

Ep #124: My Favorite Belief



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With Your Host

Natalie Brown

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This is *Weight Loss Success*, with Natalie Brown, episode 124.

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 everyone. I want to share with you today my very favorite belief. This belief has helped me to have more compassion and understanding for myself and less blame and shame. It has allowed me to find and stand in the space of acceptance of myself, and my choices, and my actions which are really my reality and is the most effective place to make changes from. Are you ready?

The belief is this, it makes perfect sense. Let me give you an example of how I have applied this in order to demonstrate what I mean. Once upon a time I was a sugar addict. Well, at least that's the label I gave myself that created instant shame, and guilt, and hopelessness. I really loved sugar in every form, candy, cookies, cake, pie, donuts, soda, Slurpees, fruit snacks, ice-cream. I could list endless items that I loved. I really did not discriminate. If it was sweet and edible I ate it. I went out of my way to eat it.

As a little girl I would sneak the bag of chocolate chips or butterscotch chips into my sock drawer so I could eat it whenever I wanted. I ate all of the candy out of my Easter basket on Easter within hours, that day, all gone. My parents didn't buy fun food, like fruit snacks. So, I remember going to my friends' houses and eating all of theirs, disrupting our play to be like, "Hey, can we go get more fruit snacks?"

Every Thursday when I was in fifth grade I walked to voice lessons after school. It was right next to a grocery store and I usually had a 30 or so minute break once I got there before my lesson started. And so, I would go in the store with my allowance and I would buy all the things, Dr. Pepper, donuts, candy bars, pudding pies. Anyone remember the green pudding

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filled Ninja Turtle pies? Those were my favorite. If you're a 90s kid you know what I mean.

Now, when I say I would buy all the things, I really mean it. I wasn't just buying a donut, and then the next week a Dr. Pepper. I bought all of those things and I ate them all in one sitting. I cannot even imagine what my blood glucose was like on Thursday afternoons. If there was a vending machine with candy in it, you better believe I was using every spare penny I had to buy some. I carried hard candy with me in my backpack all through high school. I ate cookies for lunch. I had candy for my afterschool snack.

I didn't care how low or high quality the sugar was, I would eat an éclair or a Twinkie, didn't matter. When I got married and I had my own house it was a sugar free for all. Many of my adult years looked like me eating a diet of mostly candy and treats, and some fast food mingled in, punctuated by spurts of me trying to lose weight, or eat better, and not eating as much candy or sugar, or any really for that matter. So, the love of sugar persisted all my life. And its constant companions were guilt and shame.

I don't remember a single instance of me eating sugar where there wasn't a little voice in the back of my head saying, "You shouldn't be eating this", or, "Sugar's so bad for you." A lot of my sugar consumption was done in secret or in private because of this. I tried to hide from myself everywhere. I didn't want anyone to know how much sugar I ate or how much I loved it. And I never wanted to admit it to myself. I tried so hard not to want it, not to like it, not to eat it. I never succeeded for any significant amount of time which just intensified the shame I felt.

I couldn't stop eating it even if I tried as hard as I could, it just never lasted. And then one day I learned about what sugar actually does in my body and to my brain. I learned about the feel good neurotransmitters that are released when the sweet hits my tongue. And the way that the insulin responds by flooding into my bloodstream to sweep the extra glucose into my cells to be stored as fat.

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And that my brain has evolved to drive me to seek out and find more sweet foods that create that flood of glucose because that is the energy currency of my body and energy is life sustaining. I want to read to you from the book *The Molecule of More* because I really just love the way the author describes the dopamine circuit that's involved in driving us to seek out more sugar and other life sustaining things.

This dopamine circuit evolved to promote behaviors that lead to survival and reproduction. Or to put it more plainly, to help us get food, and sex, and win competitions. It's the desire circuit that's activated not by need but by the presence of something attractive from an evolutionary or life sustaining standpoint. That is at the moment such a thing is seen the circuit is activated whether or not you're hungry. That's the nature of dopamine. It's always focused on acquiring more of everything with an eye toward providing for the future.

Hunger is something that happens here and now in the present but dopamine says, "Go ahead and eat the donut even if you're not hungry. It will increase your chance of staying alive in the future. Who knows when food will be available next? That made sense for our evolutionary ancestors who lived most of their lives on the brink of starvation. For a biological organism the most important goal related to the future is to be alive when it comes. As a result, the dopamine system is more or less obsessed with keeping us alive.

It constantly scans the environment for new sources of food, shelter, mating opportunities and other resources that will help keep our DNA replicating. When it finds something that's potentially valuable, dopamine switches on, sending the message, wake up, pay attention, this is important. It sends this message by creating the feeling of desire and often excitement. The sensation of wanting is not a choice you make, it's a reaction to the things you encounter.

The man walking past the burger place smelled food and although other priorities may have been floating around in his mind, dopamine gave him a near overwhelming urge he wanted that burger. Although the focus was

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different, this is the same mechanism that was working in our brains thousands of years ago. Imagine one of our ancestors walking along the savannah, it's a clear morning, the sun is coming up, the birds are singing and everything is as it usually is.

