

Done with Dieting Podcast #10: How to Feel



Full Episode Transcript

With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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You are listening to the Done with Dieting Podcast Episode number ten.

Hi, I'm Elizabeth Sherman, former corporate high tech executive turn life and weight loss coach. But it wasn't that long ago that I was searching for that perfect diet, the one that would finally be the golden ticket to lose the weight that I so desired.

Fast forward past tons of failed diet attempts, exercise fads and painful lessons learned, and although I still have not reached the state of Nirvana, body love, my relationship with food exercise in my body is infinitely better than it was not only when I started this journey, but even as recently as three years ago.

The journey that has allowed me to ditch my scale, stop logging my food and exercise, eat food that I didn't prepare and easily maintain my weight - something that I never thought was possible for me.

I created the Done with Dieting podcast to give you simple, easy to do and sustainable strategies to help you do the same without all of the drama that I went through.

If you're a woman who's looking to create a better relationship with food and her body, get off the diet roller coaster and free up a bunch of headspace spent on calories, how you should look what you should eat and beating yourself up for not doing what you think you should be doing. You are in the right place.

Let's get started.

Hey everyone, welcome. Welcome. Welcome to the show.

So today we are talking about emotions. Now I know. I can hear the collective groan of everyone saying, oh, emotions, that's just soft stuff. We don't need to know about emotions. But yes, yes, you do.

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And before you turn this podcast off, I want to give you the reasons why we need to pay attention to our emotions.

Because the reason that we do or don't do anything has to do with what we're feeling diets and exercise programs, they tell us what to do, right? They tell us to eat vegetables, and drink water and go exercise and lift weights and run around and do all these things. But the reason that we do or don't do those things has everything to do with how we feel.

So if we feel motivated, we're going to do those things, right. But if we don't feel motivated, or if we feel discouraged, then we're not going to do those things. And for many of my clients, the reason that we eat foods that we know aren't going to get us to our goal is because of how we're feeling. We know that we are eating for emotional reasons, we know that we're eating for reasons other than hunger. And if you're eating for reasons other than hunger, you are eating for emotional reasons.

So I think that it's really important that we talk about emotions, what they are, why we have them, how to manage them, and then how to get better control over them. So that's what we're gonna be talking about today.

Some people would call this emotional intelligence, there are a few steps to emotional intelligence. The first step in emotional intelligence is identifying what we are really feeling.

My beginning story, my origin story of emotional intelligence, goes back a number of years, I always considered myself to be really even-keeled. I always felt like I was, you know, a pretty non-emotional type of person. And I, I wore that identity with a badge of honor, because I never really got too excited about anything. And I never really got too down about anything.

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And it was really interesting, because one day, I decided that you know what, maybe there was something kind of wrong with me, because I wasn't really feeling a lot of joy.

People would talk about how excited they were, and I wasn't someone to get really overly excited about things. I thought that was just me, I thought it was just how I was. But at the same time, I would have described myself as a lifelong procrastinator.

And I was always really confused about my procrastination, especially when I was a young professional, because I wouldn't call job interviews back, or by the time that I did call those companies back, they had moved on to somebody else. And specifically, when I was a new personal trainer, a prospect would call me wanting to hire me to get in shape. And it would take me a week to call them back.

I didn't want to look too eager, I would tell myself, or I would tell myself that I needed to have some space between when they called me and calling them back. And I wouldn't call them back for a week. And by the time that I had called them back, they would have given up on me believing that I was unreliable. And I was.

It wasn't until I was listening to this book called the neuroscience of change by Kelly McGonigal. In the book she talks about procrastination, and how when we are procrastinating, we are avoiding a feeling. I remember listening to this book and being like, Oh, that's my ticket. To understand why I'm procrastinating I need to pay attention to when I'm procrastinating and what I'm feeling.

At the time. I knew that I was procrastinating right. We all know when we are procrastinating that we know that we are supposed to be doing one thing and instead we're doing something else, something that's a little bit more interesting to us. And so I started paying attention to when I was procrastinating. What were the sensations that I was feeling in my body.

