about. How else could you look at this situation? How can you turn this black and white belief on its head and start to see all the shades of grey that are possible?

Once I chose to see what I was capable of, that I was someone who could not want sugar for seven to eight hours, that was in me, instead of what I was lacking and how I could expand that capability to more times of the day, I was on my way. My brain started to look for evidence of the new thought that I was a person who was capable of not eating sugar, and I

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slowly but surely started to become her. If I can, so can you. No doubt in my mind.

Okay everybody, let's announce a winner, shall we? This week's lucky winner of a \$100 Amazon gift card is Jen. And the title of her review is, "Loving it. Instant fan." So I've been doing this drawing totally old-school. Like, handwriting the names of the reviews on slips of paper as they come in in my email and then putting them in a bag together and shaking it up and pulling one out each this week, for real.

I was so excited to see this one come out because Jen is one of my clients that just finished up her six-month weight loss group with me, where she lost a bunch of weight. I think like, 40 pounds maybe. She changed her brain and I just love her so much and all of my clients. I just love them. And I was just so excited to see her name.

So here's what she had to say about the podcast. "Loving it. Instant fan. This podcast is just what I needed to help me finish my weight loss journey. Natalie has been my coach and helped me through the first half of my weight loss success, and it's great to have this as a tool for the rest of my journey. I love the length of the podcast. It's perfect to fit in on a busy schedule and get motivation or insight. Now I can hear my coach talk to my any time I need a boost. Natalie always brings fresh ideas and I can't wait to see what else she creates through this podcast."

Oh my gosh, Jen, thank you so much. I love you so and I'm missing your face every week already. So glad I know that you're out there listening. It makes me so happy. Okay everybody, see you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you want to learn more about how to lose weight for the last time, come on over to itbeginswithathought.com. We'll see you here next week.