

Done with Dieting Podcast 17: Urges



Full Episode Transcript

With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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You are listening to the Done with Dieting Podcast Episode number 17

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.

You are listening to the done with dieting podcast episode number 17.

Hello, hello, hello everyone, and welcome to the done with dieting Podcast. I am Elizabeth Sherman, your host.

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So today, I wanted to talk about cravings or urges or whatever it is that you want to call it. When you are rummaging around your refrigerator, and you're rummaging around your kitchen or your pantry, looking for something to eat. And you know, it's not time to eat, or you know that you're not hungry, or you just have those daily occurrences where you're like, why can't I stop eating at this time of day?

Now, for me, I struggled for years and years with feeling like I needed something sweet after dinner, and I felt like I tried everything. I tried chewing gum, I tried drinking herbal tea, I tried using adult coloring books to distract me and painting my nails and a bunch of other things. But I always came back to it; I always came back to the snacking.

And in Episode Number 12, called b minus habits, I talked about the idea of leaning into doing something just a little bit better so that you're basically mitigating the damage. And so, within my own journey of feeling like I needed something sweet after dinner.

The process that I'm laying out for you today is the process that I actually took in getting rid of my habit. So, it started out with leaning into it, trying to be a little bit better every single night. So, where originally I was eating ice cream at night, then I moved into like fat-free pudding or ricotta cheese. And eventually, it just came down to needing a little bit of chocolate. And I remember at one point, I was talking to a friend about it. And she was asking me, like, how bad is this habit.

And for all practical purposes, it really was not a bad habit. I wasn't eating half of my daily calories after dinner, for example. But the reason that it really bothered me wasn't because of the calories in the food that I was eating.

The reason that this habit really bothered me was because I felt like I was basically a slave to it. I felt like I wasn't at choice with my urges. I felt like I had to eat

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something sweet before the craving would even go away. And so, it wasn't about wanting to or feeling like I needed to reduce my calorie load or anything like that. But what it was about me wanting to get out of the habit of feeling like I wasn't in control of my cravings.

I wanted to feel more empowered around my food choices and stop feeling like food had some control over me. What I wanted to talk to you about today was getting out of the habit of doing something that you don't feel like you're at choice with.

Okay, so now I have to tell you that I've been a health coach and nutritionist for gosh, going on 16 years now! And over the years, my advice on how to handle this problem, how to tackle this problem has actually changed quite a bit.

Initially, I would tell my clients, and this is what I was doing myself; my suggestion was all about distracting ourselves. So, doing things with your hands so that you wouldn't put your hands in the chip bag or doing something with your mouth or your brain so that you're distracting yourself from wanting to eat.

And this actually just doesn't work. I tried it with myself. I tried it with my clients. And it was always really frustrating that I would eventually go back to eating chocolate. And they would always fall back into their habits of going back to whatever it was that was their kryptonite as well.

What was really frustrating me about this was that I really wanted to serve my clients. This had it was so painful for them enough for them to seek help for it. And I wanted to help them, but I wasn't. And the reason that this technique doesn't work is because what we're doing is we're distracting ourselves from the original problem.

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It doesn't work because it doesn't interrupt the habit loop. And the only way to change the habit loop is to disrupt it or not allow the habit loop to complete. So, if we're using the analogy of a circuit of electricity, for example, what happens is when an electrical circuit completes itself, that's when electricity flows. And our brains work very similarly; we have what are called neurotransmitters that are very, very similar. And if we don't allow the circuit or the habit loop to complete, then the circuit will no longer fire.

Now the habit loop is a three-step process. The habit loop consists of a cue, a routine, and a reward. The cue can really be anything. The cue is something that basically kicks off the habit. It could be a time of day, it could be a specific action, or it could be an emotion; examples might be coming home from work and walking into the kitchen.

Now, the routine is a series of things that we do in response to the cue. When we walk into the kitchen, we pour ourselves a cocktail, or we start picking at dinner as it's being prepared. And then, the reward is what we get out of doing those things, or the dopamine hit that we get from eating food. When we feel full, and we feel good. The cue could be that it's three o'clock, and the routine would be going to have a piece of chocolate. And again, the reward is it tastes good. Okay, now the cue could be making dinner; the routine is as we make dinner, we pour ourselves a glass of wine, and the reward is that we feel relaxed.

Okay, so now, that's the habit loop. And I think it's really super important to point out that we may start a habit for one reason but then continue it for another. And so, it can actually be really interesting to start thinking about; why did I start doing this in the first place?

Now what we need to do is we need to allow the habit loop to not complete because when it does, every single time it does, it strengthens those

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neurotransmitter responses in our brain. And when we have the cue, then the brain needs to carry out the routine. And when it does, it receives the reward.