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What I started noticing and what I started paying attention to was that the feeling that I was having in response to or that was generating the procrastination was the feeling of anxiety as I became aware of this because I really was completely unaware that I was feeling anxious at all.

If you had asked me at the time Did I ever feel anxious, I would have told, you no. when I discovered that I was feeling anxious when I was procrastinating just the awareness of what that feeling felt like in my body allowed me to notice that I was feeling anxious a lot of the time. And as I tuned into this anxiety, I started noticing that the longer I procrastinated, the worse the anxiety got, and that it wasn't going to get better. The more I put off doing the thing that I was avoiding doing in the first place.

That was a turning point for me. Because at that point, I understood that the reason that I was procrastinating was because I was avoiding feeling the anxiety. From that point forward, I can actually tell you that I really kind of stopped procrastinating. And when I did find myself procrastinating, I would tune in to the feeling and ask myself, why am I doing that?

Now to go back to the fundamental reason of why I was procrastinating in the first place is because as a new trainer, I didn't feel confident in my skills, I was afraid that people were going to find out that I didn't know what I was doing just from the phone call, and that they would reject me. As a result, I was taking myself out of the position in the first place so that I couldn't be rejected by those people. I was basically rejecting myself.

This uncovering of anxiety, and procrastination, and not feeling confident in my skills was really the springboard to uncovering my own emotions. Because before that, I was really feeling very neutral.

After I started uncovering this emotion of anxiety, I started noticing that I had many more emotions. And it really started the process of my emotional awakening.

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So when we talk about emotions, what are they? I don't think that it's specific enough to talk about feelings. I think that we need to separate feelings into two different categories. We need to talk about emotions, and then how those emotions manifest physically in our body, also known as sensations.

So in the course of this podcast, I'm going to refer to emotions and physical sensations. An emotion is something that starts in our brain and is transferred to our body. So simply put, an emotion is a vibration in our body, emotions manifest as physical sensations. And if we had to define it to someone who wasn't human, to someone who had no idea what we were talking about, you know, how would we do that? And how we would do that is through listing out our physical sensations, things like heart beating fast, or what does our stomach feel like? Or, you know, does our face get flushed when we get embarrassed or you know, things like that?

In Episode Number seven, how to listen to your body, I talked about something called the body scan. The reason that we have the body scan is so that we can start paying attention to the physical sensations that we have in our body. So how do you feel? So how do emotions physically manifest in your body?

Now, emotions tell us what's happening around us. And they're really designed to keep us alive. For example, when we lived in the wild years and years and years ago, with monkeys and all sorts of wildlife around us, we needed our emotions in order to react quickly to dangerous threats. For example, if we saw a snake, we needed to be able to identify that snake and run away from it as fast as possible.

The way that we do that is the fear that's in our body will fuel the adrenal glands and pump cortisol through our muscles that will get the muscles ready for fight or flight right. It was better to be flooded with fear so strong so that it could carry us to safety.

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Emotions truly are our guidance systems. Our emotions are the reason we do and don't do anything. We either anticipate a positive emotion or we enter To paint a negative emotion, and that's what determines what we will or won't do.

So for me, I was anticipating being rejected by my clients. And rejection feels terrible, and so I wasn't calling them back.

Now on the other hand, once I started having confidence, when someone would call me, I would call them right back, and we would set up an appointment and things would go great. And so in those situations, because the result I was expecting was going to be good, I was actually going ahead and being proactive in doing the thing that I needed to do, which was call the client back.

Now, many of us have no idea what we're feeling emotionally, at least I know that I didn't. But once we start to get comfortable with our emotional state, what we find is that emotions are so super useful for us. And they give us clues as to what's happening around us.

But many of us judge our emotions, right? We think that we shouldn't feel anxious or depressed, that feeling sad for absolutely no reason is wrong. Yet, so many of us feel like there's something wrong with them. And we tend to think that there's something wrong with us for feeling those emotions.