She walks along looking without seeing, her mind wandering when suddenly she stumbles upon a clump of bushes that are covered with berries. She's seen these bushes a dozen times before but they never had berries on them. In the past her eyes slipped over these bushes taking in all the details, excitement wells up inside her. The future just became a little more secure because the bush with the dark green leaves makes fruit. The desire circuit powered by dopamine has sprung into action.

She's going to remember this place where the berry bushes grow. From now on whenever she sees this bush a little dopamine will be released to make her more alert and to give her a hint of excitement, the better to motivate her to acquire this thing that can help her stay alive. An important memory has been formed, important because it's linked to survival, important because it was triggered by the release of dopamine.

So, learning about how my brain evolved to respond to sugar, that's where my magical little belief was born. It makes perfect sense. Rather than my old belief that was something's wrong with me and I'm broken because I can't stop eating sugar, it shifted to it makes perfect sense that I think about it and I seek it out, and eat as much as I can. It's not that my brain and body are broken, it's actually that they are working exactly as they are supposed to.

My brain doesn't discriminate, whether the source is berries or Starbursts, the result is the same. Loads of energy in the form of glucose which is life sustaining. That is what my brain and body are primarily concerned with, surviving. My rational brain knows that eating loads of candy can have a detrimental affect on my body. But my toddler or my primitive brain which is what drives my desire for sugar, it doesn't think about the effects. It just thinks about what can be done now to promote my survival in the most basic ways.

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And it's created powerful memories throughout my life that are evidence of this being true. Beating myself up about how much I loved and wanted sugar, it couldn't stop. It just made me feel hopeless and frustrated. And when I feel hopeless and frustrated what do I want? Sugar to make me feel better and thus the cycle continued. But once I started to understand how this was all working from an evolutionary and biological perspective it made perfect sense and instead of hopeless I felt empowered. Instead of frustrated I felt acceptance.

Rather than there's nothing I can do I was able to instead from the place of understanding, ask what can I do? And from that curiosity rather than judgment, I was able to find solutions for me. Now, notice it makes perfect sense, does not change the thing itself. I was still craving sugar. I was still wanting to eat it a lot but understanding how these mechanisms and systems in my body worked, helped me to come from a place of understanding. It didn't change it, it didn't correct it, it didn't make it go away, it just helped me to get to a place of understanding.

I have applied this in so many other places too. It makes perfect sense that we go to food instead of feeling. We've never been taught to feel. And our brains have evolved to avoid pain and seek pleasure. So, if we feel uncomfortable emotions, our brain says, "Food will fix this. Food will make this better." And so, we eat. It makes perfect sense that we focus on our appearance and we obsess over the wrongness of our bodies. We've been taught, and told, and sent the message over, and over, and over in our lives everywhere we look, that there's a right body.

And that the appearance of our bodies is the most important aspect of our bodies and our identities. It makes perfect sense that we worry about what other people think and we try to fit in, and to please, and live some version of a perfect life that we think somehow exists somewhere. We evolve to be a part of a community. If we can form and we fit in, our primitive brains equate that with safety. And safety is life sustaining. That is why being accepted or acceptable feels so important and is such a strong motivator.

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It makes perfect sense that you don't want to plan, or limit foods, or that you eat off plan. Once again, eating is life sustaining. So, if your brain detects a threat to the ability to do that, even if it's your own limitation it will respond with strong urges to eat all the things to prepare for the famine. If your brain feels your freedom to eat what you want is being threatened, it will respond by trying to restore that freedom. If you have disconnected from your body in order to not feel uncomfortable emotions, you will not want to plan ahead for fear of not having food when you need it to escape.

It makes perfect sense that you don't know when to stop or don't know how to listen to fullness cues. When our insulin system is constantly on alert for floods of glucose, our whole digestive hormone system gets out of whack. The hunger hormones that tell us when to eat are constantly signaling. And the fullness hormones that tell us when we've had enough are suppressed. And so of course we are eating all the time and not stopping. And we have also learned to delegate outside of us what and how much we should eat.

We follow meal plans, or gurus, or fitness food apps that tell us so that we don't have any idea how to tune into our bodies for that information. In most of these situations we fight against reality, and we berate ourselves, and we create guilt and shame storms that just drive us to treat our bodies even worse. That is why I love, it makes perfect sense, it helps me look for the reason this might be happening or just might be. And from that more rational place I can move through understanding to solutions.

If it feels hard for you to get there at first because you're so used to just being mean, and intolerant, and giving yourself a hard time, you can start with turning this belief into a question. Sometimes questions feels like the softer version of the belief. So, when something goes sideways or you notice a pattern or a habit that isn't really serving your goals, but you aren't sure how to change, ask, how does this make sense? And see if you can work backwards to figure it out. You'll have to be openminded and willing to really see the reason.

You don't have to like the reason or think it's a 'good' reason, you just want to be able to look for it. The goal is awareness and eventual understanding.

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I know for some reason we think that intolerance and punishment is the way to change. But when we can come to some understanding with ourselves as to why we do what we do, that is the path to real change. That is how we begin to open up to solutions and do things differently.

Okay, everyone, look more closely this week at your choices and see if you can see how it makes perfect sense and start to find some solutions for you. I'll 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.