Now, the only way to get rid of those habits that we don't want to do anymore is to interrupt the habit loop. And in thinking this through and reflecting back on when I used to give the advice of distracting ourselves with doing something else other than getting into the habit.

So instead of eating chips, we would paint our nails or doing adult coloring books. So, instead of doing the thing that we're trying to avoid doing, if we distract ourselves with doing something else, we're still completing that loop; the queue is still there. Our routine is a little bit different. But our reward is still there, too, even though it's a little bit different as well. But the queue is still kicking off a routine.

And in reflecting back on this, the reason that I didn't want to tell my clients or myself to quote-unquote, just stop it was because doing that is so super freaking uncomfortable. And I didn't want them to have to go through that discomfort. I didn't want to have to go through that discomfort, but we have to have some level of discomfort if we want to be successful.

Unfortunately, if we make it easy on ourselves, it's not gonna work. And I think that that's what we always do, we try to make it easy for ourselves. I know, I wish that there was an easy way of doing this.

And the steps that I'm going to lay out for you today in this process are actually going to be easy or, but the biggest takeaway is that it is going to be effective, and they're going to save you some pain. Okay, but we can't take away all of the discomforts.

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Now before I move on to the actual steps of what we want to do in order to get out of our craving habit or to get out of the habit loop that we don't want to do, I need to put in a caveat here. Sometimes we have cravings, or we want to eat because we haven't been giving our bodies enough calories. And so the reason that we're craving food is because our body actually needs it. It's possible that we've been in the restrict binge regret cycle. So, if you are 100% hungry, I want you to eat, Okay?

If you've been restricting your calories, and you don't think that you should be eating at this time of day, it's possible that you need to eat more earlier in the day. So that being said, sometimes we also have cravings because we've been too strict. And we haven't allowed ourselves enough treats.

And so, our bodies like I need something, Okay? And I want you to be aware that treating yourself is 100% Okay. And in fact, in the eight basic habits that healthy people do, if you're not familiar with what I'm talking about, go back and listen to episode number three, and I'll put a link to this free guide in the show notes.

But episode number three, called the Foundation, outlines the eight basic habits that healthy people do. And I think that everyone needs to have treats, and we need to plan to have treats in our diet. Okay, so if you aren't planning to have treats in your diet, and you believe that there's some sort of perfect way of eating, then this technique that I'm going to share with you today is not for you.

So, this technique will not work if we are being too strict with ourselves in terms of limiting the number of calories or if we are limiting the types of foods that we're eating. And, if we feel like we need to be on a perfect plan, because being perfect and being on a plan isn't realistic for anybody, like, I don't even know what that means.

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Even if you had the perfect diet at one point, and you want to get back to that, you are a totally different person today than you were before. And so, setting up a realistic plan for yourself today, who you are today, your body's needs, and your current lifestyle is going to be really very helpful.

So, if you're unfamiliar with the eight basic habits that people do, follow the link in the show notes to get that and start tracking your habits against that guide. So again, this technique that I'm outlining today is specifically for times that we are not hungry and we are eating for reasons other than hunger. All right.

Okay. So, step one is to create a vision. Now, here's how I want you to do that. It's actually a very specific set of steps that I want you to take long before you actually have the craving. Now, this could be a couple of days before, or it could be earlier in the day; you can create the vision over the course of a few days.

But at some point, when you're not feeling this urge, Come on! What I want you to do? And again, this could take a few days of you creating this vision. I want you to think, what life could look like on the other side of success. What are you doing instead of eating at three o'clock? What are you doing, instead of eating ice cream or drinking wine at night? What exactly are you doing?

Again, this is way into the future? So maybe, six months down the road? Or maybe next year? Try to visualize yourself going through your routine in the evening? And how does it feel? What are you doing?

Now in my case, I started imagining my evening routine because I wanted to get out of the habit of wanting to eat something sweet after dinner. So, I started going through my evening just mentally, knowing that everything was pretty much going to stay the same. But I started imagining, like, what am I doing instead of eating? How am I interacting with my partner? Am I watching TV? Where am I sitting on

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the couch? What am I doing instead of doing the thing that I don't want to be doing?

And you can carry this over into lots of different areas. So if you want to drink or eat less when you go to parties, you can visualize that, like how are you interacting with people at parties or at bars? What would that look like? If you could imagine yourself with your friends in one of their houses? And the food is laid out on the table in front of you? What is it that you're doing? How are you interacting with one another? Where are you sitting? How are you positioned? Are you in front of the food? What are you thinking about? So really try to get crystal clear on what is in this vision? What's the vision about? Think about the times when you overeat? What are you doing instead?

