

Lesson 15: Self-Sabotage

Hi everybody, this is coach Terri Lance, and this is lesson 15. In today's lesson we're going to talk a little more in depth about what self sabotage is, and a myriad of reasons why we do this behavior. Over my time with The Fasting Method, one of the most common phrases that most people use to describe why they don't make the progress that they want to be making, or don't feel as successful as they would like to feel is self sabotage. They identify that they sabotage themselves and then they get really frustrated with themselves for doing this, and it just keeps a vicious cycle going.

Self sabotage is when we engage in behaviors or thoughts that actually interfere with us reaching our goals, or prevent us from moving forward. These actions actually often create greater distance between us and our intended goals. Self sabotage is universal. We all do it. So, you are not broken, flawed or weak. That's a misbelief that a lot of us have, and it actually sets us up for even more struggle and more self sabotage, because we think that we're weak or somehow broken because we can't make our healthy behavior stick, we can't follow through.

Self sabotage when it comes to eating and fasting, sometimes confuses people because they're really good at following through on things in other areas of their lives. They're able to complete their goals and tasks, they're able to achieve promotions and build relationships, but maybe they struggle in this area of their lives differently than in some others. My guess is that many of you came to this masterclass already identifying that you struggle with self sabotage around what you eat and how often you eat.

But people also struggle with self sabotage in their relationships, whether that be familial or romantic relationships in their careers and taking care of their homes and paying bills, et cetera. So we see it in all areas of life. We even see highly successful people who self sabotage. One of the things that I hear a lot of people in our community say is that they get very frustrated because they just don't understand, "Why do I do these self sabotaging behaviors? Why do I interfere with my goals when I know what I want to achieve? I know what my goal is. It's a great goal. And I have all of the knowledge I need and I have the resources, why do I do this?"

Again, if you've been thinking this, please don't get down on yourself about this, it's normal human behavior. But it is something that can be improved. Having the knowledge and having motivation, having a clear why, a clear goal, is often not always enough. We self sabotage for a variety of reasons. I want to remind you that our brain has a primary goal and function to keep us alive. One of its main tasks is to avoid threats or what it perceives as danger. So, it avoids pain or threat. Secondly, to achieve pleasure.

Oftentimes when it comes to eating foods and eating problematic foods, a lot of us think that it's really driven by pleasure and that we are seeking pleasure as our biggest problem. Most of us really are not that hedonistic though. We do have some of that in us naturally, but most of our problematic eating behavior is done to avoid the negative, the discomfort. So not having that

food that we want is a discomfort that we want to escape. Our drive to avoid pain makes certain in the moment decisions easy, because we just want to avoid burning ourselves or falling off of a ledge or consuming poison.

But nowadays, the challenge for a lot of us is that our desire to thrive to live beyond just survival means we may have to avoid things in this moment in order to help us do or feel better in the future. So if our goal is to be healthier, increase our mobility, shed body fat, et cetera, we need to make decisions now that create these positive results for our future. Avoiding eating something we enjoy right now may create discomfort or pain in the current moment, but set us up for a positive result in the future.

On the other hand, having something that we enjoy eating now, creates pleasure now, but it creates pain or discomfort in the future. So this poses a bit of a dilemma for our brain to really work through the ends of the pain and pleasure continuum. I think looking at this pleasure and pain difference is also important when we think about some reasons why some of us give up on our health or weight goals along the way in self sabotage. It might sound something like this, and might be able to relate to this. Your goal is to lose 50 pounds. You believe that your life will feel better. Your body will feel better. You'll have more mobility. You'll like your clothes more. It does all of these positive things that we seek.

But there's part of your brain that says, "You know what? I have been doing okay at this weight for quite a while now, I'm okay in my clothes. It's okay. I can just stay where I am, not losing weight is fine." So oftentimes we short circuit our bigger goals because the perceived discomfort of changing behaviors or foregoing things that feel good in the moment feels more threatening to us than the degree of perceived positive feeling or experience in the future.

