

Done with Dieting Podcast #38: Stages of Change



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With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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You are listening to the Done with Dieting Podcast Episode number 38.

Hi, I'm Elizabeth Sherman, former corporate high tech executive turned 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 and 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.

Hello everyone, welcome to today's episode. We are going to talk about the stages of change and why I wanted to talk about this topic today is because I was recently reminded of why we want to talk about this idea. I think that for so many of us, we have this idea.

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It's like when we're planning on getting married, and we walked down the aisle, and we have the honeymoon, and we do all that. And then, we get home and we're looking at our partner and we're like, "now, what?" Because we've spent all of this time planning and preparing for the wedding and then the wedding happens and now, we are married people and we have no idea, like what comes next? We think it's done.

We haven't thought about the next stages and why I bring up this is because I think that the same thing is true when it comes to our health. That we have this idea that we are going to go on a diet, we're going to do the things, we're going to be excellent at it. And then life is just going to ride off into the sunset. And I don't want to burst your bubble here, but I want to let you know, I want to set the expectation that life does go on.

And when we have this idea that once I've lost the weight, then life is going to be perfect, we all think that, right? Or once I've done this thing, then I can start living my life. And what I want to suggest is that it's all actually a process and much more fluid than we think it's going to be.

So, there is this model called the "transtheoretical model stages of change ." And there are six different stages of change, and you may have heard about these stages before you may have not, this might be the first time you're hearing about it. And so, I want to take a look at this idea, this model . And I want to apply it to dieting or becoming healthier from two different points of view.

So, first I want to approach this from the point of view of actually changing our behaviors. So, let's first look at the stages of change and how they apply to changing our behaviors, things like eating, or physical activities, sleeping, or other things that we do, right? Those actions that we take. So, the first stage of change is what's called precontemplation.

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Now, this is where we are completely unaware of how a behavior is influencing our results. We don't know what we don't know. So, for many of us, we can think back to a time of our lives when maybe we were just naturally thin when we were younger women. And so, we didn't really feel like we needed to pay attention to our eating habits. We ate whatever we wanted and whenever we wanted and didn't really care about nutrients or vegetables.

We knew that they were around, we knew we were supposed to eat our vegetables. We knew we were supposed to drink our water, but we really didn't know why, we didn't really understand what proper nutrition was and it didn't really matter because we felt fine, and we didn't really have any outward negative consequences to our behaviors.

So, people in precontemplation have no desire or interest in changing their behaviors and have no idea what they don't know about what it is that they're doing. Okay? So, that's precontemplation, that's the first phase.

The second phase is what's called contemplation. Now, in this phase, you start to realize that something's not going exactly like you want it to, something else is going on. So, with diets, you might start to think, I don't really like my results, I don't really like how I look in the mirror, or I might want to start to eat a little bit healthier.

But at this point, it's really just a thought, just a little thing that's happening in the back of your head, nothing more. This stage could be kicked off by a comment by a friend or maybe your doctor's suggestion that, "you know, you're probably gaining a little weight." it could be that your pants are starting to be a little bit more snug than they were before. It could be the suggestion from your doctor that your blood work could be better and how you could change your blood work is through eating more vegetables or getting some exercise. Or maybe you see a picture of yourself at a party and think, "do I really look like that?"

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When we're in the contemplation stage, nothing is actually happening externally. We're just mulling it over in our heads. We're thinking about the pros and cons of changing our behavior.

Now, in the preparation phase, this is where we start to do stuff. This is where we start to crowd source for information. We start talking to our friends and family about, what did you do to lose weight? Or maybe searching out the internet and figuring out how do I lower my cholesterol numbers through diet or through exercise? Maybe I start researching diets online, or start talking to our doctors about, what we should do?

Now, folks in this stage might be looking into coaches. They might be looking at personal trainers, looking at different gyms, gathering information, investigating diets, and doing that type of stuff. Okay? Now, here's the thing, many of us, when we're in this preparation stage, we think we're doing all the things. We think we're in the next stage action, because we are doing things that seem productive, but they're not actually creating any change yet.

When we're in this stage preparation, we are gathering information and when we are gathering information, it can again, feel like we are doing things, but in actuality, we're just gathering information. And it's really comfortable to stay in this phase of preparation because it doesn't require us to do anything.

When we're gathering information and when we're in this contemplation stage, one of the things that happens is, we can also start to get overwhelmed. Now, the key to success is actually moving into the action phase before we get that overwhelmed, because then we get into analysis, paralysis, right?

Now, my assistant coach for the Feel Good Sisterhood, Heather, she talks about when she was in her running phase, she read all the runner's world magazines. Read every book about running and she was laughing, we were talking about this one day. She said

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that if she had actually spent the time running instead of reading about running. She would have totally improved her running way more. And we all do that, don't we?

