

## Ep #79: Joy



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With Your Host

**Natalie Brown**

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## Ep #79: Joy

This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 79.

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, Master Certified coach, Natalie Brown.

Hello everybody. I have an issue coming up for my clients frequently and I'm sure you are probably having the same concerns, so I want to dive in this week to the idea of food as a source of joy.

Most of us are using food as a solution, food as a tool to escape, food as a reward. Outside of it being a solution for physical hunger, it doesn't really authentically create any of those things.

And yet, we are pinning a lot of our joy on food and eating and meals. I have clients say things like, "I'm a foodie," or, "This is what my husband and I love to do on date nights. We go find new restaurants." They tell me, "I love to cook for my family, or mealtimes are a really big deal in my family, it's really important to me and I just love food and what's the point of a vacation if it's not for the food? It's the only reason I vacation, it's for the food experiences. What will I have to look forward to and how will I reward myself?" All these concerns.

We're using food to fulfill all of these roles. When we think of our sources of joy, our favorite foods are typically in the top few. If we want to lose weight, I think it's important to consider what we do with that. If food is the top three of the top five sources of joy in our lives, and then we start to recognize that maybe there's some backend consequences to that, we're probably going to want to diversify that joy, find some different sources of joy.

Ultimately, that means we have to give up something that we believe creates our joy. And that feels scary for a lot of us and empty and pointless. It's like, what joy do I have in my life? What is the point of this if I don't get to have a treat at the end of the week, right?

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Now, just to be clear, having food be a source of joy is not a problem in and of itself. But for a lot of us, when we are relying on food to create the feeling of joy, or attributing joy to food and it's creating these backend consequences for us, whether it's health consequences or creating a body that we can't move around in the world the way we want to, then I think it's something to think about, something to at least consider.

This is not a podcast for those of you who are like, "I'm totally happy with food being my joy." This is for those of you who are like, "Food is my joy and that's a problem because I want to find other ways to experiencing joy and not have some of the backend consequences that food as my joy is creating for me.

So just a little disclaimer here for you all. This isn't food can't be joy. This is just if you notice that food is your joy and that's a problem because of these reasons, you may want to think about it.

If you fall into the category of someone who believes or notices that food is a lot of your joy and you don't want it to be that way, how do you feel about that? What do you notice coming up for you when you think about giving up food as a major source of joy, or looking for other sources of joy? Or when you think about the fact that you are relying on food as most of our joy.

Accepting and acknowledging what feelings that brings up for us is really important. For some of us, it brings up a lot of sadness. For some of us it brings up the feeling of hopelessness or despair. Consider that first.

And then I think it's really important to ask why you are feeling that way. Why is that the feeling that comes up? For a lot of us, we feel really sad because we think we can't feel joy if we don't have food to create it for us. That's the only thing we know that does it.

It feels like we don't know what will outside of that. For some of us, we have judgment of the fact that food is creating so much joy for us and that we're sad about it, or that we're frustrated about it, or that we're in despair about it. Notice that in there too.

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If there's some judgment about that, if you're thinking something along the lines of, "That's really pathetic that food is my only source of joy, it's just food after all, and I know that and I know it shouldn't be," notice all those thoughts you're having about it. It's really important to just be where we are and notice it and acknowledge it first and foremost because we can't really get to the bottom of it until we do that.

So once you're there, once you notice what's coming up for you when you think about setting food to the side and looking for joy elsewhere, we can then dive into the idea of food being joy. It's interesting because what feels joyful about it for a lot of us is the anticipation of it.

It's the sort of dangling carrot at the end of whatever, getting us to do something because we get to have food joy at the end of it. For example, I can get through this workday because at least I get chocolate cake at the end of it. I can get through this workweek, the beginning of school, or the end of school, or this paper, this project, whatever, because at the end of it I get, fill in the blank, food.

So what's joyful about it is often mostly the anticipation of it. It's not just the eating of it. I mean, the food tastes good, we enjoy the taste experience of the food, it's fun to eat it, maybe it's a ritual to go and stop at this place and get this favorite thing or whatever.

