

The Fasting Method #156 - Mindset & Behaviour Q&A: People Pleasing, Managing Stress, and Distraction

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

[00:00:13] This podcast is for educational purposes only, and it is not to substitute for professional care by a doctor or other qualified medical professional. You should always speak with your physician or other healthcare professionals before doing any fasting, changing your diet in any way, taking or adjusting any medications or supplements, or adopting any treatment plan for a health problem.

Speaker 2 [00:00:42] The use of any other products or services purchased by you as a result of this podcast does not create a healthcare provider-patient relationship between you and any of the experts affiliated with this podcast. Any information and statements regarding dietary supplements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration and are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

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

Terri [00:01:19] Welcome back to The Fasting Method podcast. This is your host in this episode, Dr. Terri Lance or Coach Terri. And, you've probably guessed it, if I'm doing a solo episode, it is going to be mindset and behavior focused. So we don't actually get a lot of Q&As sent in, a lot of questions that you all are sending in, based on mindset and behavior, but we hear questions from listeners and from Community members all the time, as well as my clients. So I thought I would capture what I can, highlight for you from a couple of topics that just seem to be coming up a lot currently, and I think they're things that many of you would be able to relate to.

[00:02:09] The first one is actually a topic that I discussed at some point on Monday Mindset podcast, and it's about people pleasing. And this topic comes up fairly often in the TFM Community meetings and, like I said, in my work with clients, because many of us have a hard time saying no, or following our plan, or having boundaries around things because our desire to people-please is very strong. Now, most of us don't think of the desire to please people. It's a natural kind of inherent trait that we've developed over time.

[00:02:51] The first thing I want to say about this is that, if you are struggling with people pleasing and it's interfering with you making progress on your goals, first, I want to affirm for you that you learned to be a people-pleaser for really good reasons. There is nothing pathological about you. You're not weak. You're not broken. I know I say that a lot about a lot of things, but we develop patterns, ways of thinking, ways of acting, ways of interpreting things for good reasons. And I think if some of us could give ourselves the benefit of the doubt and look at, "Why do I do this?", we would hopefully come to a better understanding of it and also feel more empowered to do something about it because we're not judging ourselves so harshly or criticizing ourselves.

[00:03:43] In general, people-pleasing comes from a need of, kind of, keeping the peace, that things are safer when other people have been pleased. We may have grown up in an environment where we needed to read the mood and what was going on with other people, especially maybe our caregivers. And so we learned to placate, and please, and give, and take care of other people's needs while shoving down our needs, because the primary needs of making sure that we're safe, making sure that someone isn't going to be

threatening toward us or something, kind of ranks above all of our other needs. So we learned to keep the peace, we learned to please other people, we learned to do things that defy our needs or our goals, so that other people around us are in a good mood, are pleased, are satisfied, are docile, whatever it might be.

[00:04:50] So, if we think about having boundaries around our decisions around eating, whether it be because we want to be fasting, or we don't want to be snacking, or we want to make choices about certain foods and not other foods, if we are struggling with people pleasing, this will often play a role in whether we actually pursue our actual goals, or if we kind of let those goals slide by because the people-pleasing goal wins out. And, again, oftentimes, this is not a conscious decision. It is a habit. It's a way of navigating life that we've learned, and, if we want to, we can relearn and redirect. So part of doing this work will entail figuring out what your needs are-- and I know this is a whole nother topic that we could spend a lot of time on, but figuring out what you need and what boundaries you want to set to kind of protect those needs. So if I have made a decision to fast and I'm in an environment where someone is eating, or wants to go eat, or wants to make food, or whatever, and they start asking, and I put away my fasting goals, I put away the plan that I'd already set out on, maybe put on the backburner my health goals, all of those things in order to make sure that their desire is met, to make sure that their desire for food is met, I'm constantly going to be missing out on my goal. So, oftentimes, there's a secondary gain involved here, in that if I do what this other person is wanting (I eat instead of fast or I eat this certain food instead of the food that I had planned to eat), the first gain that I make is that I please that person, I keep the peace, I give in to their desires and make them happy, but the secondary gain is, often, I get to also satisfy my lower brain that didn't want to keep fasting or did want to eat the more problematic food, but I was trying to hold that desire down, I was trying to follow through with my plan. So now this opportunity to, one, please other people and please my lower brain, my reptile brain, whatever we want to call it, my negotiator, it's a win/win. I get both of those desires or needs met.

