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Megan [00:00:06] Before we get started with today's episode, I would like to quickly read you our podcast disclaimer.

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[00:01:13] All right. And now we'll get started with today's episode.

[00:01:19] Hi, everyone. It's Megan Ramos here with another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. Today, I'm joined by my lovely co-hosts, Dr. Nadia Pateguana and Dr. Terri Lance, and we are going to be talking about Valentine's Day strategies. Well, ladies, what are your plans for Valentine's Day?

Nadia [00:01:42] Okay, I'll go first this time. [laughter] This is actually a little bit of a funny story, so typical of Nadia. [laughter] So I grew up with a single mom, right? Those of you that know me, I talk a lot about my family, including my mom. I grew up with a single mom, so, in my house, it became a tradition that I would spend Valentine's Day with my mom, even as a teenager, even as a young adult, even when I had a boyfriend, and, eventually, when I got married. And so we call each other each other's Valentine. And on Valentine's Day, I always send her flowers and she buys me something. It's just been the way that I grew up.

[00:02:17] And so I got married and then had two girls, and it just so happens that I've passed that on to my children. So they're so used to spending Valentine's Day with me because, one, my husband travels a lot for work, so very often he's away, and, two, he doesn't [laughs] like Valentine's Day, which is fine with me because, for me, Valentine's, for some reason, I've associated it with, first, it was my mom and now with spending it with my girls. So we do plan something. And I'm looking forward to sharing some of that with you guys today.

Terri [00:02:49] And I'm probably on the opposite end of this. For me, Valentine's Day has never been much of a celebration. I think once I started changing how I eat, it was a time [laughs] to stay out of the stores, not looking at the end caps of all of the problematic foods. So for me, Valentine's Day and this holiday season will be very much like any other week of the year. It might involve a special meal, but, generally, it's not something that changes my normal life very much.

Megan [00:03:20] Well, I'm a total goof for all holidays and my husband is the biggest Scrooge, although he does like Christmas, but all other holidays he freaking loathes, including Valentine's Day. I force him [laughs] to participate, but we've got some rules in how we celebrate. So we never go out that big Valentine's Day date weekend, ever. It's

chaotic. You have to eat from a preset meal. You're probably not going to like many of the foods, they don't jive with your dietary plans. It's just awful. Like, the whole experience of actually eating out that big Valentine's Day celebration weekend is just terrible. So we either do the weekend before or the weekend after. So this year, just given where Valentine's Day falls, on a Tuesday, we're going to be eating out the weekend after. That way, we're not forced into eating certain foods and there's not particular temptations. What we're going to largely talk about during this podcast is how to deal with those temptations, but they're all sugar, sugar, sugar with more sugar. What we do is we protect ourselves by eating at a separate time, and then we indulge in certain things. So maybe we'll get some Japanese A5 Wagyu as a dessert when we are eating out at a nice steakhouse, and that's something that we normally wouldn't do throughout the rest of the year since it's a little bit on the pricier side of things. So we find other ways to indulge in things that we truly love during this particular [laughs] goofy holiday season.

[00:05:02] But every year we hear from so many of you about how challenging it is. We're kind of in this habitual mode where we buy our significant others these chocolates, or chocolate-covered strawberries, or it's a time for dessert. And I think Valentine's Day, for so many people, has become showing your loved ones how much you care with sugar. And that's really what we hear from all of you. It's a struggle. It's a struggle in your relationship. You don't want to have it. You want to avoid those temptations. You're worried about your significant others and what they're going to gift to you. And a lot of people do this on autopilot.

[00:05:42] I actually remember our first Christmas here in the clinic, and it was so crazy to me how many patients brought me sugar and cookies and chocolate for Christmas, knowing [laughs] my diet, knowing my story, and knowing all the education I provided with them. Now, I was extremely grateful to receive these tokens of appreciation from all of these patients but, eventually, we kind of giggled about it all because, of all of the people, why would they give me those particular foods? But that's what you do at the holiday times. And this is even, I think, emphasize a hundred times more when we go into Valentine's Day weekend.

