

Done with Dieting Podcast #73: Mental Fitness



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With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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We talk a lot about physical fitness but what does it actually mean to be mentally or emotionally fit. When we become physically fit, we perform repetitions of physical exercise where we build up the strength of our physical muscle. When we talk about mental fitness, we talk about the mental work where we build up the strength of our mental muscles.

In today's podcast, I'm talking all about how to create mental fitness. Let's get started.

You are listening to the done with dieting podcast. The podcast for women in midlife, who are done with dieting, but still want to lose weight and feel good in your clothes. You know that diets don't work long term. But you feel like there's this secret that everyone else knows that you just haven't figured it out yet.

I am your host, Elizabeth Sherman. And I've helped hundreds of women get off the diet roller coaster change their relationship with food, exercise, and their bodies. Through this podcast, my goal is to help you too.

Welcome. Let's get started.

Hey everyone, welcome to our podcast today, podcast number 73. And what we are talking about today is something called mental fitness. And it's something that I work a lot with my clients on because what I find is that no one has really taught us how to train our brain. No one has taught us how to examine our thoughts. No one has taught us how to change our thoughts, how to look at our problems a little bit differently.

And that right there is the reason why I added life coaching to my practice. When I started out in health and fitness, 17 years ago. Wow, it's been awhile. I started out as a

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personal trainer. And what was really interesting to me is I knew that I could help people so much more because I had done the work myself in transforming my body and my brain in order to do the things that I wanted to be able to do.

What happened is I was a certified personal trainer; I got my nutrition certificate together. And I would start to work with my clients. And what would happen is they would be running on all cylinders. They would be doing so great. They would be exercising every week. They would be feeling great. They would be having good sleep and they would start to get the results that they were looking for whether that was weight loss, or just feeling better in their bodies and feeling proud of themselves.

And then inevitably, something would happen because life always gets in the way, and something would happen that would just pull the rug right from under them. And that thing was always some sort of problem. Whether they needed to take care of a parent, or something happened with their kid, and they needed to pay special attention to their child because they were going through something at the time, or maybe work just got busy.

And what would happen is they would just spin out and they wouldn't then be able to keep up all of the things that they were doing because they were devoting so much attention to this other problem. And let me be clear here, that sometimes there were time restrictions. So, sometimes we do get busy at work, and we do put in longer hours, or we have to take care of a parent. And so, therefore our time is stretched.

But more often than not, what prevents us from making good choices in the kitchen or what prevents us from actually going out for that walk is the mental drama that is in our heads. The mental drama that says, "I just can't even deal with that thing right now. I'm just going to not think about it and do what's easiest."

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One of the reasons that my clients work with me for a period of six months is that we can't white knuckle it for six months. Things are going to come up in those six months that we aren't going to be able to deal with.

And so, to have the power of a coach with you on that journey to get you through those difficult times, where it seems like our brain is going to offer us the objection that, oh, I don't have time for that right now. But the truth is that the time that we invest now is going to save us time later, 100% of the time.

What I want to talk about today is mental fitness. Mental fitness is the ability to have mental stamina. It's doing what you want most over what you want in the moment. And so, for many of my clients, it's practicing discipline. Keeping your commitments to yourself and getting consistent in whatever it is that you want to be consistent in.

Because what's happening here is whenever we set goals, we set goals from the thinking part of our brain, what's called the "prefrontal cortex." The part of our brain that actually can look forward into the future. And the part of our brain that can actually see consequences to our actions and knows that if we keep doing the things that we're doing, we're going to have consequences to those actions.

But when we are in the moment, what's happening is our lower brain, our emotional brain, our inner critic is taking over. And that emotional brain, that lower brain doesn't care about the future. The emotional brain only cares about the here and now. The emotional brain only cares about what is happening in this moment.

And in this moment, what the emotional brain wants is it wants to seek pleasure, it wants to avoid pain, and it wants to do it as efficiently as possible.

When we are hijacked by our emotional brain, when that emotional brain is piping up and it's saying, I want cookies or we don't have time for that, or it would be better to

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avoid this conflict because then that could have terrible consequences. We would be rejected from the herd.