Also remember, that our brain prefers things that are known to it. It really does not seek novelty. It can do novel thoughts and seek novelty, but seeking novelty or new things requires more energy. Especially when we are tired or under stress, our brain will switch over and use neurons that require less energy to fire. And that will be the things that we already know or already do, that are already habit because those seeking novelty require more energy.

Now, this also helps explain why we start off well when we first start a new habit. You have some enthusiasm for this new behavior and your goal when you first start fasting, or you first start to change how you were eating. And then many of us find that as we go along, we may lose some of this momentum as our brain loses its focus on the novelty of it. And instead seeks familiar habits. This is a reality of our brain. So if you are thinking that you can do great on any plan for a couple of weeks, but then you always fall off, this is a challenge you need to address to combat this inertia and instead keep moving forward.

There's so many possible reasons to understand why you self sabotage, and we all do some pieces of most of these. But you may hear some that really stand out to you as you listen. Some of the reasons that we self sabotage are about our thoughts and ways we think and feel about ourselves and the tasks at hand. One of the most common causes of self sabotage is low



self-esteem. And I know we've all heard a lot about self-esteem for many years, but it really is an important factor here. If we don't see ourselves as having worth, being worthy of the goal, worthy of the effort, or if we don't see ourselves as having the abilities to achieve what we're working toward, we are going to be more likely to self sabotage.

We see these goals as less attainable for us, and if we can't attain it, why would we put in that effort? Enter self sabotage behaviors. One factor at play for many of us working on weight loss is the influence of our past experiences. Many of us have dieted before, we've lost significant amounts of weight before, or we've lost a little bit of weight before, but then regained it. Unfortunately, this outcome has served as a reason to self sabotage, because we've gained evidence that we can't succeed at this. A potential significant blow to our self-esteem. It also helps to create the next cause, limiting beliefs.

Some of our limiting beliefs are things we internalized by listening to others and watching others. Let's say, for example, when you were young, you heard your mom talk about how difficult it was for her to lose weight, and how miserable she was while she was trying to lose weight. You probably internalized some of that, or you internalized other messages about struggles and difficulties and people's abilities. And you've now taken those in as being facts or just realities to deal with in your own health journey.

Another common reason many of us engage in self sabotage is the concept of cognitive dissonance. I actually believe this is probably the biggest reason I see folks struggle. It's when we hold two things in our mind that are really in contrast to each other, and they're usually a belief and a behavior or a belief and a decision that needs to be made. So if I believe that I can't succeed at losing weight, but I have a fasting goal and an eating plan set up for the week. This creates a tension inside of me, because what I'm trying to do is incongruent with my belief about what I can actually accomplish.

And when we experience cognitive dissonance, we really have only one choice. And that is we have to change either the belief or the behavior. I want to share an example with you of cognitive dissonance that still stands out to me so clearly after all of these years, from way back in the beginning of my teaching career. I was a middle school English teacher, and it was a challenging job for me. I had this eighth grader who came to my class every day and she didn't participate, she didn't bring materials, and it was a writing class. And our curriculum at that time was very writing based. She wouldn't turn in her work, even the assignments that only required that you put your name on them, she wouldn't turn them in. So she failed my class every marking period, and it just broke my heart.

One day, she came to my class and I saw that she was writing and writing and writing. I asked her if I could read what she was writing or if she would read it to me, and she did. I gave her so much positive feedback. I said, "Wow, this is great. You're a skilled writer. I didn't know, this is so good." And I thought that she got excited hearing this feedback. The next day she came back to class, she didn't bring her stuff. She didn't even bring a pencil. This is cognitive dissonance. And me giving that feedback was so incongruent with this path she already set herself on, that she couldn't maintain it.

