

thefastingmethod_135.mp3

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.

[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 Dr. Terri Lance and this is my first episode in the New Year so I am very excited to be back and talking with all of you as you are entering into this exciting part of the year. You might notice that my voice is a little bit froggy today. I do have a bit of a virus. I'm getting better now, but it has affected my talking, so I apologize.

[00:01:48] So, oftentimes, I think about what is the next topic that I want to share in the podcast episode that I'm going to do. What do people need to hear? What would help people to think about and listen to? And I listen to what's going on in The Fasting Method Community, and I listen to what's going on in the work that I do with my coaching clients. So what I'm going to bring to you today is something that I've been hearing in almost all of my coaching conversations, especially into the New Year, as people are kind of working on getting back on track and, you know, kind of entering into this next phase of their journey. And I'm also hearing it in The Fasting Method Community, in our large Community group meetings. It's a topic that comes up very frequently.

[00:02:41] So what I'm hearing from people in our Community and from my clients, and think that you might benefit from thinking about, is that many people are struggling right now. It's the beginning of the year. Many people have just gone through kind of a holiday season or a very social season, and suddenly they're wanting to get back on track, they're wanting to get their fasting schedule going again, and they are struggling. Either they're not seeing the results that they want (they were hoping to be losing weight at this point, or they were hoping to be changing their glucose numbers and resolving some health concerns, and they're just not seeing that progress) or they are not seeing themselves kind of progressing in their ability to fast. They are struggling to get through fasts, they're struggling to get through the schedule that they've set for themselves. Maybe they're at a place where they're doing alternate-day 24s, or they want to be doing 36-hour or 42-hour fasts, or whatever it is, and they're struggling. They're breaking their fast by hour 14, or they're having a hard time getting, you know, between the two meals that they're scheduled for that day.

[00:03:57] Many of you may already know my bias on this topic. I have discussed it before in previous episodes with a little less depth, so I wanted to really focus on it tonight. And

that bias is that I think what a lot of us struggle with is we put so much emphasis on the fasting part of this journey. And I know that sounds kind of weird. I'm a fasting coach. I work at The Fasting Method so, of course, there's a lot of emphasis on the fasting, but what happens is the reliance on fasting to do kind of the heavy lifting, that it's going to be the thing that makes everything work. And, unfortunately, when people are kind of leaning too heavily on this part of the equation, they often are not really addressing what's going on between their fasts. Maybe they did a 24-hour fast yesterday and they're going to do one tomorrow. What's going on today? What are they doing with their food behaviors? How often are they eating? What food are they eating? How much are they eating? They really kind of ignore this, just knowing that tomorrow they're going to jump back into that next fast and everything's going to be okay.

[00:05:20] You can probably already tell by the way I'm describing it, it's an imbalanced view of the actual journey. Fasting and what we're doing with our eating are equally important. You know, oftentimes, people talk about fasting being Batman and food being Robin. I don't think that's really true. I think they're at least equally important and, for some of us, the food part may take higher priority until we can really do it successfully.

[00:05:56] So what am I talking about here? Why would this be the case? When I think about what many people struggle with when it comes to this balancing act of fasting and what they eat and how they eat, what their eating behaviors are, it feels like what's going on is they've discovered this magical trick. You know, it's almost like they've been given a magic wand. And, on some level, I totally get it. Fasting is this amazing thing. It is a tool that I wish I had 15 years before I learned about it. I wish we all knew about it. I wish it were much more common. I think so many things about our current state of health, and issues around obesity, and other issues would be totally different if fasting were more widely accepted and people knew more about it. So you're given this magic wand, this gift, this secret, almost, that other people don't know about, and it's so exciting.

[00:07:04] And for many of us, it really feels like it's the first thing that we can really say really works for us. And that is so exciting. I love that when people come to us and they say, "I've tried everything and nothing has worked long term, but fasting really works for me. It's the only thing that's worked for me." This is phenomenal to hear. However, what I see so many people doing then, as I mentioned earlier, is they put so much reliance on the fasting part and its super powers that they assume what they do in between really doesn't matter, that it's almost justifiable because they just did a fast, or they're heading into a fast. This is just normal kind of human thinking - "If I do this, then I can do this," "If I don't do this, then I get to do this." You know, I've seen people do this around exercise - "If I do a lot of exercise today, I can go home and eat more dessert," or I watched someone finishing a marathon and crossing the marathon finish line and, on the other side, grabbing a cigarette and enjoying a cigarette. And I just thought, "Oh my gosh, this person is doing something that, supposedly, is really geared toward health. And then after they complete it, they actually do something that is really detrimental to their health." And that's what I see some of us doing with this reliance on fasting and ignoring what's going on with food.

[00:08:44] The way I look at it, you really can't resolve a problem or remove an obstacle by avoiding it. And this is really how some people are approaching it. And you might find that you've been doing this. So it might take some time to kind of dig in and look at, am I putting so much emphasis on my fasting and leaning on that to accomplish the work that I want to do while I'm ignoring what's happening with food? So, an example of trying to resolve a problem by just avoiding it. Let's say, for example, someone is in debt, they have a lot of bills, and they owe a lot of credit cards and other companies, and they're really

struggling to get back on track. Their strategy might be, "I'm not going to open my mail. I'll bring it inside. I'm going to put it in that drawer but I'm not going to open it. I don't want to have to look at that. It's painful. It's so uncomfortable." But clearly, if they don't open the bills, they're certainly not going to be knowing what they owe, and knowing where to send it, and all of that, so they're not going to be able to resolve the problem and start making progress moving forward.