[00:06:26] So, Terri, we're going to kick things off by throwing the ball over to you, since I think you manage this the most in your behavior groups.

Terri [00:06:35] So I'm going to talk about a concept that I think might be useful to people and then we'll kind of fill in how this fits with fasting and food and things. I want to talk a little bit about a concept in a book by Gary Chapman called The Five Love Languages, and it's looking at how you experience love and know that you're loved and how you express love. So those five methods are touch or physical attention, quality time, gift-giving, acts of service, and words of affirmation. Now, oftentimes in a relationship, people have different love languages from their partner. So one person, theirs might be gift giving, so they buy you the perfect gift, but because your main love language is words of affirmation, that gift doesn't really communicate that to you. So this is a great challenge for people to start working on - figuring out your love language and other people in your lives (your kids, your partners, best friends), figuring out their love language so that you can try and speak the same language, on some level. If you are giving the love in Spanish but they only speak French, they're not quite going to be able to receive your message.

[00:07:53] So how does this relate to Valentine's Day? Making Valentine's Day special, being a way of expressing love, connection, and valuing of a relationship. Looking at these different love languages and thinking about, let's say, gift giving is important to you or to

the other person that you're wanting to express love to. How can you choose gifts to give that don't involve problematic foods or experiences that would get in the way? And how can you let the other person know what type of gifts would be appropriate for you? Setting some limits. And I know this is really hard for a lot of us, but to say, "I'm going to ask a favor. This Valentine's Day, if you would not get me those chocolates or a dessert, I would really appreciate it." Now, that person might have to think a little more creatively, but you could help them. You could let them know some other things that would kind of do it for you.

[00:08:53] But then also think about quality time. And I know, Megan, you've talked about this in other ways when we've talked about socializing and the whole nature of it being so food-focused. How else can we spend quality time together for Valentine's Day that doesn't revolve around food, or, especially, revolve around problematic food? Now, again, let's say I eat low-carb. My quality time with someone might be we're going to make a great low-carb meal. We're going to enjoy food together, but it's still going to fit my approach to eating. So I don't have to not have food involved at all, just keep it consistent with my plan.

[00:09:36] Maybe to show my love and connection with someone, I'm going to think of an act of service that I can do. So, Nadia, you mentioned your girls. You know, maybe it's, I don't know, doing some kind of special project for them and they come home from school and their room is decorated in a new way or something. So again, it doesn't have to involve chocolate, it doesn't have to involve decadent food to enjoy the season of love and connecting with other people. So that's my way of kind of getting us started in talking about this.

Megan [00:10:11] I think it's a great strategy. When I met my husband, our fourth date was Valentine's Day weekend in San Francisco. I was living in Toronto and he was in the Bay Area at the time, and I hadn't totally opened up to him [laughs] about my journey with fasting and nutrition. He just thought I was a really cool chick that liked to eat a lot of steak and was not afraid of salt. So automatically he was living in the plant-based land over here, so I was just this really cool chick that liked good meat. [laughs] So that was about all he knew, at that point, going into our fourth date. And I said to him, I said, "Hey, you know, Valentine's Day is going to be crazy there. I do not know the lay of the land to help plan anything." And I said, "You know, I'm not really big on gifts either, so why don't we just have an experience and go somewhere?" So we, you know, took a little road trip, checked out the redwoods, did those type of things, and had that type of adventure for that particular Valentine's Day.

[00:11:18] And we do what Terri mentioned for our birthdays. So for our birthdays, we don't exchange gifts, we don't really go out and have parties and do those type of things. Our birthdays are actually very close together, and every year we pick a trip to go on and have an experience during that particular time. And we take turns every other year so it's fair. So two years ago we went to Maui. I'd never been to Hawaii before. We now live quite close, you know, being based in California versus Toronto, so I was really excited. Then last year my husband got to pick, and we did this road trip throughout Oregon and I got to see where he went to grad school and all the stuff. It was very cool and Oregon's incredibly beautiful. So we invest in those type of experiences. And we don't do gifts, none of that stuff. We just enjoy and we invest in each other in that respect. And it works really, really well.