When we can notice this emotional hijacking that the inner critic and judge is doing to us. What we can do is we can talk to ourselves; we can bring our prefrontal cortex back online and we can talk to ourselves more than we listen to ourselves. So, that right there is the ability to have mental fitness.

Because people will come to me all the time. Clients will come to me, and they'll say, oh, but Elizabeth, I'm just not disciplined. I just don't have that sticktuitiveness. I just am not consistent. And what I want to tell you is if you have these thoughts as well, what I want to offer is that discipline, commitment, and consistency are all skills that you can build.

They are not personal qualities. You are not disciplined or not disciplined. You are not consistent or not consistent. These are skills that you can practice on a daily basis. And just like with mental fitness, if you don't keep up the skill, you will lose it. And so, this is really important.

And I love the idea of equating the mental fitness to physical fitness because we've all been there. We've all done the exercise routines and we can see that as we do more squats or do more bicep curls, that we build that muscle that we get stronger.

But when we go away from the gym for a period of time, then we lose that. We lose that ability to lift the same amount of weight. And so, the same thing is true when we're talking about mental fitness. And we can absolutely, put this in the context of weight loss and health habits as well.

Because we know that if we don't do the things, if we don't keep up our health behaviors, then we're going to have to I don't want to say start over because there's still an underlying foundation there. But we have to build up that mental muscle again.

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So, let me ask you, how would it feel to make a commitment to yourself and then actually follow through with it? So many of my clients come to me because they can make commitments to other people and follow through. But they can't keep commitments to themselves. And the reason why we can't keep commitments to ourselves is because we are conditioned to put other people's needs and wants before our own.

And so, when other people want something from us, it's not an emergency, but we feel like we need to tend to whatever it is that they desire before we can take care of ourselves. And what will often happen is that we will believe that we are being selfish if we tell someone no, or that other people are going to be disappointed if we tell them no, if we put our own needs in front of theirs.

And so, what happens is after a period of time after years, and years, and years of taking care of other people, we don't even know what we want anymore. We don't even know what our needs would look like. And so, it becomes very uncomfortable to be able to say no to someone and to actually follow through in advocating for our own needs and wants.

But again, I want to let you know that just like practicing saying yes to other people and no to ourselves is weakening the mental muscle. The same thing is true that we can start to strengthen that mental muscle by saying, "no to other people," and "yes to ourselves."

Now, we don't want to do this all the time because that would be way too uncomfortable. And just like with physical fitness, most of us start out with using mental weights that are way too heavy. And what that looks like is making these huge commitments to ourselves because we think we should, because we think that that's what we're supposed to do.

But what that does is it takes us so far out of our comfort zone that we ultimately fall down. As a personal trainer, every once in a while, I would see these stories online of

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other folks who are like, you know, I just started with this trainer, and we were doing squats and it was lovely while I was doing it. But now, I can't even get up off the toilet seat. I am so incredibly sore.

As a personal trainer, I would find that as being very negligent on the form of the person that they had hired. Because you should not be so physically sore that you cannot move after a personal training appointment. And some coaches do that as a form of look at how unconditioned you are, look at how de-conditioned you are, and how much you need me. And it's just so rude.

But anyway, back to mental fitness. What we want to do is we want to make it easy for ourselves. We want to use the little weights first. And as we feel more comfortable, as we get more comfortable with the way that we're doing the exercise, as we start to build up those muscles in our bodies.

Then, we start to gain confidence. And as we gain confidence, we are feel more competent and we feel more encouraged in doing the thing that we want to do. And so, as we increase our repetitions, our exercise actually grows in difficulty. You don't start off with the tough heavy stuff, you need to build up. And the same thing is true with mental fitness.

We can't just start out with, telling ourselves that we're going to start asking for what we need when we haven't done that in years. We need to start small. So, when we start out on a physical fitness program, we start slowing with low weight and a low risk of getting hurt.