When we're in preparation, we're taking what's called, passive action. And passive action doesn't actually get us the results. But moving on to the next stage of action is tough. Now, in action, I should say, when we are in the action phase, here we take action by doing, not just by planning your meals, but by eating the vegetables that you've planned to eat and have prepared.

When we're in the action stage, we're actually doing things that move us forward instead of the passive action phase, which is when we're just learning about it. When we're in the action phase we're taking, what's called massive action. We're doing the things, we're going on walks, we're showing up to the gym. We are meeting our trainer, we're following the directions, we're actually following through. We're eating a healthy diet, we're going to bed on time. And we're mindful of what it is that we're doing, we're intentional. It's moving the needle towards our goal.

Now, folks in this stage potentially have hired a personal trainer or coach they've joined a gym or a program like Weight Watchers or Nutrisystem. You might be logging your food or following an online exercise program. Okay? So, in this action phase, we are doing the things that are moving us towards our goal.

Now, the next phase is what's called maintenance and relapse prevention. Now, in this stage, you are doing all the things, you're consistent in your exercise habit, and you're planning your meals. You are regularly going to the grocery store; you're regularly going through Pinterest and finding recipes that are healthy for you and that your family likes.

And so, you have this process that's ongoing, you've figure it out, what all of the pitfalls are and it's like a well-oiled running machine. Maybe you're doing food preparation

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ahead of time and your environment supports your goals. You think you have it all dialed in, and you do.

But I want you to be aware that maintenance is not the last stage. There's actually one more stage and that is relapse or termination. And this is what's really confusing for so many people because when we're in the maintenance phase, we're like in that honeymoon phase of our marriage, right? We're like, "oh, we're home free, we don't have to think about this anymore, we're done." Right?

But in relapse and termination, this tends to happen when something in our life creates stress or chaos. It could be a busy time at work, or it could be a problem with one of your kids, or some other very real demands of your time from your family, or some other stressful situation.

And for me, when I was in the early stages of my career, I would work with my clients in getting their nutrition dialed in and getting their exercise dialed in. And it was always really confusing and frustrating to me, why something would happen in their life? And the rug would get pulled out from under them. And what I realized was that it was always stress-related.

Now, as a personal trainer or nutritionist, I really didn't have the tools to counsel my clients on, how to manage their time more effectively so that they could prepare their meals or how to talk to their boss in a way that allowed them to feel more empowered in their work and put their health before that. And so, that's actually one of the reasons why I became a life coach and started adding that to my practice.

And so, when we're in the maintenance phase, we think that we're done. We don't expect the rug to get pulled out from under us. We don't expect that when life happens, that those habits that we worked so hard to cultivate that seems so easy that they fall by the wayside. But for whatever reason, the habits, and behaviors that we had established have

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gotten disrupted and we've stopped doing the things. And so, this is the relapse or termination phase.

When we're in this stage, it can be so confusing because we thought that we were an exerciser. We thought we were a runner. We thought that we were one of those people who went to the gym every day. We thought that everything was wrapped up and done. We thought that we were someone who ate vegetables every day. We thought that we would sail off into the sunset happily ever after.

But I want you to be aware that these stages are actually very fluid, and we can move in and out of the different phases, the different stages, and not actually have to have it mean anything. The problem comes in when we stop doing something and then we make it mean something about us. We're like, "oh, I thought I was an exerciser, I thought I was a runner." But now, I can't make that happen anymore. I guess I'm just not or I guess that there's something wrong with me.

And so, what I want to explore next is these stages of change and what happens in our brains and get a little bit more specific and explain how these stages of change work within our thought process. Because what happens in our thought process during each of these stages is actually the most important part. It's way more important than what we're actually doing.

So, let's take a look at the stages of change and how they will work with changing our personal stories and beliefs about ourselves. The food that we eat and also the world around us. So, again, in precontemplation, this is where we don't know that we have limiting beliefs or disempowering stories that we make up or we know that they exist, but they might be unconscious.

This is also a place of not being ready or wanting to change. So, an example of this might be the thought that, life would be better if I was thin or that I might have more

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opportunities if I was attractive. And so, those are two stories that I potentially could believe. I might have an idea that those stories are wrong, but I might be unwilling to give those stories up because of all of the reinforcing messaging that I receive about how thinness is better than not being thin. Or the comments that other people give me about my appearance.

This could also look like being unaware that our negative self-talk exists or is responsible for giving up on all of those diet and exercise programs that we've bought into over the years. When we're in precontemplation, we're still trying to solve our overeating problems with diets and exercise programs. Thinking that if we could just change the diet that we're on, we could lose the weight. Never realizing that the reason that we do the things that we do, that we eat the things that we eat, that we exercise or don't exercise has everything to do with how we think about the food ourselves and our bodies.