So again, do this way before you're feeling any urges and when you feel in control of your cravings. Now, what this is doing for you is it's allowing your brain to start preparing for what's possible in the future. It's allowing you to create a vision. And we're going to call on this vision in one of our later steps. So what this is doing is it's preparing your brain so that you can call on the future version of yourself, the version of yourself who's gotten out of this habit, and the version of yourself who has been successful.

And so, what we're doing here is we're basically looking at the future versions of ourselves, the version who is successful, the version who has conquered this craving, and we're going to call on her in the actual moment.

Alright, so right now, we are just creating that vision for ourselves. Because once we can create the vision, we know that we can be successful at it. Step two is to have a plan and set an intention. Now, depending on what we're talking about, it may be an eating plan, or it may be a drinking plan. I want you to decide what you're going to do ahead of time.

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So, in my situation, this is how I got out of my nighttime eating habit. I didn't necessarily need to plan what I was actually having for each of my meals. But I knew that I was going to be eating a certain number of meals and at which times those meals would be. And so, knowing that I would get enough nutrition in each of those meals, I decided that I wasn't going to eat outside of those mealtimes.

Now, my plan was that I didn't want to be eating anything after your dinner. Your plan might be different; you may be deciding that you're going to reduce your consumption. But you don't have to go to not eating anything. You can decide ahead of time that you're going to limit what it is that you're eating. So, if you're not ready to give up eating ice cream, for example, that's totally okay. Then make a plan of what you are willing to do this week, and then lean into where you eventually want to go.

So, what I recommend in this situation is to decide what your portion is going to be. And then, once you decide what your portion is going to be, put that into a bowl, and then eat just that. And so, what you're doing is you're deciding ahead of time, like what's my plan for when I do want to have the ice cream, or what's my plan when I do decide to have the chocolate.

Now, why this works, and why is this important? So that you can know ahead of time what's going to happen. And the other thing I want you to start thinking about at this point is when you do have the plan.

And in step number one, when you've created the vision, understand that getting to that vision executing the plan is going to be a little bit uncomfortable, especially at the beginning. So, we need to be willing to let this be uncomfortable. And allowing it to be comfortable ahead of time is actually going to set yourself up for success. Okay, so that's step number two, have a plan.

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So, we've created a vision, and we have a plan. And we've set an intention of what we're planning on doing. Now, the third step is to notice when we don't want to follow the plan. You know, depending on how long you've had your habit of nighttime eating your glass of wine, or your three o'clock chocolate craving, depending on how long you've been doing this, your brain is on autopilot, it's automatically going to want to follow the steps, it's going to want to go there.

And so, this next step is, is it's going to be becoming aware. Starting to notice when we're not following the plan, when you find yourself in front of the fridge or pantry, looking for something to eat, or when you're sitting on the couch, and suddenly your brain offers you the suggestion that a glass of wine would taste really nice right now. Oh, I really want to have my chocolate. Or I really wish I could have some ice cream.

And what I want to suggest is that you ask yourself, Am I hungry? And when you ask yourself, Am I hungry? I want you to do a body scan. If you don't know how to do a body scan, I want you to go listen to episode number seven, called "What's it means to listen to your body?"

In Episode Number seven, I talked about how to do a body scan. Now in that body scan, you're going to notice what your hunger levels are, you're going to notice, are you hungry? Again, if you are hungry, I legit want you to eat. But if you're not hungry, I want you to ask yourself, why do I want to eat?

Now the answer to that question could be one of three things. The first we've already been talking about it could be the habit loop. So, for example, if you're used to snacking at three o'clock in the afternoon, your body knows that it's three o'clock in the afternoon, and it's going to want to continue snacking.

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Now, if it's right after dinner, and you're sitting on the couch watching television, your brain might offer you the thought of Hey, it's time to have our evening snack. And that's totally fine. Another explanation is it could be that you're having a craving. So it could be that you're not used to having a three o'clock craving, but all of a sudden you start to, so why are you having that craving.

And then the third reason that you might be wanting something is because you're feeling an emotion. And that emotion might be boredom because boredom is an emotion. It could be anxiety. It could be sadness. It could be a disappointment.

Whatever it is, it's okay. Now, when you do your body scan, and again, these are the actual steps that I have taken to get out of habit eating. So, when you do a body scan, you're asking, am I hungry? And then if I'm not hungry, asking myself, why do I want to eat? Is it a habit? Is it a craving, or is it emotion?