As we continue to perform repetitions, we build strength. And what was uncomfortable is now starting to be comfortable. So, the same thing is true for things like setting boundaries. You can start out by setting low risk boundaries and then slowly start to increase the risk of what the impact is of those boundaries.

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So, another example would be taking time for myself. Maybe taking a vacation on my own seems like something way outside of the comfort zone. But maybe stealing away for five minutes is something that I can do right now. And so, as we build this skill of asking for what I want and asking those around me to support me, we gain confidence.

Another example of this might be resisting cookies, even though I want them. So, start with one cookie, and maybe it's have one, and then resist the second one. It doesn't have to be an all or nothing proposition.

And we can move on to bigger weights, and more complex exercises, and the same thing is true with our mental fitness as well. So, being able to stop that inner critic in the middle of a hijacking and say, wait a minute, this isn't what I want.

So, what are the steps that we need to take in order to start building up our mental fitness. The first step is really getting in touch with your inner critic and your judge. And there's a tool that I teach both within the Feel Good Sisterhood, my group coaching program, as well as my one-on-one coaching program which is something called "thought downloads."

And what it does is it really allows us to get in touch with what we're thinking. I think about our brain as being this big whirling vortex. And in that whirling vortex, there are just hundreds of thousands of sentences that are going around in that vortex. And we're thinking the same things over, and over, and over again.

And through the process of what's called a thought download, what we're doing is we're taking one sentence out of the vortex and we're throwing it down on paper so that we have one less thing to think about. And when this thing is on paper, we can really look at it.

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Have you ever had the experience where you've been talking to someone and you've said something and you double back and you're like, oh my God, do I really think that? And this is like the same thing. It exposes those lies that we tell ourselves.

And so, really being able to get in touch with our inner critic, with our judge, with the lower brain, with that emotional brain so that we can stop the hijacking when it's happening.

So, things that we judge ourselves for, things that we judge other people for, and then also when we judge circumstances. When something happens to us and all we can think is, oh my God, this is the worst thing that's ever going to happen to me or the worrier. So, this is going to happen. And I'm really worried that it's going to happen.

And you know, it's so funny, I've actually been keeping a log of the things that I have self-doubt about and the things that I worry about. I would say that 99 percent of the time, those things that I worry about, those things that my lower brain offers me that are things that I need to be worried about in the future, never come true.

So, being able to intercept those worries, those lies, those criticisms that our brain offers us of ourselves, as well as other people, and events and circumstances is such a crucial skill. Because then we can stop the noise that's happening in our head.

When we notice that our judge is hijacking ourselves, then what's happening is we typically will notice that we're having negative emotion along with that. Negative emotion being fear, worry, overwhelm, shame, guilt, disappointment, or frustration. And those are just a few, there are many, many other emotions that our judge or our inner critic will produce.

And so, whenever you're having those negative emotions, be aware that your brain is telling you something that is probably not true.

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And so again, step one is starting to become aware of what it is that your brain is telling you what the lie is that your brain is telling you so that you can then combat it.

Step number two is then address the problem from the place of your future self or your higher self. Asking yourself, okay, so this person who I aspire to be in the future or taking myself out of the pettiness of whatever this situation is. How do I want to think about this problem? What would my future self-do in this situation?

And then, another really good question to ask yourself, is this situation going to matter in five hours, five days, five weeks, five months, five years? So, what we really want to do is we want to right size the problem.

Oftentimes, when we're faced with the cookies, we want the cookie right now. But when we think about, am I going to want this in an hour? Maybe, but maybe not. Am I going to want it in five hours? Probably not.

So, if it's not something that's going to bother me in five hours, why do I have to manage it right now? How can I get over that and just move on, right?

And then, next thing we want to do is act accordingly. What does my higher self say? Again, if you've been listening to this podcast for any amount of time, you know, that there are times that you are going to want to eat the broccoli. But there are other times that you are going to want to eat the brownie.

So, really being able to zoom out from the lens of what's happening right now, to what's the larger perspective here. And what am I going to want overall? Sometimes you're going to want to eat brownies with your kids or your grandkids.