Now, stage number two is what's called contemplation and here, we're starting to become aware of our disempowering narratives and are interested in changing them. But we feel skeptical that it can work for us. We might even feel ambivalent. So, like, "yeah, I see that having this belief," that I need to be thin is really getting in my way or believing that I need to look like Kate Moss is getting in my way because I'm never going to look like Kate Moss, right? I'm never going to have the bone structure of Kate Moss.

But not really seeing that, that is actually possible. We don't believe that it's possible to change our thoughts. We might start to awaken to the negative self-talk but are afraid that if we let go of these thoughts, these negative statements, that we'll plunge deeper into gaining weight. That we will want to eat ice cream all the time, or not exercise, or do the things that we feel like we need to be doing, not want to be doing, but need to be doing in order to maintain or lose weight. Okay?

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So, when we're in contemplation, we start to awaken to the thoughts that our brain is offering us but we're really not sure how to change them. And so, that's where preparation comes in. This is where it actually gets really exciting.

And again, the work that I'm doing with the women in the Feel Good Sisterhood is just so incredibly inspiring because at this stage we're committed to changing our disempowering thoughts and stories. We're starting to connect the dots between, I need to look like Kate Moss, and how that's actually translating into my behavior of needing to eat everything in the kitchen after my partner goes to sleep. Okay?

We're starting to connect the dots between, how the things I believe about myself, translate into how I act towards myself? When we're in preparation, we start to see how the negative self-talk is actually hurting our progress. When we're in preparation, we can actually see that the negative self-talk is actually hurting our progress, but we might be unsure of how to actually do it, or if we're ready to change, because that can be really scary. We don't know what's on the other side.

Now, stage number four, action. Here in the action phase, we're taking action by doing things like working with a coach on identifying our limiting beliefs and thoughts. We are coming up with new mantras or stories for ourselves, noticing when our brain is filling in the gaps of stories that we don't have all the information for.

So, for example, let's say that I text my friend and she doesn't text me back for two days. Does my brain start filling in the gaps of, "oh, is she mad at me? Did I do something?" And starts that spinning of questioning, filling in the stories that we don't have answers to, our brains do that. Whenever we have facts and there are gaps in the story, our brains come up with narratives of that story. And it's usually something about us, something negative about us. We usually aren't giving other people the benefit of the doubt.

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And so, when we're in action phase, we start to identify some of these limiting beliefs. And we start to talk about the topic to some of our friends, and we begin to feel our confidence rise, and we start to call BS on our brain. We start to feel better and happier, and we start to make progress. All right? And so, this action phase is so incredibly inspiring.

The next phase is maintenance and relapse prevention, again stage number five. Now in this stage, we'll likely have some sort of practice that works for us in identifying what our brain is offering us in terms of thought errors and using some tools when we fall back into old patterns, or old feelings, old stories. Which is likely going to happen, but often less and less as time goes on.

So, within my practice of working with my clients and in the Feel Good Sisterhood, what I do is I help them to establish the practice of creating what are called thought downloads and then, taking some of those thoughts and plugging them into the think, feel, act cycle or the model in order to see how these thoughts are creating our feelings, how our feelings influence our actions, and then her actions produce our results. And so, by doing this on a regular basis, it helps us to stay on top of those patterns.

Now, here's the thing, just like when we're talking about going to the gym or eating, all of these mental work is never ever going to be done. It's a practice, it's not a destination. And so, of course there are going to be times when we have relapsed. And so, this tends to happen when we get triggered, such as when we have, like for instance, a breakup or an argument with someone who's really close to us. And the negative self-talk starts cropping back up.

And here's the thing, whether we're talking about the mental work that goes into changing our behaviors or we're talking about the doing work, it's not an "if" it will happen, but rather "when" it happens. Now, negative self-talk is not the relapse, but our reaction to it could be my brain. Elizabeth, my brain offers me negative self-talk all

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the time, but I decide whether or not I'm going to believe it or not. And being able to identify it and recover from it is where we have success.

My brain is always going to offer me negative things about other people, or experiences, or myself. My brain is trying to protect me. And so, when it offers me those things, I can actually be compassionate with myself, and I can understand that it's just a well-practiced story. That it's just producing the result in this other area.

Now, if you throw in the towel and say, "forget it, this isn't working," or feel like you're too broken, that you're not capable of change, or buy into the negative self-talk that your brain is offering you instead of just picking up and continuing back with step four, the action phase, that's what I want you to notice. Changing your thoughts and changing your beliefs about yourself takes time. It takes commitment to the process and perseverance. Also, the action phase is the phase that's tends to stop people.

