

# The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

## EPISODE 40: SPECIAL SERIES—12 KEYS TO END BINGE EATING, PART 6

*What does Shakespeare's Twelfth Night have to do with your eating and your brain? Keep listening!*

Welcome to *The Done Bingeing Podcast*. This is the place to hear about how you can pair the emerging brain science about why you binge with powerful life coaching to help you stop. If you want to explore a non-clinical approach to end binge eating, you're in the right place. It's time to free yourself. You have more power than you know. And now, your host, Life and Weight-Loss Coach Martha Ayim.

Welcome to Episode 40 of *The Done Bingeing Podcast* and to part 6 of this special series, *12 Keys to End Binge Eating*. This episode focuses on the fifth key: Understand Your Brain.

This is one of my favorite keys because I've found that when my clients understand what's happening in their brain, so many pieces of their eating struggles begin to make sense. It's where I see the most willingness to forgive themselves for their inability to resolve their bingeing to date. And it's where I see the first flickers of hope about their prospects of ending their bingeing.

Right now, your eating behavior likely leaves you feeling completely out of control. And because you're desperately doing something you desperately want to stop doing, you probably feel alarmed at best and ashamed at worst.

Part of you wants to stop bingeing so badly and part of you wants to keep bingeing just as badly. And so you have that tell-tale dissonance between how you want to eat and how you actually do eat. It's almost like there's two of you playing tug-of-war.

And all of this is fantastic news.

Oh yeah, you heard me all right. I said, "*fantastic*."

Why?

Here's why:

Because the two of you playing tug-of-war reflect two parts of your brain also playing tug-of-war—and those two parts of your brain are functioning exactly as they were designed to function. The problem is

that they're currently cross-wired to work *against* each other instead of *with* each other. And *that*, we can fix!

When I studied neurology as an undergrad, I was astounded by the complexity of the brain. And I spent every office hour with my prof going over the intricacies of neuronal mechanisms until he kicked me out every week and said he *really* had to get home now.

So he'd probably cringe if he heard me simplify the brain as I'm about to. But I think the simplification is helpful in understanding what's going on up there when you get an urge to binge and you react to that urge by bingeing.

Here's the bare bones of what you need to know:

The two parts of your brain working at cross-purposes right now are your lower brain and your higher brain.

Your lower brain is the oldest part of your 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, and it's stayed through evolution to be a part of the human brain.

Two of your lower brain's main jobs are a) to keep you alive and b) to automate patterns.

Let's take a closer look at job #1. When I was a kid, I used to play Let's See Who Can Hold Their Breath the Longest with my friends. I'd probably been inspired by an episode of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, in which Steve Austin had escaped the bad guys by holding his breath under water.

I lost every time. I'd try so hard not to breathe. I'd shut my eyes, clench my fists, and think over and over, "I'm a fish, I don't need air." I'd pop a vein or two and, inevitably, double over, gasping.

What happened?

My lower brain had kicked in, kicked me in the pants, and said, "You're not a fish, Knuckle-Head, *breathe!*" My lower brain's job is to ensure that I get what I need to survive and it takes that supreme responsibility very, very seriously.

So, given that one of your lower brain's main jobs is to keep you alive, what do you suppose it'll do if it's worried that you're not eating enough? If you guessed send out super-powerful impulses to eat, eat, eat, you are right, right, right!

If your lower brain thinks that you're remotely in danger of starving, it'll send out any kind of signal it can to get you to eat, including an urge to binge. Why? Because it wants you to live. FYI: your lower brain is probably on hyper-alert if you're on a restrictive diet.

Now, as if keeping you alive wasn't enough responsibility, your lower brain has another task. Here's job #2:

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

When these two lower brain functions (that is, securing your survival and automating patterns) come together, you've got a potent combo.

The reason it can really feel like you'll really die if you don't binge is because the urge comes from the part of your brain that's frantically trying to keep you alive. And because bingeing has become a programmed habit, so much of the pattern happens below your radar because it's now become automatic.

Luckily, you also have a higher brain.

Your higher brain is the most recent part of the brain, emerging only 2 or 3 million years ago or so. (And, when you're talking about the history of the universe, that's not that long.) Only primates have a higher brain and 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 moving toward the pantry) as opposed to involuntary movements (like breathing).

While your lower brain can send out automated orders to binge or die, it's your higher brain that decides whether you follow through with a decision and an action.

So, your lower brain can't make you eat a whole chicken, even though it's shouting 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: First, your lower brain *can't make the decision* to eat the bird. And, second, your lower brain *can't control your movements* that would get you to the bird.

Only your higher brain can choose what to do about an urge fired from the lower brain. So, while your lower brain might try to talk you into eating a chicken with a cheesecake chaser, your higher brain can talk you out of both.

But that's what's *possible* when your higher brain is trained to work *for you*. Right now, it's innocently working against you by engaging in an unproductive battle with your lower brain.

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 platefuls of food. 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 serving.

The bad news is that your higher brain doesn't really know how to effectively help you right now.