[00:07:37] So I want to encourage people to really start to take an honest look at their people-pleasing around food and around eating, and also recognize that there's an additional layer of motivation to not say no or not defy someone else's plan. But I really want to encourage you to think about how is this serving you. Now, the obvious answer is that it's not serving you, but we often kind of negate that answer because we are getting some benefits from it. They're just not those bigger goals that we're looking at, like reversing diabetes, or resolving nonalcoholic fatty liver, or losing a significant amount of weight, or maintaining, or building our longevity, all of those really important goals. We let these two other goals that feel quite important, again, kind of rank higher than our health, our longevity, our well-being, our feeling good in our own body. And so I encourage you to really start noticing when you do it. What is it that's actually most important to you? Making your partner happy in this moment or staying alive and being with your partner longer? Enjoying a food, or no longer fasting or reaching your weight loss goal? I know that, oftentimes, when I talk about these things, it is kind of weighing out these two sides of our wants and our desires. The one that is immediate - I want to feel good right now, I want my partner to feel good right now, it'll be so much easier if I just say yes. The hard part is those in-the-moment decisions that feel good usually interfere with the longer-term goals that we have. So I want you to really think about the here and now. What's going to feel better right now? Pleasing this person, pleasing my lower brain, or moving closer toward my weight-loss goals, moving closer toward my health goals, even though those things won't be realized for a time and they're not quite as tangible right now, in this moment. We've got to stop giving in to that immediate gratification of desires and goals and really emphasize our longer-term desires and goals.

[00:10:16] Now, again, this is not simple when we have learned to address things with people-pleasing behaviors. Again, we learned those for really good reasons. We are not flawed people because we want to please others, but we've got to keep, again, kind of comparing or weighing out those values. Is it more important to me right now to please someone else or take care of my needs? Whose life am I living? How can I let that person worry about taking care of themselves or meeting their own needs, versus me feeling obligated to do that at the expense of meeting my own needs? Again, this is a topic that many of us could talk about often and for long periods of time, but I just really want to encourage people to start thinking about it. Many of us who are struggling with our health or our weight did not get here because we put our needs first. Oftentimes, we've gotten here because we put our actual needs on the backburner, focused on the immediate-gratification things, the stress relievers, the coping strategies, and the people-pleasing, keeping ourselves feeling safer because we made sure others around us were satisfied.

[00:11:44] So that's the first topic. So the next topic that came up, or is coming up fairly often, is people managing stressors or feeling really uncomfortable with things in maybe one area of their life, like work, and figuring out what to do with that kind of angst without leaning into problematic food behaviors. And I think most of us can probably relate to this, that idea that, "Oh my gosh, I'm overwhelmed with how much work I have to be doing," or, "Oh, there are some stressors going on in my family right now that are really challenging." What can I do to stay on track? You know, what behavioral things can I use and what mindset things can I use?

[00:12:35] Recently, in one of my Community meetings, someone made a statement that I thought was really important, and it's a theme that I have tried to convey so many times, and I love it when someone else says it and it's not coming from me. But she said something to the effect of, "I can fast even while life is going on," meaning I don't interrupt my fasting patterns, I don't change my patterns just because life happens. Because the reality is, life is continually going to be happening (that's the good part), but sometimes the things that are happening in life are challenging - work stressors, family stressors, health stressors, or family health stressors, those kinds of things, political things going on in the world or in your community, tragedies that are going on. This causes a lot of stress. This causes a lot of emotions to surface for so many of us. And what many of us know to do is to lean on the comfort, the escape, of food, and especially problematic food. I've never, ever, *ever* had a client or Community member tell me that they were super stressed out about some deadlines at work and all of the workload that they were having to manage, that they came home and just really overate broccoli. That's never the case. It's the problematic food, it's the comfort foods, it's the snack foods, it's the ultra-processed foods that we lean into on these occasions or at these times. But the reality is, for so many of us, this is more the norm than not. We are in stressful situations fairly often. We go from one deadline to the next deadline, the work deadline or the work stress eases up and then the family stress picks up and gets more difficult. So we have to keep working on how do I stay focused on self-care, even though life is really complicated?