So she had to change either her self concept or the behavior. So she changed the behavior back to her old ways and continued to disengage and fail my class. And I'm really trying to emphasize here that cognitive dissonance is a big motivator for self sabotage. When you have more than one competing desire or need, which we often do, the brain struggles even more so. So, let's say you have some thoughts swirling around in your mind, "I really want this food, I know this food is really unhealthy for me, I know that I could get some healthier food, but that's going to take extra effort right now, and it's really not as much fun to eat that." So you have these various desires and needs all kinds of competing. This is often where we'll self sabotage.

Typically, our natural go-to is to give into the easier of those options. And that often is to engage in the behavior that sets us back. Another primary motivator of self sabotage is the fear of change. So, as we're working to change our behavior and build new habits, our brain is holding back a little bit. Our brain gets a little on edge about this, and it would prefer to keep things the way it already knows.

Interestingly, this isn't something bad that our brain is doing. But if you think about it from an evolutionary perspective, why would our brain do this? New things or new situations or behaviors, going out and exploring, learning new things, to the brain means opening yourself up to risk. Danger, going back to the ancestors, going outside of your cave or your small group meant the possibility of running into a beast that could eat you, whatever, a threat, not having food once you get out there. Being separated from your group or your tribe almost surely meant the threat of injury or death. So change is typically experienced as kind of a threat to the brain. And here we are in modern times, working on all of this self growth and changing things, and our brain resists that at least to some degree.

This is why I think it's important to recognize that changing behaviors and habits is not just a simple process, but that your struggles are natural and can be worked through. As if the causes I've already discussed weren't enough, we also have learned a number of habits of thoughts that create great opportunities for self sabotage. And these are all cognitive distortions. They're problematic thinking patterns that we've learned to do, and we've learned to do them as coping mechanisms or a way to survive or navigate difficult environments. These cognitive distortions are things that you're probably familiar with, but I'll go through a few of them.

One is having a perfectionistic way of thinking or perfectionism. If we expect perfection from ourselves and from others, this leaves us very little room for not succeeding, not doing everything a 100%, being very tightly bound around our boundaries, and around what we expect of ourselves. This also leaves us very susceptible to crash when we don't meet that perfectionistic standard, which is likely because we're not perfect, we're human, we're naturally imperfect. But when we hold a perfectionistic expectation, it's easily not met. And then that lowers our self-esteem and creates even more reason to self sabotage.

A similar pattern for some of us is all or nothing thinking, a very important cognitive distortion that a lot of us struggle with. Let's say I had planned to do a 42-hour fast, and I decided to eat something a little while ago. Now, I fall into that faulty thinking that I might as well eat whatever I want because I already blew it. I already broke my fast. I failed and I might as well do this now.



But if we could reframe it and instead say something to ourselves like, "Hey, I broke my fast early, I ate some healthy food and now I'm going to keep going with my food plan, and that doesn't need to hold me back."

But when we get caught up in that all or nothing thinking, we self sabotage because we feel like we've either ruined it or blown it, and then it just doesn't matter what we choose to do now. Another cognitive distortion that we often make is that we overgeneralize things. So because something happened once we believe that it will happen again. Or if it's happened a number of times that it will always happen. Or if we see someone else do this, we believe that's also how it will work for us. So we over apply information to all situations.

Let's say, for example, you've been used to eating desserts and treats and maybe more problematic foods on holidays, and you have some holidays coming up. So, overgeneralizing would mean that you might say something like, "Look, I always eat way too much, and I eat everything I know that's not healthy for me because it's the holidays. Last year I ate so much, I got sick, but I've always done this. It's just how the holidays go for me." So the assumption is, that you'll keep doing it just because you've done it in the past. You're overgeneralizing. It's happened before, it will happen again.

Think about all the things that you did while you were growing up, or while you matured that you don't do anymore, like falling down when you took your first steps. Think about a number of things that you did while you were growing up, or as you matured that you learned to do differently. Like when you first learned to walk, you fell down, you were unsteady and you didn't know how to hold yourself up. After that first couple of days, getting up on your feet, you figured it out. But if you had stopped, just because I've always fallen in the past, none of us would be walking now.