But what if this is just part of the human experience, I'm willing to suggest that judging our emotions as bad resisting feeling the emotion of anxiety or depression, because we don't think that we should have it actually even makes it worse.

So let's talk a little bit about how negative emotions can serve us. Let's use the example of discomfort. What does comfort is telling us is potentially that things aren't what we're used to expecting. And it could also be that we are growing and stretching.

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Fear tells us that we're worried about something in the future, that's going to happen, that's negative, that's going to make our life a little bit worse right.

Now, anger, we don't like talking about anger, right? Anger is scary. And we feel like anger is a negative emotion, and emotion that we shouldn't be experiencing. Anger is telling us that maybe a boundary has been crossed. And hurt is generally generated from a sense of loss.

Disappointment tells us that our expectations were a little bit off.

Frustration tells us that we believe that we should be doing better or more than we currently are, or something's blocking us from progressing.

Now, each of these emotions that I just mentioned, don't feel good in our bodies, we generally don't want to feel frustrated or disappointed or hurt, right. But what if they just give us information, they give us information about what we're thinking and what we believe we're capable of. And so they give us clues into our mind.

So generally, we think about emotions in terms of good and bad. And sometimes when we are first starting to uncover our emotions, categorizing our emotions in relation to how they feel in our body, good or bad, it's the first step that we need to take. And then as we get more nuanced, and start to feel the difference between good emotions and better emotions, we can start to put labels on those emotions as well.

Same thing for bad emotions. Initially, when we are starting out and learning emotional intelligence, what we're doing is we're sifting our emotions through the lens of positive negative. And I want to offer that there's actually a third category, which is neutral. So contentment might be a neutral category, it doesn't necessarily feel good, and it doesn't necessarily feel bad. Boredom is a negative emotion, but it's probably closer to the middle of the continuum.

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What's really fascinating is that different emotions feel differently in each of us. And each of us has different experiences with different emotions which make them either useful or unuseful to us.

So it's always really interesting when I talk to my clients, for example, about what emotions do they want to feel on a daily basis, or what emotion do they want to feel in order to be able to do the things that they need to do in order to be healthy. For example, cooking or you know, planning their meals for the week or exercising. And some people will say excited well, other people will say motivated, which are pretty common responses, but then others will even say determined or focused or committed. So different emotions will create different results in each of us.

Our perceptions of emotions are that they're very feminine, right? From a societal standpoint, we have a lot of judgment about emotions, because we see them as being a weakness, and we see them as being feminine. And we are constantly talking about how women are emotional, and that we can't control our emotions. Like she's so emotional, right?

But I'm going to argue that men have emotions as well. And that women are the only ones with emotions is total BS, okay. And the quintessential example of men having emotions, and not only men having emotions, but men allowing their emotions to control their actions are bar fights, right? That's just a different type of emotion. A midlife crisis is totally an emotional response to aging. You know, women are not the only ones that have emotions, maybe we are more likely to respond to them. But men have emotions as well. And they respond to them just on a different level.

And this is one reason why I love the think feel act cycle is because we know that everything we do has everything to do with how we feel. And the thoughts that we have that make us feel whatever emotion it is that we're having. Be aware that we cannot function. Without emotions, we have emotions, all of the time.

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Now, emotions are very fleeting, we can have hundreds of different emotions within a day. And so it's always really interesting when someone comes to me, and they say, I just want to feel motivated to exercise. Because motivation is a feeling. And just like we feel joy and anger and sadness, and and boredom, we feel motivation as well.

And so we can not depend on motivation being there for us all of the time. Because if we do, then we're going to be really upset when it's not there when we need it to be.

The first step in mastering emotional intelligence is understanding how emotions feel in our body, and then being able to feel comfortable with those physical sensations that the emotions produce in our body. So when I have an emotion, what are the physical sensations that go along with that emotion. And so it takes a little while of noticing, and then naming what those physical sensations are.