[00:14:42] Now, right now I'm not even talking about how do I stay on track when fun things are happening, like my family wants to go on a cruise or, you know, there's a big community gathering with lots of problematic food. That's another topic that we cover often here on the podcast. But what about when life hands me those really challenging things that cause me stress, that cause me pain and sadness or fear? What do I do? Because, for many of us, again, not because we're weak or not because we're flawed or broken, but

because we have grown up in this environment of our food culture, we have learned that leaning into problematic food, frequently eating, snacking, munching on things here and there all the time, we've learned that as a coping strategy to help us get through these tough times, and, unfortunately, we pay the price. We pay the price with our health, we pay the price with our body, with our body fat, with, you know, all of the conditions that come with that. The surgeries required, the pain management that we have to work through, the physical therapy that's required, all of these things. These consequences of our coping strategies that, of course, we need coping strategies to get through these difficult stressors in life, but, oftentimes, the ones we choose are ones that cost us in another way. They cost us our health, our weight, and our wellbeing, and even our mood, our anxiety, all of these things.

[00:16:23] So how do we keep moving forward? How do we stay in that positive mindset? I think it's really important to remind ourselves of something that's been talked about a lot recently in the Community, and that is to remind yourself that when your body is well nourished, when your immunity is good, when your gut health is good, when your inflammation is down, when your body has enough protein and enough healthy fats, enough nutrients, managing stress is easier. You're more well-equipped, you have more patience, you have more tolerance, you have more energy, have more stamina, you have clearer thinking. The opposite of that is that when we use that coping strategy of problematic eating, frequent eating, eating problematic foods, or both, all of those things are also compromised: our immunity, our gut health, our stamina, our energy, our sleep, our mental capacity, our brain fog. All of these things are more problematic. And guess what? When all of those things are happening, we are less able to handle the stressors that we're facing. So, unfortunately, the coping strategies we use to help us get through this moment make getting through the next moments more difficult.

[00:17:53] And then, as a reminder, that the food industry, the kind of cultural influences, and even our own lower brain, none of those things want us to remember that if I compromise my nutrition, my wellbeing, all of these things, right now, my ability to get through the next wave of these stressors is going to be worse. I'm going to be less able to get through them and feel good when I am loading myself up with frequently eating, especially problematic food. So we have to keep reminding ourselves of that.

[00:18:34] One way I encourage you to do that is not just a scare tactic. It's not just like threatening yourself with, "Oh, you're going to feel worse in 20 minutes if you eat this," or, "You're going to have worse decision-making tomorrow if you do this." For many of us, those kind of negative messages don't work. So, instead, I want to encourage you to really focus on what are the benefits, what are the positive outcomes of making good decisions for my self-care? If making the good decision is, "I'm going to stop here and eat a good fat-fasting meal because I'm really struggling, I need something right now." It's better to make the choice to use fat fasting foods that keep us from gaining more cravings and increase our hunger, increase our inflammation, all of those negative things that turn us in the other direction. "Hey, I'm going to stop here. I'm going to have some nice fat-fasting foods to satisfy my nutritional need right now, while not also loading my body up with all of these negative consequences." So keep focusing on the positives that you bring to yourself when you make good self-care. When I eat the right food, this is how my body feels. When I fast, this is how my body feels.

[00:19:57] Again, recently, someone just really highlighted this so beautifully in a large group meeting. She talked about paying attention to all of the ways that she feels good in her body while she is fasting. I also experience this. More so, I notice, on days when I'm

eating, I feel a little more lethargic, I feel a little more lower-energy, even though I'm eating really good foods for myself. On fasting days, my energy is a little better. My brain, my mental clarity is clearer. So we need to keep highlighting those things for ourselves because making the choices for problematic things, there are so many messages kind of pushing us in that direction. Again, more for short-term gratification, but there are lots of influences that make us want to move in that direction. So we need to combat these with the reminders for ourselves. "When I eat like this, I feel like crap, I fall asleep, I need a nap, I can't make a decision to save my life." "When I eat like this, I have mental clarity, I feel good, my joints don't hurt, my pants fit better, I have better energy, I sleep better." All of these things, we need to keep highlighting that. So reminding ourselves about why eating appropriately and skipping eating, giving our body breaks, fasting, why these things feel good.

[00:21:40] I want to share a little bit of an analogy here, and the reason why keeping this front and center in our mind is so important. Let's take, for example, a professional basketball player. Part of their skillset that is really valuable is their ability to make free throws. A number of points in the game come from free throws, high pressure situations, you know, making these foul shots, whatever. Really important skill. My sense is that if you get to the professional level playing basketball, you have shot so many of these free throws that they are just second nature to you. You have a very clear way of doing it. It just swishes in there each time and it's just this beautiful shot. Now, if we take that same professional basketball player, and we take an ace bandage, and we wrap their arms around their rib cage so that they can only just slightly lift at the elbows and try and shoot. It's a high-pressure situation in the game. These last two points are going to make the game or not, but we wrap the basketball player's arms like this and then we say, "Oh please, please make this shot. We need this. We need these points. This is going to win the game." They can't do it. They're compromised. Their whole flow of how they shoot, their whole physiology of how they shoot, is totally compromised by this interference of wrapping their arms around their ribcage. This is what we're doing to ourselves when we are facing difficult things, facing a lot of stressors. We're binding ourselves by making these choices that interfere.