Things that you didn't do well, but you still risked to do it again. Let's say, for example, you asked someone out on a date because you were interested and they said no. And then you went on to date other people and found the love of a great partner. Just because we have certain experiences does not mean we have to continue to repeat them over and over. Two other common cognitive distortions are focusing or dwelling on negative thoughts and discounting the positive. So while you're learning to fast, you focus on how difficult it is or on how much you miss eating while watching TV. You train your brain to feel the challenge even more negatively, and this serves to overwhelm or demotivate your brain and you.

As far as discounting the positive, I tend to hear this come up in this community when people talk about some of the progress or efforts that they're making as they move forward. They tend to talk about it as if it's not good enough progress because they needed to use something like bone broth, or they discount the fact that they've achieved positive things. I often hear it in their word choices. Like when people would say, "I only did a 24 hour fast." We're discounting the positive of that. Or they say, "I only did 18 sixes this week." We're making that sound like it's not positive. So how does that help motivate our brain? It doesn't. And it will ensure that we self sabotage ourselves over and over again.

So turning those statements around, "I didn't fast as long as I planned, but I got in five really good 18 sixes this week." Focusing on the positive rather than discounting the positive. These things lead us to self sabotage because they tell our brain things are not going well, that they can't go well, and that we just can't really do or achieve our goal or build this new habit. And as you remember from the first lesson, when I talked about our self talk, our brain is listening to that. And if we're telling it that what we're working on is impossible, it won't work for it. So self sabotage walks right in.

Self sabotage is also really driven by two primary fears, the fear of failure and the fear of success. Sometimes when you think of doing something new, you might be focused on the potential for failure. I think many of us can easily relate to fearing that we might fail at something, but many of us might not have thought about having fear of success as something that we would consciously worry about. But I'm going to talk about how I actually think it plays a bigger role in self sabotage than many of us realize. In general, when we think of the fear of failure influencing us to self sabotage, one way this can happen is that we use it as a way to take ownership of the outcome.

Because we may fear that we may not be successful at something, and because our brain tends to have a desire for a sense of control over things to feel safe, we interpret that it may feel less threatening to decide to not follow through with our new plan or goal, because this way we are in control and we don't have to actually find out if we might not succeed. In this case, when we fear failure as a possibility, we might say something like, "Listen, I'm not really sure I can lose this weight. I'm not sure I can resolve this diabetes diagnosis." That feels a little threatening or uncomfortable to our mind, because it doesn't like the unknown. It doesn't like the possibility that something might not work, something that we have risked doing and put effort into.

So, in a self protective move, we think in some ways, "Well, I'd rather know that it didn't work because I didn't do the necessary steps rather than finding out that we couldn't do them." What we tend to do is some ego protection. We would rather say, "I didn't win that game because I didn't practice enough." Versus maybe having to say, "My skill level isn't as matched to that opponent." So it would be easier for us to protect ourselves rather than have to own that something wasn't accessible to us, or that maybe we struggled to achieve it.

Now, my hope is that we would all be practicing not feeling shame or embarrassment about our efforts not leading to immediate success or the fact that some of our skills are really challenging for us. But instead, letting ourselves feel empowered to take risks, but that's a stretch for many of us to work on, and our brain tries to protect us from that. So self sabotage and curse. As I said earlier, though, I actually think that the fear of success is a primary reason many of us self sabotage. Again, for a lot of people on the surface, this makes no sense. I know my goals, their good goals. Why would I possibly not want to achieve those goals?

But there are reasons why our brain and our patterns of thinking actually do fear success, even though it's something that we really want. For many of us, we don't necessarily believe we are worthy of success. Again, if we have limiting beliefs that tell us that we are less than, not enough or something negative, getting close to goal starts to rub up against that in an

uncomfortable way for us. Not believing in our own abilities enough may lead us to experience an imposter syndrome, where we think that our success isn't really going to happen, and more likely that people will finally realize that we're not able to do what they think we can do, or we aren't really who they think we are.