And for myself, I know that when I initially started getting in touch with my emotions, there would be times when I would feel intense emotion, and all of the feelings would come up at the same time. So it took a long time for me to be able to sift through those different feelings so that I could start to understand which physical sensations went with which emotions.

So for example, if I was feeling afraid, and angry and sad, and defensive, what are the physical sensations that go along with each of those different emotions? When we feel them all at once, it's a little overwhelming to, you know, figure out what are all of the emotions that I'm feeling at the same time. And so it took a little bit of time for me to figure out that these are the physical sensations that go along with anger. These are the physical sensations that go along with sadness. These are the physical sensations that go along with disappointment, so on and so forth.

Now, when we are having an intense emotion, what will typically happen is the part of our brain that creates logical thought actually goes offline. It's called the prefrontal

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cortex. And so that will go offline. And we will stop thinking I know that this would happen to me all the time in the middle of an argument, that I wouldn't be able to defend myself. I wouldn't be able to articulate what I was thinking I wouldn't be able to articulate what I was feeling or even put together a constructive series of coherent sentences. I wouldn't be able to think properly.

I felt completely out of control because Cuz I had this intense emotion. And I didn't even know how to say anything. And so it was really overwhelming through the process of noticing how emotions feel in our body. So for example, feeling a lump in your throat, or, for example, when I'm embarrassed, my face gets red, and I feel flushed and hot, when we start to notice those physical sensations, then we can start to create some awareness around those emotions.

Because ultimately, what's happening is, we're not in the practice of feeling the emotion. And therefore we're afraid of what might happen when we allow the emotion to come out, right, we're afraid of losing control, because negative emotions feel bad. And because they feel bad, we're not in practice of allowing the emotions to be there and not respond to them. We're not in practice of allowing the emotion to be there, and just notice it and sit with it. And instead, what we try to do is stuff it down.

Now, here's the really interesting thing, emotions, they might feel bad, but they can't hurt us. And I really want you to hear that emotions can not hurt us, we will have a 100% survival rate of our feelings, if we can stay in our body, and just feel the physical sensations that those emotions create in us, they cannot hurt us.

When we can allow ourselves to feel those feelings and do whatever it is that we want to do any way, then we will have the power to do anything that we want in the world, when we have the power to feel our feelings and do what we want any way, if we can do what we want most, without allowing our feelings to get in the way we can accomplish anything.

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And so to put this in practical terms, the reason that we run for the cookies is because we feel like we've disappointed a friend by not being able to be there for her. Or maybe something happened at work, where we're feeling a lot of shame. And we really just want to comfort ourselves with a bottle of wine. And not that there's anything wrong with either of those solutions.

But far too often, we run to those numbing type of behaviors, instead of dealing with the problem in and of itself.

After we've eaten the cookies, we're gonna feel terrible, and our problem isn't going to be gone, we're still going to feel like we've disappointed our friend, after we've drank the bottle of wine, we're still going to feel shame about our performance at work. And it'll even make us feel worse, because it's not getting us any closer to our goal of being healthier. In fact, it's getting in our way, it doesn't help anything, when we run to those behaviors to help us feel better.

And so why not just deal with the emotion in the first place instead of trying to cover it up with something outside of ourselves.

Now, we all want to be happy, right? If you ask anyone, we all just want to feel positive emotions. We want to feel love, we want to feel happy. We want to feel excited, joy, contentment, all of those amazing feelings. I think that I fought for a really long time that it was possible to only feel the good emotions, the ones that I wanted to feel. But I want to offer you the thought that maybe emotions are 50% good and 50% bad. And having 50% positive and negative emotions in our life is really all part of the human experience.

I'd like you to imagine that emotions are kind of like a sine wave. It's kind of like a curve that goes up and down and up and down. And in the middle is a line. And I want to offer the idea that positive emotions are the emotions that are above that line. And

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negative emotions are emotions that are below that line. I think that we have this gut feeling that we can just erase everything that's below that line. And that will just feel the good emotions right? That we don't need to necessarily feel good emotions 100% of the time, but that will feel positive emotion most of the time.