[00:23:33] So maybe even picturing this. What do I need right now? I'm really stressed, I'm on deadline, the family situation is really complicated, whatever it is, do I wrap this ace bandage around my arms and try to make the free throw? Or do I go through my normal routine and, you know, dribble four times and hold it like this before I shoot? And what is that? It's eating well. It's doing time-restricted eating. It's fasting when possible. Now, during these super stressful times, it might not be possible to fast longer, but getting shorter fasts in, good TRE, appropriate food choices - this is how we need to keep looking at this. Stop binding ourselves with all of these negative consequences of this self-care that isn't self-care. It's self destruction. But on the surface, especially our lower brain, tells us that it's required, it's necessary, it's the only thing that's going to feel good right now. The problem is, remember, that lower brain doesn't care how you're going to feel in ten minutes, or three hours, or two days.

[00:24:51] So this is the mindset I want you to keep working on. Doing well by my body right now will make dealing with these situations easier as I keep going. Choosing to handle these in immediately-gratifying ways that interfere for me will only make managing this stress more and more difficult as I go.

[00:25:18] So speaking of stress, there's another topic that I've been asked about and has come up in some Community meetings. I think oftentimes when people think about stress,

or think about difficult situations, or how to manage things, even how to get through a fast, we often rely on the strategy of distraction. And, folks, I am here to say that distraction is not a bad thing. There are times when we need distraction. Now, some of us might learn some other strategies, like meditation or things, so it's not that we need to take our mind over here into this other mindless use of it, but we might allow ourselves to become kind of unencumbered by thinking, and all of these things. But distraction, technically, is not a horrible thing, so I don't want to-- I don't want anyone to feel like they're being kind of chastised if they use distraction as a strategy, but I think many of us need to really think about is the distraction I'm using helping me? And sometimes that means short term, like if I am going to get a blood draw. If I turn my head and look at a poster on the wall while the phlebotomist is poking that needle into my arm, that's a great distraction for me. It's short. It doesn't have a negative consequence. There's nothing wrong with looking at that poster and it helped me not to focus on the needle. All is good. But, oftentimes, we tend to get distracted by either problematic things or just mindless things, like watching a lot of TV, scrolling through our phone. But, unfortunately, one of the results of these distraction techniques is, yes, they might serve as a little bit of a buffer, but what they often do is they keep us disconnected from ourselves. And some of us, we know we're using distractions so that we can feel disconnected, but, ultimately, big picture, so much of learning to fast and learning to eat properly is to be connected to your body, it's to be aware. How can we do what we just talked about in the last segment, how can we pay attention to the positive things that we experience when we're fasting, or when we fuel our body appropriately, if we're disconnected? So, in order to avoid the discomfort, we check out. We do activities that almost numb us from paying attention.

[00:28:15] Coach Jamie and I recently did an episode looking at problematic food and kind of comparing that with the use of alcohol, but, again, both being used to numb and prevent ourselves from feeling or being aware of what's really going on. And they lead to problems because the more we learn that I can't manage what is going on, the more of the distraction that I need. So, in that example, the more alcohol I need, the more frequently I'm going to have to have alcohol, the more alcohol I'm going to have to have as my dependence increases, and the more situations will require it. Now I need to drink first thing in the morning. Same thing with problematic food. The more I lean into problematic food as a distraction, the earlier in the day I'm going to need problematic food, the more problematic food I'm going to need, the more frequently I'm going to need it, all of that. Same as these other behaviors. If one of my forms of distraction is watching TV, now I want to get up in the morning and start watching TV. I want to stay numb. I want to be in that disconnected place. We need to be more connected with ourselves, not less connected. And part of the challenge with this-- and you've probably heard me say this somewhere before, but part of the challenge with this is the messaging we have in our mind that says, "I can't handle this. I need to be checked out." "I can't handle this conversation. I need to numb out with this repetitive behavior. I need to be on my phone scrolling instead of really engaging in this difficult conversation with my partner." "I need to deal with my grief based on what's going on in my family. I need to deal with by being checked out," by, again, watching a lot of TV, doing these other problematic behaviors, eating, mindlessly eating, snacking, grazing.