Now, I point this out for a few reasons. One is to tell you that it's normal as well as to hold your feet to the fire, to hold you accountable. We are all human and we have all fallen into this trap. So, just start to notice if this is you and it totally makes sense if you feel stuck, if you've lived your life collecting evidence that your previous stories were true. And it totally makes sense that if you've remained stuck, you've lived your life collecting all of these different stories, all of this evidence. That all of these lies that your brain was telling you were true, or else you wouldn't be having the same stories today.

And number two, it's totally normal that when we believe that we're moving forward and gaining momentum, that we're quote unquote past all that, that we've moved beyond that, and that we shouldn't have to revisit it, that we've been quote unquote fixed. Right?

But if we don't change the stories in our head, we're going to continue to replay the same scenarios, especially when it comes to our health and our weight over-and-over-and over

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again. We are going to recreate those same exact experiences. It's not until we change the stories that we can change our results.

So, maybe you've always told yourself that you're not athletic, and therefore you've always started and stopped workout routines. Or maybe your parents told your brother that he was the athletic one and you were the funny one. Then, you have evidence that you are not graceful, you're unathletic and that creates evidence for that story.

When you try to change this workout habit, what would happen is it would require a lot of action and it requires a lot of work for you to believe that something else might be true. And then, following through with an exercise regimen that actually works for you. Changing these stories in our heads is difficult.

Now again, the reason that I'm talking about this is because I want you to be aware that all of these stages are completely fluid. So, you may be in precontemplation right now for one thing, maybe speaking Chinese. And then, you start to investigate it and then something comes up and then you move back into precontemplation. And then, you're in contemplation and then, you start preparation but then you move back into precontemplation.

And so, be aware that you can move in and out of all of these phases and it doesn't mean anything bad about you or anything. What we get to do as people is decide, what do you want to do? This is a lifelong process; you do not get to check out. And so, when you start to do thought work, or dieting, or eating better, or whatever. All of a sudden, like put it on the back burner and never think about it again. I tell the women in the Feel Good Sisterhood all the time, a vegetable does not accidentally pop into my mouth. I never say, "Oops, I accidentally ate a carrot today."

And so, what happens is some of these habits that we do have to be continually ongoing processes. They have to be thoughtful processes. And in the Feel Good Sisterhood, we

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start out with awareness. We spend actually an entire month just observing, what am I doing? What am I thinking? What results am I getting? How am I feeling? Which I know sounds totally weird.

But here's the thing, if we don't know where we are, we can't change those things and we can't go to where we want to go. We think that if we just follow these diets, if I just follow the rules that the diet tells me to do, then I am going to be fixed and I'm going to be thin.

But the reason that we do or don't do anything has everything to do with how we're thinking about it? How we're thinking about ourselves? How we're thinking about the food? How we're thinking about our partners or our family, what obligations we have to them? What does it mean to be a good daughter? What does it mean to be a good wife or a good mother?

And then, how do they play into how we take care of ourselves? When I think that the nutrition of my children comes before my own, how is that going to influence things, for example, when I feed myself? And so, all of this stuff is so incredibly powerful and fascinating.

The biggest takeaway that I want you to get from this episode is oftentimes, when we go into relapse or termination, we think that it's done and the key to being successful with our goals is to become resilient. And what resilience means is when we have a failure, not making it mean anything about us or who we are as people.

The key to success is getting through failures more rapidly. And so, when we move into relapse, moving back into maintenance or moving back into action before we have to go all the way back to contemplation or preparation. The faster that we move in and out of these phases, the more successful we will be with our goals. And this is what I teach the women in the Feel Good Sisterhood. It is such an incredibly powerful program.

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And so, I want to invite you to join the Feel Good Sisterhood waitlist. Enrollment for the Feel Good Sisterhood is going to start next week, but you can get ahead of the curve and get on the wait list now. In order to do this, what you need to do is go to elizabethsherman.com/groupcoaching, and that will bring you to the waitlist page for the Feel Good Sisterhood.

Regardless of what stage you're in, as far as your nutrition goes, or your eating goes, or your sleep goes, anything that you're doing for your health. This is not the end, okay? This is just the beginning. And so, there's so much more in practicing your health habits.

That's all I have for you today, have an amazing day everyone. And I can't wait for you to sign up for the waitlist for the Feel Good Sisterhood. I can't wait for you to join. Have a great day, everyone. See you next time. Bye-bye.

Hey, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, you have to come check out the Feel Good Sisterhood. It's my small group coaching program where we take all this material, and we apply it. We figure out what works for us, and we don't ever look at another diet ever again.

Join me over at elizabethsherman.com/groupcoaching. I'd love to have you join me in the Feel Good Sisterhood. See you there.