Nadia [00:12:15] I feel like the two of you guys totally read my mind on this. First of all, Megan, I'm totally with you. I married the Grinch, by the way [laughter], if I forgot to tell you guys. He totally doesn't like Christmas because of the whole gift-giving thing, but he's all about experiences and enjoying time with us. So that's a good thing, I guess. And Terri, one of my strategies, it's actually pretty consistent with most of these chocolate-laden type of holidays like Halloween. Since I spend most of these holidays planning things with my girls, I spend a lot of time focusing on the fun activities around Halloween, and Valentine's Day's the same.

[00:12:56] So lots of decorations for sure. We are going to decorate (starting very soon, actually), we'll be decorating-- I have a balloon machine, one of those balloon-blow-up machines, whatever they're called. What's the word I'm looking for? Not sure, but I make all kinds of balloon things. I'm really into that. And we do gifts, we definitely do gifts. I'm a gift giver, and so there'll be a lot of that, but really, it's to take a lot of the focus away from the sweets, especially for the kids and myself. You know, I have an issue, still, and I'm very aware of how I do around sugar.

[00:13:34] And so although I think that a lot of us, it isn't just what we bring into our home. Like you, Megan, we never, ever, ever go out on Valentine's Day. We never go to a restaurant or try not to do any of that because it'll just be full of stuff that you don't want to eat. The problem is leading up to Valentine's Day. It's all over, right? Every store you walk by, on TV, there's just so much junk food, and particularly, of course, sugar and sweets all over. So it's very, very tempting. So figuring out how to distract yourself from that. I always use distraction as a wonderful, my favorite fasting aid, as I call it. So I just keep myself and the kids really busy with lots and lots of fun things. For sure, lots and lots of activities, decorations. We don't go out to eat. We try to really stay away from all of that stuff because it's almost impossible to avoid it. It's all over the place. I know. I mean, everyone listening is like, "But how? It's all over." Of course, it is all over the place, but really try to distract yourself.

[00:14:42] And like Megan said, not too long ago, the more you eat-- she mentioned this in another podcast, but the more we eat, the more of certain things we eat, the more we want to eat, and so it's really just avoiding it. I just avoid it. I don't even go for that first bite of anything because I know that once I start, it's really hard to stop. It's the same thing, like last year for Halloween. I do find that Valentine's Day and Halloween are very, very similar because it's a holiday that is very candy based, and it's a holiday that I do spend with my girls. And I'm not only trying to do the best for me, I'm try-- and a lot of you guys listening are probably feeling the same. I'm trying to do the best for my young family as well. So just keeping them really busy, entertained, lots of fun things. That's what I do and it seems to work out okay.

Terri [00:15:33] An important thing with that, you just highlighted, Nadia, is that for many of us, maybe the first time or two through some of these experiences are a little bit more complicated because our brain is set - "I know what happens throughout the month of February. We get these things, we get candy, we get these treats." And once you trade those out, once you replace those with other activities and other ways of celebrating, other ways of enjoying yourself, the less important they become.

[00:16:06] But to me, this goes back to my whole thing about making this a lifestyle, making this part of your identity. Many of us currently have these things tied to these holidays, tied to travel. If you ask many people, "Where are you going on your vacation or on your holiday?" And they're like, "Oh, I'm going to such and such and I'm going to eat

this." They have it tied to the food. And I think the more we can get used to disconnecting locations with the food, events with specific foods, and holidays with specific foods, the more we can enjoy them and not have them create tension in us. Many people, as we talked about in the past round of holiday seasons, many people start getting tense in October because of the holidays that are coming and the foods, and the food behaviors, that they normally associate with those.

[00:17:04] So the more we can start to work on these other associations. So your girls are learning, "Oh, Valentine's Day means we get to do this activity," or, "We engage with each other in these ways." I think I saw a post back in Halloween time where you had Halloween pajamas and you were watching movies together or something. The more those things become the ways that we identify ourselves and our connection to those holidays, the less tempting those problematic foods are because they aren't our foods, they aren't our way of celebrating, they aren't our way of connecting.