But I want to offer you that if we get rid of the negative emotion. We will only go high as we go low and this is what was happening. With me that instead of only feeling positive emotion, that I was basically feeling numb, because I couldn't go low, because I was resisting, feeling those emotions. Therefore, I couldn't experience positive emotions either.

We need to have contrast in our life. Emotions are part of the human experience, and we can't get away from them, we have them, there's no doubt about it, we can have the good without the bad.

And we want to have negative emotion, don't we, I mean, we don't want to be happy at a funeral. And when a friend loses her job, we don't want to respond with toxic positivity, toxic positivity being, hey, look at the bright side, right? Like, if you've ever been feeling bad, and someone has said that to you, it doesn't make you feel better. We want to feel the entire range of emotions, even if it feels bad to us.

So the next step is how to figure out how to feel the emotion without running to food, Netflix, drinking or distracting with shopping, and being comfortable with our own emotional state. Because when we are, it also allows us to be okay. When other people have negative emotions as well, we don't become that person that says, hey, look at the bright side, right.

As I mentioned, if you are someone who doesn't feel emotion, the very first step is to start to get in touch with that. And if you haven't listened to episode number seven,

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which is learn how to listen to your body, then I highly, highly recommend that because in that podcast, I talk about something called a body scan.

And through the process of creating the body scan, what you're going to do is you're going to start getting in touch with not only your hunger signals, but also how emotions manifest in your body. What are the physical sensations that go along with those emotions.

Now, the next step is how to process emotion, there are four different responses that we will commonly have to emotion. So the first one that I want to talk about is buffering or numbing, and I mentioned this earlier, so I just want to explain a little bit more about it.

So how do we numb ourselves, when we feel strong, emotional feeling will usually kind of distract ourselves, right? We will use food to make us feel better, we'll hop on social media, or we might turn to drinking, there is a difference between just distracting ourselves and numbing ourselves. numbing ourselves tends to be kind of a go to, it tends to be a habit where we will automatically reach for food or reach for alcohol or reach for Amazon, for example, when we are feeling a negative emotion. And we know that we're numbing when we don't feel better. On the other side of it.

If you've ever eaten a bunch of cookies, or chips or something like that, in response to feeling sadness or anxiety, you probably don't feel any better on the side of it. In fact, you might even feel worse, because what's happening is you feel bad from overeating or over drinking or overspending. And then the problem is still there. Right?

So where's the line then between normally eating or drinking alcohol or shopping and numbing? And I think the answer to that is how do you feel on the other side of it? And is it something that you feel like you have control over or not, if you don't feel like you have control over it, and it's creating a net negative experience in your life, then it may

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be numbing behavior, it may be a way that you're escaping this emotion. And so why do we numb, we do it because negative emotion feels bad.

Of course, it goes back to what's called the motivational triad, the motivational triad being that we want to seek pleasure, we want to avoid pain, and we want to do it as fast as possible. And so we numb because negative emotion feels bad. And drinking or shopping or eating feels good, at least at the beginning. That's why we numb, because we don't want to feel the negative emotion.

The second response that we have to processing emotion is distracting ourselves. So this could just be doing something different. It doesn't necessarily have to be a numbing behavior. So it could be for example, you know, straightening up the house when you don't want to have a negative conversation. Or it could be going out for a run. Could those things be buffering behaviors? Absolutely. But it just depends on how we're using them. But in either of those cases, we're using this new method, this new distraction, as a way of not feeling our feelings.

The third response to emotion is resisting it. And so this is something that a lot of us do, especially when we feel like we shouldn't be having this emotional response when we feel like we shouldn't be feeling anxious, or we feel like we shouldn't be depressed, or we shouldn't be sad or anything like that. And so resisting what that looks like, if you think about having a beach ball, and you push the beach ball under water, we can keep it down for a period of time. But eventually, it just erupts, and it just over explodes.