The good news is that it can learn. That's the beauty of neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to be retrained.

Brain science tells us that nothing actually forces you to binge, though it may not feel like that when the urge comes thundering through. Every binge requires a decision to say yes to the urge and voluntary movement to get the food and eat it.

And we're not just talking about one decision and one movement. Every moment provides an opportunity for you to say yes or no to the urge to binge.

Let's say you're about to leave work and you're feeling pretty stressed about office dynamics. As you put your arms into the sleeves of your coat, you notice the first inklings of an urge to binge. There's leftover cake from a colleague's birthday in the lounge. This is moment number one. Are you going to say yes to the urge and go and get some cake? Or are you going to say no to the urge, lock your office door, and make your way to the car?

You decide to say no to the urge and walk past the lounge. On the way to the stairs, you pass the vending machine and ponder a Kit Kat because . . . well . . . "you deserve a break today." This is moment number two. Are you going to say yes to the urge and eat your chocolate break? Or are you going to say no to the urge, pass the vending machine, and continue to the staircase?

You decide to say no to the urge and head down to parking level 1B. Inside your car, you remember the licorice in the glove compartment. It's been in there long enough to be slightly melted and a little gross, but it probably won't kill you. This is moment number three. Are you going to say yes to the urge and chomp down on some red, gummy sticks? Or are you going to say no to the urge, put the licorice back in the compartment, and pull out of the parking garage?

You decide to say no to the urge and head out into afternoon rush hour. As you're stopped at a light, you see your favorite bakery just ahead. This is moment number four. Are you going to say yes to the urge and stop for butter tarts? Or are you going to say no to the urge, pass the bakery, and get on the freeway?

You decide to say no the urge and pull onto the on ramp. As you near home, you remember the bags of treats the kids brought home from school on Valentine's Day, then forgot about. This is moment number five. Are you going to say yes to the urge and head for the pantry as soon as you walk in the door? Or are you going to say no to the urge, and take the 20 minutes you have before the kids arrive to unwind and change into more comfortable clothes?

Every moment is a moment to make a choice to either say yes to the urge or no to the urge. In the coming parts of this special series, I'll be covering what to do in those moments. The more often you say no to the urge, the less often it will visit you.

Perhaps you still believe that your urges to binge are out of your control, that they're absolutely overpowering. But here's the problem with a belief like that: it leaves you feeling overwhelmed and powerless, and those are two pretty potent, uncomfortable emotions. And what do you tend to do when you feel difficult emotions? Well, if you're anything like I was, you probably eat. So, for starters, the belief that your urges are overpowering and beyond your control isn't helping you.

But that's not all. As we've just seen from the brain science, that's not even a belief that's true. You aren't out of control. Your lower brain just makes you feel like that. But your higher brain is up there too and at the ready to help you make choices and take actions that *do* serve you and that are *true* to who you want to be.

Now, you might be worried that because the urges are really, really strong, not bingeing when they come will have to be really, really hard.

But think about this:

For sure, there've been times when you really wanted to binge, and you did.

But there've also times when you really didn't want to binge, and you didn't.

And it wasn't always because you were sick as a dog.

Sometime you just didn't want to binge.

And it was effortless.

Don't forget that has already been a part of your experience.

That's what we want to foster.

That's what we want to make automatic.

That's what it's like when you retrain your brain.

And that's what I created my masterclass to teach you.

You can rewire your brain to work for you. (Right now it's working against you.)

You have power over your urges. (In fact, you are so much more powerful than you know.)

And you don't need to starve to control your eating. (The truth is, when you feel satisfied, control isn't necessary.)

You don't need to worry that my masterclass is going to slam the door of a rehab lock-down.

My masterclass is going to open the door to a new-found freedom.

I'm teaching it for a limited time, so save your seat before it's too late by going to [www.holdingthespace.co/masterclass](http://www.holdingthespace.co/masterclass). I'll be coaching for free in the class too, so come with your questions ready!

For so long, you've probably believed that you were powerless.

But as Shakespeare alluded to in *Twelfth Night*, no prison is more confining than the one we don't know we're in.

Maybe you've been living behind bars and you didn't even know it.

You are not powerless.

You can stay in a cage in the name of control or you can risk freedom by stepping out.

You can view the world through iron bars as if that's normal.

Or you can move beyond the bars and create a new normal.

That's it for Episode 40. Thank you for listening. For a limited time, I'm teaching a free masterclass to dig deeper into the essential steps to ending binge eating. But this masterclass isn't just about learning, it's also an opportunity to get live coaching for free from me. Reserve your spot now at [www.holdingthespace.co/masterclass/](http://www.holdingthespace.co/masterclass/)! You are *not* going to want to miss it.

Thanks for listening to *The Done Bingeing Podcast*. Martha is a certified life and weight loss coach who's available to help you stop bingeing. Book a free session with her at [www.holdingthespace.co/book](http://www.holdingthespace.co/book). And stay tuned for next week's episode on freeing yourself from binge eating and creating the life you want.