Most of us are seeking things in our goals that we believe are going to make us happy, but that's a big unknown. And for many of us being happy is an unknown thing. Our brain tries to avoid the unknown. So this creates some tension. One of the reasons I see many people struggle with approaching success that might actually throw them into self sabotage, is that success may mean they have to get to know themselves differently. So if we've known ourselves as someone who is 300 pounds or more, maybe overweight since early childhood, that's how we know how to think of ourselves. We know how to navigate the world at that weight. What if we were to weigh 175 pounds, working through our fasting and eating strategies?

We might feel like we don't know that person. Like we don't know how to navigate life in that body. And it feels almost foreign to us that it feels threatening to the brain, and the brain would rather slow that process down or stop it from happening. For some people, working toward a goal related to weight loss may trigger some old trauma responses, especially if these people experienced any sexual abuse history or trauma, or that they learned that their body either was not their own, or they learned that it got attention that made things unsafe or uncomfortable for them.

So for some people at this stage in life, to go through a significant transition and change how they look in their body, can mean getting some additional attention that maybe would feel like positive attention to some, but for some of us may actually feel threatening. It may be that any type of sexual energy or flirting or something like that, might actually trigger old trauma responses, if that's ever been used against us in the past. Again on the surface, people might think, "I want to get there. I have so many good thoughts about being in that body." But there's often a part of our mind that is resisting it.

So if you notice that you're sabotaging a lot, I encourage you to really explore whether there might be some things that you actually resist or fear based on what success might mean or look like for you. For some people, I also think success means, I'm going to have to keep working on this then. Let's say my goal is to lose 100 pounds and I work hard to lose 100 pounds. What will life be like then? How hard will I have to work to maintain that? And that might sound a bit overwhelming or daunting. Again, I know it may sound strange that fear of success could hold us back, but I see it quite often, and I think it's a lot more natural than we think.

Remember that most of our habits of thought and behavior habits are long standing. We've done them for a long time, and to stop our self sabotage, we're going to have to really unravel them, and build new ways of thinking and new ways of behaving. So it's going to take a lot of practice. I also want to share an analogy that may help you to think about your self sabotage behaviors. There is a part of your mind that is so fearful of you growing and changing, that it wants to prevent you from succeeding, it is your saboteur.



Or if you prefer to think of this part of your mind less as an enemy that is purposely holding you back from success, you can think of it as a negotiator who is highly trained to negotiate its way around all of your decisions, wanting to talk you out of anything that sounds difficult or in any way, threatening or uncomfortable.

If you want to be able to manage the ongoing messages from your saboteur or negotiator, you need to study their moves. What things do they say to you? What lies do they tell you, or what vulnerabilities do they throw up in your face? And then, instead of arguing with them, you can work to distance yourself from their messaging. You can recognize these moves as tricks to get you to accept staying put, instead of reaching your goals. And in less than 17, I'll share some more strategies that will help you to avoid giving in to your saboteur or negotiator.

The action point for this lesson is, I want to invite you to identify common messages your saboteur tells you, and how you will manage these faulty messages. The goal of this week is to try an extended fasting protocol, or simply extend the duration of your current intermittent fasting protocol by at least 30 minutes. Try using fat fasting for one or two days before the longer fast to help. In order to help support you while you're trying to implement these action items and goals for the week, please remember to join us in the healthy habits challenge and in any of our accountability groups this week.

Don't forget to register for the next masterclass Q&A, where we'll answer your questions. And again, all of these sessions are listed in your course syllabus, make sure to check it out so you don't miss those. Also, I hope that you are coming into the forum and letting us know how things are going, and asking questions that you may have in our exclusive forum thread for this masterclass. That's it for today. Have a great day everybody. Take good care. Bye-bye.