[00:17:41] So I think it's exciting to listen to you, not only, as you said, doing this for you, but also what you're teaching them about these holiday seasons, what you can teach them about what travel involves, that it's not all focused on decadent or problematic foods, that there's so much more meaning out there.

Nadia [00:18:03] I think you brought up a really important point for me, and I think it's important to maybe mention this again for the people listening because I think the three of us maybe even take this for granted because we, as you said, we've gone through quite a few of these seasons already, right? We've done, I don't know, six, seven, ten, Valentine's Day as living a healthier lifestyle, whereas for a lot of people listening, this is their very first attempt of, "How am I going to get through?" You know, "I did really well from January 1st until February 14th, but how am I going to get through this?" Or, "I won't be able to do it."

[00:18:38] But it's a concept that you bring up all the time, Terri, which is realizing that we can do hard things. Yeah, this will be a hard thing to do, but I can do it. Believing that you can do it, there's another way to do it, as opposed to, "Well, it's Valentine's, of course I'm going to eat A, B or C." No, not necessarily. You don't really have to. It does-- and like you guys said, for me, I don't need to have this conversation because my husband does not buy me chocolates. [laughs] But, you know, for a lot of us, it may require a conversation with your spouse, with your partner, with your friends, whoever you celebrate this holiday with. It may require that. It requires a decision on your part. You have to decide that, number one, you want to try doing it in a different way, in a healthier way. So you have to decide. Then you have to prepare and organize. What are you going to do instead? But you have to **believe** that you could actually do it because you can. And remember that once you actually get through that day-- that's why I say that day requires probably a lot of distraction, a lot of different things, right? Choosing to do other things, to eat other things. The next day you're going to wake up and go, "Oh my God, I did it. I actually did it. I was able to do it." So that will give you-- you will be more likely to believe that you can do that for other holidays, and for other years to come. So you actually just have to get through it. You actually have to do it, believe that you can do it and, you know, do the hard things, like Terri said, even for New Year's.

Megan [00:19:59] I think it's important that we work on our communication with our significant others, too, during this time. It can be really challenging for everybody, not just you, who's trying to eat differently or model your lifestyle differently. If you just reach out to your partner and say, "Hey, I'm not eating any chocolate this year," "I'm not eating any desserts this year", "I'm not doing X, Y and Z, food-wise this year," and you leave it at that,

it makes it really challenging for them because this has just become habitual. It's all they grew up knowing, it's all they've done in their adult life, and they might not know what to do. So this kind of leads, sometimes, I think, to panic mode, and this is what I've heard from significant others of our Community members. It's panic mode, they don't know what to do. And then they have this sort of self-talk that's like, "Okay, I'm just going to buy this stuff anyways." You know, "I don't know what else to do and I've got to do something." And then they justify-- I'd always joke with my husband, I can justify any pair of shoes at any occasion and at any point in time [laughs] because I have a shoe addiction. And meanwhile, I work at home and I wear slippers 95% of my life. [laughs] But you know, there's a way to justify it when you're kind of out of options here, and you don't know what it is to do, and you're in panic mode. So that panic mode tends to survival mode and you just default to what you know.

[00:21:30] So something that I'll work with clients on is, you know, helping them find things that they can help equip their partner with. As I mentioned earlier, at the start of my relationship with my husband, I said, "Hey, you know, let's go on an adventure. Let's have an experience together that we haven't had yet. You know, I'm just starting to date you. This is my second time coming out to California to visit you." And together we planned it. So I don't just throw it on him. We looked on the web together, found something that we wanted to go do together, and it wasn't just all on him, my significant other, to come up with a backup plan, when I'm certain, up until that point, all he did was give his dates chocolate and take them out for sugar-loaded meals, up until that point.