[00:30:29] So one of the things I want to encourage is to start changing that messaging that we give ourselves. Work on building that trust. "I can handle what it is that I'm facing." Now, let's be honest, that doesn't mean it's going to be comfortable. We don't need to distract ourselves from things that are not uncomfortable. We distract ourselves from things that we have learned to avoid. We've learned that maybe it's easier to pretend it isn't happening or pretend that it's not there. And so we numb ourselves. But we all have

goals that we're working on: we want to resolve health issues, we want to improve our longevity we want to do all of these amazing things, we want to lose weight, we want to lose a significant amount of weight. We can't reach goals when we're disconnected from ourselves. We can't be in touch with our values and our needs when we are disconnected from ourselves. And, again, one of the ways we do this is through distraction. We use food as distraction. We use our devices: our TVs, our cell phones, our iPads, whatever. We get into this place of being distracted so that we don't have to face what is happening, but by not being present with what's happening, we also can't work toward the positive. So, first and foremost, start working on messages to yourself about your abilities. "I can handle whatever I'm experiencing."

[00:32:14] The good news is, anyone listening to this today, you have survived everything that's happened up until today. There's been nothing in your life that you couldn't handle because you're here. You've handled everything. And, again, it doesn't mean it's been comfortable, it doesn't mean you've enjoyed it, but you have the resilience. You have the ability to be with difficult emotions, complicated issues, tragic happenings. We do get through them and we have to keep reminding ourselves that, because otherwise we say things like, "Oh my God, I just can't handle this," "I can't get through this," or, "I would never survive that." We give our brains so many complicated messages. We tell our brain that we have to be numbed, we have to escape, we have to avoid. And that's not the case.

[00:33:12] Then how do we move forward? Building this trust, working on this trust. Gather examples. Every time you get through something by being present, remind yourself. Go back and say, "Hey, the last time this happened, this is how I got through it. This is how I stayed present. This is how I manage those emotions." Keep reminding yourself of your abilities so that you can keep doing them.

[00:33:41] And then the last part of this is how do I keep doing that consistently? Please remember that we don't do any perfection consistently. What we do is our best effort. And the most important thing is that we keep doing *that* consistently. We keep moving forward with things. We keep identifying our abilities, our skills, our strengths, and our coping mechanisms that are healthy for us and we keep repeating these. It's really good to, those of you who do journaling, make note of how you cope with things in a way that is healthy for you because you're going to run into this type of stressor or this type of feeling again. "How did I handle this last time I felt like this? Oh, I went for a nice walk, I talked with my friend and processed it, and then I meditated before going to bed." Great. We've now got four strategies to help us this time when we feel like that. So keep track of your successful attempts at working through things and getting through things because, like I said, we've gotten through all of them so far.

[00:35:00] What I don't want to encourage is reminding yourself that you've avoided a lot of things and somehow ended up here. That is not a good moving forward kind of mindset. We want to instill that confidence in ourselves. "I can do difficult things." "I can get through painful times."

[00:35:23] I remember, when I was a kid, I was very, very afraid of goodbyes. I think I was very afraid of losing people. So when we would visit my grandparents, I would cry the day before the goodbye because I was so afraid that they wouldn't be around anymore and I would never get to see them again. And the reality is that fear came true. I eventually lost them. I eventually lost my parents. And at some point in my life, I thought, "There's nothing worse that could happen. I can't imagine. That is something I don't think I can get through." And, of course, I did get through it.

[00:36:01] We can do hard things. We can work through difficult emotions. We can manage stress, but we have to be taking care of ourselves. We have to build that trust in ourselves and our abilities so that we can do that.

[00:36:20] Now, I know that today's episode really hits on some deeper things, and I hope that I've said enough about each of them that just stirs you to kind of work on it on your own. There are none of these that I can give clear black-and-white steps one through five to resolve. They're deeper than that. They're more challenging than that. But I hope that by listening today, you've been able to dig in and start looking at some of these in how you want to move forward with them.

[00:36:54] Now, if you enjoyed this episode, I encourage you to share it with someone else that you think would benefit. Don't forget to leave us a review. Help us out so that other people find us. The more reviews that we get, the more people will find us and also get to share in these resources. I look forward to coming back to you with another episode soon. And, in the meantime, I hope that you take good care of you. And if you're interested in some of the things I've talked about today and you're not already a member of our community, come on in and give it a try for a month. Come to the meetings. Get in these conversations. People are working on deep, transformational pieces. All right, everybody. Take good care.