Now, there are four different ways that we can handle this situation. Most of us know about them. And I also talked about the third. So, the first way that we can handle this is to get into the craving or get into the habit of emotional eating. It's something that many of us have done in the past.

Now the advantage to this choice is that it gets rid of the uncomfortable feeling. But many of us judge ourselves for giving in to it because we feel like we should be stronger. If this is the method that you're going to choose, that's totally fine. But here's what I want you to do. If you are going to give in to the craving, what I want you to do is I want you to do it consciously.

I want you to make a choice because most of the time we don't. I want you to either say it out loud or mentally say it to yourself in your head. I am choosing to give in to my craving, or I'm feeling sad, and I'm choosing to eat anyway. And that way, at least you're not doing it from an unconscious point of view.

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So, if you choose to eat anyway, again, I want you to say it to yourself or say it out loud to other people in the room. I know that I'm not hungry, but I'm choosing to give in to my craving or emotion. And I'm going to eat anyway.

And then what happens is we have so much more power over what it is that we're going to do, we have so much more power over what we're eating, we can then decide whether we're going to eat everything, we can portion out a smaller bowl and eat just that. Or we can decide that we're going to eat something else completely.

So, I really want ice cream. But I'm going to have yogurt instead. So, what this step does is at least bring your awareness to what's happening. So again, the first option is getting into the craving.

The second option is to distract yourself. And I mentioned this earlier that this was my previous solution, right? That this was my go-to solution to do something different to take your mind off the craving, do laundry, do adult coloring books, take a walk, you know, paint your nails or do something different. But again, as I said before, this doesn't really work very well because we're still completing the habit loop.

The third option that we can call on to rid ourselves of this habit, or the third way that we can answer wanting to eat when we're not hungry, is we can resist it, we can resist the habit, we can resist the emotion.

And that feels really super freaking uncomfortable. But it's kind of like we're in denial of it. It's like we feel like we're white-knuckling it. And what this can feel like is if you've ever gone out to dinner with friends, and you really want dessert, but no one else does.

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And you don't want to be embarrassed by ordering dessert for just you. And so, you say that you don't want dessert either. But you're just constantly sitting there thinking about it. And you're resisting that feeling that craving that you're resisting because it feels so terrible.

And so, it's just constantly on a loop in your head that you're thinking about it. Now, what typically happens when we resist feeling something is that completing the habit loop becomes destructive. When we resist completing the habit loop, what tends to happen is it gets answered, but probably in a more destructive way later.

So, what that might look like is you going home, and instead of having dessert at the restaurant, you go home, and you eat whatever is available to you, or you stop at the grocery store on your way home and eat an entire pie. So, we don't want to do that either. Because the brain and the body have a way of getting what they want, regardless of what we think is good for us, so that's resisting, that's our third option.

Now, the fourth option is probably the most uncomfortable. And that is what's called allowing the emotion or allowing the craving, but not giving in to it. So, the four ways of answering a craving or an urge are either giving in to it, distracting ourselves from it, resisting it, and now allowing the urge.

And if you haven't listened to episode number 10, Yes, I'm plugging my Podcast again about how to feel. I explain how to drop into your body and how to feel the emotion. Now here's what's going to happen when we allow the emotion when we allow the craving.

Because, remember, when we've created the vision, and when we've made the plan, we've also prepared ourselves that it's going to be uncomfortable when we're not completing the habit loop. If we allow ourselves to feel uncomfortable, and we allow ourselves to feel the emotion or the urge or the craving and really not give

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into it. But just feel what craving feels like. It's going to feel like some nervous energy.

And when I say it like that, it's like, oh, of course, I can do this. It's just nervous energy, of course. But feeling that nervous energy feels really super uncomfortable. And when we feel the nervous energy, and not give in to the craving, it just feeling it is just so kind of crazy that like, oh, I've just been resisting this. But no one has ever shared that with us. We just know that it feels bad. But I really want you to stop and ask yourself, what does a craving feel like?

Now in the moment, it's going to feel really super uncomfortable. But if you notice what it feels like in your body, if you just notice that nervous energy, you will be able to allow the feeling and know that you can get through it.

Now, here's the other thing I want you to do. When you are feeling that nervous energy, what I want you to do is I want you to remember your vision from step number one. I want you to call on that version of yourself in the vision that we created in step number one, and I want you to call on the future version of yourself, the version of yourself who has completed the cycle and no longer has these cravings. It's no longer difficult for her. And I want you to be comforted in the knowledge that it's not always going to be this hard. Because it's not, cravings typically only last for about 10 minutes.

And in fact, I want you to be aware that the very first day that you have these cravings are going to be the hardest, every day after that is going to be easier and easier. Every day after that, you're going to feel the nervous energy in your body. And you're going to notice it, and you're going to name it.