But so much of the dopamine reward involved is actually the anticipatory dopamine that's released in just the looking forward to it. That's why looking forward to something feels so fun and we always are wanting to have something to look forward to.

I think that's why for so many people, this last year and a half has been so hard because there's been so much unknown and some of those things we look forward to haven't been available to us, and we had no end in sight in terms of when it would be happening again.

We missed out on a lot of that anticipatory feel-good dopamine that we get when we have something to look forward to. We weren't planning

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vacations, or going out to eat, or meeting up with friends, or having parties and events that we look forward to. We were deprived of all of that anticipatory dopamine that we all love and crave so much.

And it's a part of this food is joy scenario. We have both the anticipation of the reward and the reward itself that are almost two separate experiences. So part of the struggle we face in setting aside food joy, looking for joy outside of food is that we feel like we're going to be missing out then on that looking forward to something feeling.

That's also something to think about. If you are engaged in activities, whether it's work, school, family, whatever in your life, where the only good part of it is looking forward to it being over and you getting the food reward that you're going to provide yourself at the end of it, that may be something you want to look into in and of itself.

If we're not finding any joy in the process and all the joy is coming from the process being over, that's a gap you may want to investigate. I used to say yes to a lot of things. In my pre-coach life, I was very involved planning school events and hosting things at my house, planning parties, there was a lot of people pleasing and doing things out of obligation back then.

And I clearly remember thinking to myself, "My favorite part of this is when it's over." Because then I don't have a giant to-do list looming, and lots of tasks and errands, I don't have anything to worry about, I don't have the responsibility, I don't have the pressure, I don't need relief.

All the things that were feeling like a problem during the process were also created by me. I always had the option to say no or go through something and enjoy it and love the different parts of it and feel totally different about the process. It's possible to change how we feel about the process by changing how we think about the process.

So what about the experience of food joy itself? Not just the anticipation of it, but the joy we get from the experience of eating the food. The experience of food joy is an intensified experience.

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We have the anticipatory dopamine and then we have dopamine and serotonin and all sorts of feel-good neurotransmitters released when we actually eat the food, when we complete the reward loop. There's a flood, this rush of reward that comes from the experience of eating as well, and it's intense.

Think about when you're craving something and you're thinking, "I get my favorite food at the end of this." And you get to the end, to that food you were anticipating and craving, and you eat it. And it's like, this is so good feeling. It's intense. It's an intense experience.

And when we think about setting that aside, it's difficult to conjure other things that bring that intensity of a reward. This is one thing we have to come to terms with when we are wanting to set aside or expand our sources of joy from food to other things.

The experience of joy is going to be a little bit different. It's not going to be as intense in the moment when we look outside of food for that joy. To me, it's the difference between fireworks and a candle. Fireworks are magnificent and intense and awe-inspiring and amazing and kind of mind-blowing and unusual and unique. You don't typically see fireworks every single day. It's usually as a specific time of celebration that we get to experience fireworks.

And multiple senses are involved because you will see and hear it, sometimes even feel it, depending on how close you are to it. But they explode and there's this intense show and then there's an even bigger finale and then it's over. It's over for another six months or a year. It's a blaze of glory and then it's gone.

Whereas a candle, it's not as bright, not as magnificent or amazing maybe, more every day, but consistent. It's a source of light that is different but it's still light and it can be beautiful in its own right. That's the difference between non-food sources of joy and some of those food sources of joy. The intensity and duration of the feeling.

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That's not to say eating needs to become totally joyless in general. We are designed to experience pleasure from the act of eating in order to encourage us to keep doing it. I still get plenty of pleasure from a delicious, fresh salad, or roast chicken and vegetables, or a slow-cooked pot roast. Plenty of joy from a beautiful piece of fresh grilled fish.

I love those things too, and I get pleasure from those things. But if for instance I'm craving chocolate cake from a very specific place, and I've had a long week, and I've told myself all week that if I just get through the week then I get to go to that certain special place and eat the special chocolate cake, and then I go there and then I eat it, that is an all-together different level of pleasure.

That is an explosion of anticipatory dopamine and reward dopamine. There is no getting around it. So saying I'm no longer going to rely on that or utilize that as a source of joy and that I'm going to look elsewhere means I'm giving up that intense pleasure. This is what I want you to think about.