[00:22:23] So working with your partner, saying, "Hey, you know, I'm not going to do this anymore, but let's have an experience, or maybe there's something else that you would like to be gifted." Maybe, you know, it's a massage at the spa, maybe it's a manicure and a pedicure, maybe you've got a good new woodworking project that you've got going on. Or maybe there's, you know, some new hiking boots that you want so you can go on adventures together and do those type of things that are not food related. Equip them with something. You know what they're likely to default to, in terms of gifts, at this time of year. So equip them with something that you know is complimentary in price and in effort to obtain, but things that aren't related to food, that are related to this new identity that you're trying to establish. So then that way, when your partner has it on their calendar to go out and come up with their Valentine's Day plan, they know that you're interested in seeing this play, or you're interested in going to this concert, or you want to do this particular hike, or there's these boots that you want, these things otherwise that they can give you. And then they feel really good about it. They feel empowered, they know what to do, so they're not going to default back to what they have done habitually. And they know that they're doing something that you are genuinely going to really appreciate. So it makes them feel good, and it reinforces their behavior. Then you're very grateful, you have a great holiday together, and your partner is going to stop looking to these default traits of, you know, buying chocolate and pastries and desserts and those type of things. On this holiday, they're going to say, "Wow, you know, so and so really enjoy this experience," or "They really enjoyed their massage at the spa," or "They really enjoyed this new hobby that I helped contribute to by buying new equipment or an online course or something for them." And that just reinforces it. So then not only does Valentine's Day start to transform within that relationship, other holidays will start to transform too.

[00:24:42] But when partners don't communicate these things or give these suggestions at the start, I find a lot of the time it just leads to a lot of aggravation because their significant other just doesn't know what to do then. You are educating yourself right now on fasting and nutrition and these behavior strategies to help adopt this new lifestyle. We need to

help educate and support our partners through this journey too. And when we make that investment, you know, it really pays off greatly for them and for us because, you know, the holiday will stop becoming about sugar and stuff for them, too, and that's great for their health and their well-being, as well, down the road.

Terri [00:25:23] I love that, Megan. In my previous work as a therapist, I used to hear this often, that gift-giving and celebrating often is a point of tension for many couples because you think the person knows you well enough that they will just know what you want. And you know, this kind of requires a little bit of mind reading and most of us don't have that ability, so it's really better to help them know what you would enjoy. And if you're looking for something that is more an experience, less of a financial gift kind of thing, or a gift that has a financial piece behind it, you know, maybe you would feel loved if your significant other did the dishes for three nights this month, if dishes is normally your task. Or that they do something for you that gives you a break from doing that task, or whatever it is, around the house. So it doesn't have to be even something out of the ordinary. It doesn't have to be something expensive. It can be showing you love me by giving me a break on Wednesday night, next month, one week, but letting them know, helping to communicate. How would you feel loved? How would you feel celebrated? And asking them how would they feel loved? How would they feel celebrated?

Nadia [00:26:54] You just reminded me of something, Terri. Many, many years ago, my husband had a coworker who was going around the office going crazy because his wife, for Valentine's, had asked him to write a letter with all the reasons why he loved her. That was the one thing that she wanted. And he was go-- he was trying his best. You know, sometimes it's a lot easier to just buy chocolates [laughter] than it is to write-- and the guy was going-- so he's asking all the guys in the office to help him out. But anyways, there are many ways to show love, for sure. And Valentine's Day is just a reminder, I think, an opportunity for us to show, you know, on that quote-unquote 'special' day-- but we really do have to learn-- I like that idea, Terri, you have to learn what your love language is. I personally do tell my husband-- I mean, it was my birthday recently and I personally have gotten really good at telling him what I like and what I want. [laughs] And I think he appreciates it. It just makes it so much easier for him.

Megan [00:28:01] We do gifts at Christmas time. It's the one holiday where we do gifts rather than experiences, and we tell each other. Unless there's sort of the odd year where it has been very clear what the other person wants, it's just so rewarding to see your partner happy on the other side of things. And I think a lot of people recognize that. But it's just really, again, about communicating and letting the other person know. And what I often see is a lot of people making these changes and just assuming that their partner knows that they're going to want something different this Valentine's Day. And that's not fair. It's not fair to anybody. And we, at the end of the day, by not doing so end up with these treats and then feeling bad about the circumstances. And when we feel bad about food, we tend to lean into not the best food. Then we feel worse after the fact and resentment starts to boil up. So just having that communication and just being really clear about what you want and what is going to serve you this holiday can really make a big difference.