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And the first day is going to be the worst. The next day, it's going to be easier. And the next day, it's going to be even easier, and every other day after that, that you don't give into it.

Now the last step in this process is celebrating. I want you to celebrate, okay? I want you to celebrate. And I want you to notice how you feel about yourself after not having giving in to the craving. And I want you to notice the commitment that you've made to yourself. I want you to notice how you feel about yourself. Are you proud of yourself? Are you amazed that you did it? Are you happy? I want you to just celebrate that emotion of not having those thoughts of self-loathing going on in your brain and all of the beating up that we do to ourselves after we've given in to the craving.

And after we've done something that we don't want to be doing. We're like, "Oh, we're stronger than that!" Why did I even do that? So, I want you to notice that those thoughts aren't there anymore. Because you allow the feeling, you allowed the urge the emotion, and you didn't give into it. And that feels pretty freaking amazing!

And once we're celebrating that little bit, that little accomplishment, what I want you to do is, I want you to do another body scan. And when you do that body scan, I want you to cement how you feel about yourself in your memory.

And here's why this is so super important. It's important because the next time that you are confronted with that craving, the next day, you're going to have to go through the whole process again. But this time, it's going to be easier because this time, not only are you going to decide that you're going to sit in the discomfort.

And you're going to call on the future version of yourself who has completed this process. But you are also going to remember how freaking amazing you feel when you didn't do it and how proud you are of yourself. And I want you to use those

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two pieces of evidence, belief in the future version of yourself who has conquered this challenge, and the evidence that you have of you doing it.

And being proud of yourself, and how that felt wanting to feel that way again, then it will become easier and easier to get through that craving. The hardest part in this whole thing is the first time that you do it. Because you don't have the self-confidence that you can get through it. The very first time is going to be the most difficult, but every time after that, because every time you celebrate, you're creating more and more evidence of yourself. You're creating more and more evidence of your ability to be successful.

Okay, so let me go through the steps just one more time. So, step number one is create a vision of the future version of yourself. The version of you who has conquered this habit creates a crystal clear vision of what does life look like? Instead of what does life look like today, what does life look like on the other side of success? What are you doing? How do you fill your time instead of doing the thing that you currently want to stop doing? Okay?

Step number two is to have a plan and set an intention each day of what you're planning on doing in relation to the habit. So again, depending on what we're talking about, it may be setting out an eating plan and deciding what to eat ahead of time, how much you're going to eat or treat yourself.

And then, step number three is doing a body scan and asking, am I hungry? When you have that craving, come on! Again, if you're hungry, I totally want you to eat. If you're not, you have four different choices. You can either give in to the craving and if you do this, remember, you're going to say to yourself or out loud. I am giving in to this craving or this emotion, but I'm doing it with total awareness. You can distract yourself. But again, that doesn't work very well; you can resist. And again, that doesn't work very well either.

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Or you can feel the urge, feel the craving, acknowledge it, and totally honor knowing that this will pass. Okay, now, I just have one other thing that I want to say to you; this is not a linear process. There will be days when you will give in to the craving. And that's totally 100% okay. What I want you to know, though, is that the self-loathing, the drama that goes on in our brains, after we do something that we don't want to do, something that we think we shouldn't have done, that that self-loathing is totally optional, you do not have to speak poorly to yourself. And you don't have to beat yourself up after you eat ice cream. It's just food.

And so, I want you to be aware that there will be days when you will feel like you have more resolve. And there will be days when you do not feel like you have as much resolve on those days. And when you don't have as much resolve, and you feel weak.

And let's say that you've given in to the craving, and you maybe didn't even realize that you did it until afterward. It's totally 100%. Okay, just stop and get curious with yourself what really happened there because when we can look at things through the eyes of curiosity, instead of judgment. It's going to make things so much easier.

Now, that's all I have for you today. I hope this was helpful. I know that this was totally helpful for me when I was going through the process. And it's been a process that I have gone through, and I walk my clients through as well. So yeah, I hope this works for you. Have an amazing week, everyone. I will see you next time. Bye-bye.

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Hey, thanks for listening.

If you're done with dieting but still want to create healthy habits that are simple, easy to do, and sustainable. I've got an amazing resource for you. The Eight Basic Habits That Healthy People Do Guide and Checklist had everything you need to get started

And if you do this eight (8) things, not only your body will be on the right size but you'll probably be healthier than most people you know.

To get your copy of your guide and checklist:

Go to elizabethsherman.com/habits to get started today.

It's elizabethsherman.com/HABITS

See you next week!