I'm giving up that intense pleasure. But at the same time, I'm also giving up the aftermath of that. For me, if I were to keep rewarding myself with and looking for joy in chocolate cake or sugar cookies or Dr. Pepper or Cheetos or whatever, then I was also continuing to create a body that I wasn't able to move around in the world the way I wanted to.

I couldn't bend over very comfortably and touch my toes. Running was much more difficult on my joints. I was having other health consequences like reflux that created nodules on my vocal cords. I wasn't sleeping well; I was tired all of the time as a result.

Choosing to eat that way and using food as my source of joy and experiencing intense pleasure day in and day out meant I was also choosing to experience these consequences as well. So that's what we get to think about.

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We get the intense pleasure, yes, true. But what else do we get along with it? We have to take both because we can't choose one without the other. That's not how it works.

When we start to look outside of food to non-food joy, it's less intense pleasure, but it also doesn't come along with a lot of the backend consequences that intense food pleasure does. We're trading in the intense pleasure for the lack of consequences. We're choosing a little bit less intense momentary pleasure for a more peaceful, longer lasting joy. It's a tradeoff. There are always tradeoffs.

I wanted to share some examples of this in my life. The longer lasting joy I choose in my life that I have traded for the intense momentary food joy. I've had clients who are like, "I don't know what else there is, I don't know if there's anything else in my life besides this food joy." And I get it. It's a shift we have to make.

Sometimes when food joy has been a primary focus, it's hard to see past to what else there is. So I just wanted to share with you some of the non-food sources of joy that I like to look for in my life.

We commonly use the phrase find joy and I would just offer that you have to actively look for something in order to find it. When I use the phrase find joy, I'm not referring to things I just stumbled upon. I make it a point to look for, to seek out the feeling of joy in my life outside of food.

I find a lot of joy in my children. I love when they are sleeping. I love when they're awake most of the time too, but there's something so special about them peacefully sleeping that reminds me of all of their goodness. I think of holding them in my arms as babies, and the memory brings me joy.

Any time my children are doing things that bring them joy and make them happy, oh my gosh, I feel such a sense of vicarious joy as well. When my kids are getting along and enjoying each other, I find joy in that. I find joy in walking outside and feeling sun on my face, just warm sun any time really.

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I'm very into warm things. I find a lot of joy in curling up in my bed with my warm heating pad a warm cup of chamomile tea. I love holding a warm mug in my hands. My dogs and cats bring me joy most of the time.

The flowers, blossoms on the trees, the leaves changing in the fall, sunsets, sunrises, clouds, mountains, the ocean, so much joy for me in nature. A new lip color I've never tried, reading a novel just for fun, sleeping in once in a while, spending time just with myself. Spending time with my best friend, with my husband.

Driving and listening to music and singing at the top of my lungs, yummy smells in every form, I could keep going for days. Notice a lot of these things that bring me joy are also things that even when I'm not experiencing them directly, even when I'm just thinking about those things after the fact, after they've happened, and I'm just remembering them, the memory of them also brings me joy.

It's interesting because there's no backend consequences but there are some of those lasting effects, even the memory of the experience brings me joy. Whereas for example, the chocolate cake memory, for me, there was a lot of shame and guilt there because I was fully aware of the unintended consequences or the backend consequences of the eating of the chocolate cake all the time. It wasn't clean joy.

These other sources of joy, even though they don't provide that intense pleasure, provide me joy along the way as well which is such a beautiful thing. And you can see the joy is not necessarily giant, life-changing things. We don't have to find a whole bunch of new hobbies and things to do that bring us joy. We can find that peaceful calm joy, a joy that is light and bright like the candle in all sorts of tiny little places.

What would you be able to find joy in if you were to set aside food and all the unintended consequences of food joy? Okay everyone, if you have questions, I have answers. I am gathering all of your burning questions for a future podcast Q&A episode, so if you're wondering about something, ask

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away. Head to [itbeginswithathought.com/question](http://itbeginswithathought.com/question) and ask me anything. 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](http://itbeginswithathought.com). We'll see you here next week.