And so this could be the case with frustration, or anger, or any of those types of things, we can keep it at bay for a little bit. But if we don't acknowledge if we don't give it legs, if we're not being honest with ourselves about what we're feeling, then it's going to explode inappropriately. So what this would look like might be taking it out on someone who doesn't deserve it. Right, we do that all the time to our loved ones right.

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Now, I'm going to offer that the last response to emotion is probably the most scary, but also the most productive, which is actually allowing the emotion.

And so what this looks like is again, going back to episode number seven, and doing a body scan, so feeling the emotion. So doing a body scan, understanding how that emotion physically manifests in your body, and then allowing yourself to just notice it and name.

I mentioned earlier that when we are feeling intense emotion that our prefrontal cortex, our thinking part of our brain goes offline, when we start noticing and naming how emotions physically feel in our body. What happens is that brings that thinking part of our brain back online. So as you're feeling emotion, you can say, this is shame, or this is what anxiety feels like, or this is what anger feels like, and then start to pay attention. Noticing My heart is beating rapidly, my cheeks are flushed, my muscles are tight, I feel a knot in my stomach. So noticing and naming not only the emotion of it in and of itself, but also what are the physical sensations that you are experiencing as a result of the emotion.

Noticing and naming is going to be really super important when it comes to allowing and processing the emotion.

And what you'll find is that emotions tend to come in waves. So the first wave can be really intense, and then allowing the emotion will allow it to wash over you more quickly. When we resist the emotion, then we find that the emotion stays with us much longer. And so by allowing the emotion, we can allow the emotion to go through our body more quickly.

And here's why this work is really super important, and how it's really helped me. First of all, there's a quote by Viktor Frankl that says between stimulus and response, there is

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a space. And in that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.

By being able to notice and name our emotions, what it allows us to do, is instead of reacting to situations, it allows us to have that space between reaction and response. And it's been really powerful for me, because before when I didn't have emotional intelligence, what would happen is someone would say something and I would just pop off at the mouth. I would say something back to them, and not really mean it. And just because I was feeling defensive or I was feeling angry, and I didn't give myself the space to really understand what I was feeling or potentially why I was feeling it.

And so what getting in touch With my emotions has allowed me to do is it's really allowed me to have better control over my environment over my relationships. And it's really allowed me to do whatever it is that I want to do, regardless of my emotional states.

Now there's one other thing that I also want to offer in terms of processing the emotion and allowing the emotion which is getting into the habit of breathing, the more we can be conscious of our breathing, we can create more of that space between the stimulus and how we react to it, the more that we can be aware of how feelings feel in our body, the more we can just be okay with that, the better off we are going to be. Because the more we are okay, with how emotions feel in our body, the more we will become emotionally intelligent ourselves and experience, the entire range of being a human. Being able to decode our emotions is crucial in making sense of what we do and why.

And so if you've ever looked back on an experience that you've had something that you've done, and you've kind of scratched your head and wondered, why did I even do that? Going back and thinking about what was I feeling at the time can be a really powerful experience, approaching past experiences through the lens of curiosity and

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wondering, why did I do that and really being able to dig into it can really allow us to be free going forward.

So that's about all I have for you today, processing an emotion is really allowing ourselves to feel the emotion, not judging it, and being okay with the physical sensations of that emotion and being okay with being in your body and not wanting to escape.

And again, if there's one thing that you walk away from this podcast episode with, it's that feelings can not hurt us. They might feel uncomfortable, but we have a 100% survival rate of them. Getting more comfortable with your emotional state can really help you gain more control over your health, as well as everything else that's happening in your life.

That's all I have for you today. Have an amazing week. I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye.

Hey, thanks for listening.

If you're done with dieting and would like to work with me as your coach, I'd like to invite you to reach out to myself and my team to ask about programs and pricing. Go to elizabethsherman.com/contact to get started today. I can't wait to hear from you.

See you next week.