[00:29:10] Now, for those of you who are going to go out on Valentine's Day weekend, because that's just how things are going to happen in your particular relationship, there's nothing wrong with that. But what we encourage you to do is to take a look at that menu in advance, see what's on there that you can eat and come up with a plan. And if a restaurant has a preset meal plan and it doesn't look like it's going to meet your needs, then try to find another restaurant that doesn't, so you can get what it is that you want. But

go into that restaurant with a plan. Never show up at a restaurant without a plan, especially when you know there's going to be a lot of dessert temptations.

[00:29:51] We also encourage people to eat even a small meal before they head out or eat a larger proper meal a little bit earlier on in the day. So if you have a good fatty lunch with a good amount of protein, then that's fine when you're going out. Or even if you have a hectic day, having something like an avocado or eating some hard-boiled eggs, you know, half an hour, an hour before you go out just to help get your appetite hormones under control and balance nicely. Eating that fat and that protein, it's like body armor, mental body armor against the sugar temptations. So if you're going into that restaurant and you're feeling hungry and you've made this plan that you're going to fast until this bigger meal, it's never a good strategy because you're not going to have that mental body armor to protect you from the sugar. The sugar is going to look really enticing at that particular time. It's not until we're 36 hours or so into a fast where the appetite really even starts to become suppressed in the first place. And that's more so for women. With men, appetite seems to run fairly constant, you know, throughout the majority of a fast, even an extended fast. So women get the most appetite reduction through fasting, and that doesn't even happen till 36 hours. So don't think you're going to do one meal that day and you're going to do something like a 20 or 24-hour fast, and that's going to keep your appetite at bay. It's not. So protect yourself. Have that fatty meal or have that fatty mini-meal before you head into that celebratory meal. It'll make it a lot easier to eat the foods that you plan to eat rather than deviating and ending up eating a bunch of sugar at that holiday meal.

Nadia [00:31:37] I think that's a really good reminder. I know we talk a lot about this in our program, all of us do, and we have a lot of resources about why food order matters, why food order is important. I often say this in my meetings, how you break a fast (so the first thing that you eat, that you put into your mouth when you break a fast), whether that's a mini fast or a longer fast, is going to ultimately determine how you eat, how you feel, and how much you eat, and what you end up eating during not only that meal, but probably the next few days to come. So food order really matters. You know, look this up if you're not quite sure what this means. I know Megan has written about it, Dr. Fung has talked about it in some videos, and Terri and I talk about it all the time.

[00:32:22] So food order really matters. Eating something at home before you go out is a really good idea. And even at the restaurant, you know, choosing to eat the real, whole foods first before you start indulging in the carbier, more sugary, more processed things.

Terri [00:32:39] One last thing I will add to this, going back to kind of how we started this episode. The more you change all of the things that we've been talking about - focusing on the experiences, the other ways of expressing love and connection, all of those pieces of changing the way you think about and make sense of these holiday times - the less likely you are to feel deprived. So when you walk through those stores and *don't* purchase all of those problematic foods, I think you'll feel less deprived from that, the more you can make these other pieces so satisfying.

[00:33:16] I kind of compare it to something from childhood. I used to love to play on the monkey bars when I was in elementary school, and I have so many memories of that that I can look back on, but it doesn't mean I need to go play on the monkey bars now. I have had those experiences. So I have had experiences of having decadent food on Valentine's Day. I'm not missing out on anything now. Those are past memories, and I'm not in a place of deprivation. So I think the more we can make all of this our lifestyle and make it a

rewarding, fulfilling lifestyle, the less deprivation we're going to feel by bypassing those problematic aspects.

Megan [00:33:59] All right, everyone, thank you for joining us for another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. We'll be back next week. And until then, happy fasting, everyone.

Nadia [00:34:10] Bye, everyone.

Terri [00:34:11] Take good care.