But other times when you're sitting home alone and you're just looking for something to do, the brownie isn't really what you're looking for. You're looking for something else.

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And so, being able to call BS on your brain that's telling you that eating all the brownies is going to make you feel better. Yes, it's going to make you feel better in the moment, but it's not going to make you feel better afterwards.

Because then, you're going to be full, you're going to be overfull. You're not going to feel good from all of the stuff that you've just eaten. And then, on top of that, you still have the emotion that you were trying to cover up in the first place.

Now, the benefits of increasing your mental fitness are being able to notice and call out. Again, all of those lies that our brain offers us. All of those lies that tells us, you're going to feel better if you eat all the brownies. Well, you've had one, you may as well just eat the entire pan. You've already screwed up today. You may as well, just go all in. It's not a perfect day anymore and you need to be perfect.

All of those things are lies. They're lies that our brain tells us that we buy into. And so, the more that we can notice what those lies are and put them down on paper, and really call out, and get to know our lower brain and our inner critic, the more we're going to be successful.

Another benefit of increasing your mental fitness is being able to hold yourself accountable. And feeling proud because you've actually accomplished whatever it is that you've set out to do. It's so interesting when I work with my clients and as well as the women in the Feel Good Sisterhood that oftentimes, the weight loss doesn't even become the goal anymore.

The goal is actually just being nice to ourselves, being able to hold ourselves accountable, and do the things that we want to do. And what happens then is the weight loss becomes just a by-product and it's a benefit, sure. But it's something that really isn't on the forefront of most of my client's minds anymore.

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And I want you to think about that. What would life look like or what would it feel like if you were not constantly thinking about your weight? You'd have a lot more brain power to think about other things, right?

And the beating yourself up that you have after you haven't worked out, or after you've eaten that second cookie, or whatever you are currently beating yourself up about that inner critic. That inner critic just is not helpful.

And so, being able to quiet the inner critic and do what you want most overpaying attention to that inner critic, making you feel terrible is really an amazing skill to have. And what happens then is we generally feel happier because we're quieting that part of our brain. It's not going to go away, okay. I'm not going to lie.

The inner critic never goes away. But we can quiet her. We can entertain her and say, oh, there you are! That's cute. I know this is a story that you've told me time and time again. And you're trying to convince me, how useful you are by keeping me out of danger, but you know what? We're not doing that anymore. We are going after what we want instead of listening to you.

And then, the other thing is reducing what's called "internalized oppression." So oftentimes, we've been socialized that women are not meant to be successful, or women's places in the home, or all of those subtle social messages that we get that tell us that we should not act the way that we want to act.

That we should dim our bulbs, that we should dim our light, that we shouldn't be our true and authentic selves. And what happens is those external messages come into ourselves, come into our psyche. And our lower brain, our inner critic just starts repeating those. That's what's called internalized oppression.

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My coach Kara talks about how the call is coming from inside the house, like in scary movies. And what we realize is that no one else is really actually judging us, that we are judging ourselves. And so, what getting in touch with our inner critic does.

And being able to call out these lies that they tell us, our inner critic tells us is we'll have reduced judgment, we'll have reduced negative self-talk. Getting rid of the self-doubt, the self-loathing, and the overthinking. How many of you identify as an overthinker?

If you want to improve your mental fitness, I am totally going to invite you to work with me one-on-one as a personal one-on-one coach. And we can work on all of building up your mental fitness as well as helping you to develop the skills and habits that you know will lead to making you feel better and potentially losing weight at the same time.

Now, if one-on-one coaching isn't something that you're interested in. I also want to invite you to join my group coaching program, the Feel Good Sisterhood. Now, the Feel Good Sisterhood is opening soon.

So, I want you to get on the wait list if that's something that you might be interested in. Because you are going to get something special when you are on the wait list. Not only will you get early access to the materials on July 11th, but you will also get additional bonuses. Otherwise, if you don't get on the wait list, the Feel Good Sisterhood is going to open on July 18th one week later.

So, have an amazing week. That's all I have for you today. I will talk to you all later. 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

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