

The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

EPISODE 6: UNDERSTANDING THE URGE

How could eating a whole cake when you don't even want a slice be a good sign? Keep listening!

Welcome to the Done Bingeing podcast, where you'll hear about powerful life coaching strategies that empower you to end binge eating.

Binge eating is no joke. So, explore all your options. If you're functioning well in your life and you want to explore a non-clinical approach to stop bingeing, coaching might be perfect for you. Life coaching isn't therapy, but it may help you on your journey whether you also choose to do therapy or not. Trust yourself, take good care of yourself, get the support you need, and see what works for you. If you want to hear how life coaching can help free you from binge eating, you're in the right place! You have more power than you know. Why not take it back? And now, your host, Life and Weight-Loss Coach Martha Ayim.

Welcome to Episode 6 of the Done Bingeing Podcast. Thank you for being here with me.

In Episode 3, I introduced the concept of self-regard and talked about the price we pay when we feel shame about our bingeing.

Episodes 4 and 5 started to break this down so we could see how self-regard plays a vital role in six main areas that binge eaters tend to face:

1. their unhappiness with their weight
2. their attempts to diet to lose that weight and to control their eating
3. their urges to binge
4. the bingeing itself
5. the aftermath of binges
6. dealing with their weight after the binges have stopped

Episode 4 focused on #1: the weight. Episode 5 tackled #2 food restriction.

This week, Episode 6 begins to explore the urges to binge.

This is an area where I work closely with clients to invite them to reconsider a deep-seated belief—that their urges to binge are beyond their control, that they're absolutely overpowering.

I get it. My urges to binge used to feel overwhelming too. Like they actually grab you by the scuff of the neck and shove your face into the fridge! But that leaves us feeling pretty powerless, right? Well, before we get too carried away, let's go back to the brain science to figure out what's really going on here.

Let's recap from last week: You have a lower brain and a higher brain. We learned from Dr. Amy Johnson (2013) that the lower brain is the oldest part of the brain. We're talking *pre*-prehistoric. It first showed up in fish almost 500 million years ago. Most creatures have it—including reptiles—so it's sometimes called "the reptilian brain." It's old and rigid. It doesn't think or reason. It's stayed through evolution to be a part of the human brain.

Last week, I mentioned that one of your lower brain's main jobs is to keep you alive by sending out powerful impulses for anything it thinks you need to live—and that includes food. That's job #1.

But that's not all. Your lower brain has another important job. Here's job #2:

Your lower brain tries to help you run more efficiently by automating patterns that it notices happen repeatedly—like this pattern: you get an urge to binge, you binge to make that urge go away; you get an urge, you binge to make it go away; urge, binge; urge, binge.

When these two lower brain functions (that is, sending out powerful signals to keep you alive and automating repeated patterns) come together, you've got a potent combo.

Because binge eating has become a programmed habit, your lower brain thinks you need to binge to survive. So, it sounds the alarm for you to binge. The reason it can really feel like you'll die if you don't binge is because the urge comes from the part of your brain that relentlessly tries to keep you alive.

Luckily for us, we also have a higher brain that knows better.

Your higher brain is the most recent part of the brain, emerging only 2 or 3 million years ago or so. (And, hey, that's recent when you're talking about the history of the universe.) Only primates have a higher brain. It's sometimes called "the prefrontal cortex."

Your higher brain is the home of your logical reasoning skills, your ability to make conscious choices, and your capacity to make voluntary movements (like flipping an omelet) as opposed to involuntary movements (like breathing). Your higher brain is what sets you apart from a bird.

While your lower brain can send out pre-programmed orders to binge or die, it's your higher brain that decides whether you follow through.

So, your lower brain can't make you eat a whole seven-layer cake, even though it's screaming for you to do just that. Since it's not in charge of your executive functioning, your lower brain can't do either of these two things.

1. Your lower brain can't make the call to devour those discs of fluffy cake layered with smooth icing.

2. Your lower brain can't control your legs that could hustle you over to the fridge or your arms that could whip the cake off the top shelf.

Only your higher brain can choose what to do about an urge fired from the lower brain. And only your higher brain can get you from zero to cake in two seconds flat.

So, while your lower brain might try to *talk* you into eating that seven-layer cake, your higher brain can *talk you down* one layer at a time and can *walk you back* one step at a time.

Now you can see that the disconnect you've been feeling between the part of you that wants to eat and the part of you that doesn't makes perfect sense: Your animal-survival instincts coming from your lower brain think you'll die if you don't down a whole cake. But your intelligent reflections coming from your higher brain don't want you to have—and know that you don't really need—more than one piece.

Now that you know that the disconnect makes sense, you can use the same brain science to wire a new connection in your brain—and to end your binges for good. Getting to know your higher brain can turn it into an amazing ally as you find your way out of binge eating.

There's something else you can do now that you know that the disconnect you've been feeling reflects a brain that's working exactly as it was design to work: You can cut yourself some slack. You're going to hear me say this again and again: You're not broken or flawed or inept. Eating a cake when you don't want to isn't a ridiculous behavior for a binge eater. It's a logical consequence. You don't need to shame yourself. If I hadn't convinced you to let go of the shame yet, I hope I've convinced you now. You deserve your own respect. Treat yourself with dignity. Give yourself the gift of self-regard.

You needed to understand to urge. Now, you do. You also now know that your decisions and actions come from a completely different, and much more evolved, part of your brain than your urges do.

You really do get to choose your response to an urge to binge. And now that you know *why* you get to choose, the *how* becomes a whole lot easier.

In the next episode, you're going to learn how to take the power out of your urges and put it back in your hands.

Stay tuned.

That's it for Episode 6. Thank you for listening.

If you enjoyed this podcast, subscribe so you never miss an episode!

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Thanks for listening to this episode of The Done Bingeing Podcast. Remember, although life coaching can complement therapy, it's not a substitute for therapy if that's what you require. Make sure you get the support you need. And let Martha know if she can help you along the way. Come back next week for more on saying goodbye to the binge.

Reference

Johnson, A. (2013). *Fighting the Urge: Change Unwanted Behaviors Once and For All*.
www.DrAmyJohnson.com.