[00:10:00] Many of you may know that, in my previous career, I was a therapist. I worked with clients individually. Every now and then I worked with couples. But when I would work with someone who was having relationship issues with their spouse or partner, they might describe, you know, "Every time we talk, we just argue. We have such a hard time communicating. I don't know what to do anymore." I'm guessing most of you would be surprised if, as their therapist, I said, "Wait, I've got an idea. Since every time you guys talk, you argue and you get more upset with each other and create more distance, how about for seven days, just don't talk to each other?" What do you think I'd be going for? What's going to happen on day eight when they start talking to each other again? Sure, day five, they're going to say, "Oh my gosh, it's great, we're not arguing at all," but they're also not addressing why are they arguing, what's going on in their relationship that's getting in the way? They're just not addressing it. They're walking around it like it's the elephant in the room, hoping it's going to disappear on its own.

[00:11:20] So you can tell, again, my bias here. I don't think we can move forward and make progress on things by avoiding them. And, unfortunately, the way some of us are approaching fasting, that's exactly what we're doing. Our actual challenge has been created through our relationship with food, our eating habits, our behaviors, things that we learned from a very young age or whatnot, and we find this magical tool of fasting and we think, "Ah, this is going to make it all work better." But again, it can't. Avoiding eating, not eating for 42 hours, not eating for five days, not eating for 15 days, whatever type of fasting people are really taking on, it has all of that power of so many health benefits but it will not fix your relationship with food. Only addressing your relationship with food can help you resolve your relationship with food.

[00:12:32] So, am I here to discourage anyone from fasting? Of course not. I want everyone to be able to fast successfully. I want everyone to be able to fast in a way that really accomplishes their goals and feels good. But if we're fasting, in essence, kind of avoiding our challenges with eating, we're never going to really see the results we want. Even if we see them short term, it's not going to stay that way. It's going to catch up with us. Many of you are familiar with sayings like, "You can't outrun an unhealthy diet," "You can't outexercise an unhealthy diet." Well, you also can't outfast an unhealthy diet.

[00:13:23] And I was talking with the client today, and I really enjoyed my conversation with this client because they asked, you know, "What happened? Before, I was doing 36-hour fasts. I was doing three of them a week, and I did start to lose weight, and I wasn't paying attention to what I was eating in between." And we both just kind of looked at each other and it was like, "Okay, but that worked for a period of time, but it stopped working. And now, even though you're doing those fasts, you're not seeing the results you want. You don't feel well. You're struggling to do the fasts. What happened?" And we really kind of identified that, at first, it was successful because it was new. It was a new behavior and it forced the body to do some things differently but, over time, it was losing that power to really help the client lose weight because the eating behaviors were really kind of mitigating so many of those benefits.

[00:14:23] So what can you do if you're struggling with this? If you're listening and you're thinking, "Oh shoot, I think Terri's kind of on to something here. Hmm, I don't really know what I'm going to do about this," I have some thoughts for you that I'd like to share and really encourage you to dig into. First, I encourage you to do some exploring of your relationship with food. Now, if you're someone who is open to doing some journaling, you could do it by writing down some thoughts about this. If you're someone who meditates, you could do some meditation on this topic. You could talk with a therapist about this topic. You could talk with someone else who understands about this, but I think it would be really important to start asking yourself some questions about what food is for you. And so kind of thinking about: what do I eat? Why do I eat? When? What purpose does it serve when I eat?

[00:15:26] Now, on the surface, these things might sound kind of obvious. "Well, Terri, I eat because I need nutrition, I need food." Is that really why you eat? Is that why you ate that snack earlier today? Is that why you ate extra after dinner? Certainly, we all eat because we need nutrition and we need that sustenance, but when you really explore your relationship with food and a lot of your food behaviors, it goes well beyond that for many of us. So just taking a really honest, non-shaming, non-blaming look at, "How do I engage with food?".

[00:16:07] Some of us might say, "Oh, when I'm feeling kind of low, I don't eat very much. I lose my appetite and I don't really even want to eat." Another person might say, "Oh, when I'm feeling really down and low, I want to kind of hug myself with food and soothe myself." So it's going to vary for people, but to really give yourself that time to explore, "What is it for me?" And then really think about, "What of those answers or thoughts that I came up with are getting in my way?" So if I said, "Well, I eat a well-balanced meal, appropriate timing of the day, and I eat two or three of them a day. Hmm, sounds like I don't have a problem with that relationship with food." But if I say, "Well, when things happen at work, I come home, I stop on the way home and I grab some snack food. I grab some old comfort food. When I'm out with friends, I overindulge in certain beverages and certain foods," that's where you start to identify, "Aha! There are some things about how I engage with food that are causing me difficulties, that are getting in the way of my goals."

[00:17:26] Then I encourage you to really kind of explore your true desire or wants or goals. What do you want? What do you want to be accomplishing? Why are you listening to this podcast? Why are you in the TFM Community? Why are you working with the coach on this? You really have something strong within you that is making you want to make some changes in your life. You want something. You want to feel healthier in your body. You want better numbers when you go to the doctor and get your biomarkers. You want greater longevity. You want more mobility. You want to feel good. You don't want joint pain. You don't want, you know, decreasing vision or things like that. So you have these really strong WHYs (WHY not wise).

[00:18:24] The next thing I encourage you to dig into, explore, do some journaling about is whether what you want or need is more important when it comes to your food. Now, some of you might be scratching your head right now and wondering, "What is Terri saying here? I don't get this." Oftentimes, many of us want things related to food. We want the comfort that certain food brings us. We want the social connection that we enjoy with certain foods or certain beverages. And these are important to us. I'm not telling us that we shouldn't have these wants, but we also have some needs. What does my body need? What does my body that has struggled with diabetes need, as far as what food I'm eating? If I have a lot of inflammation, what does my body need, as far as how to help mitigate that

inflammation? So really exploring there's usually a difference between what we want and what we need.

[00:19:35] And for some of us, I'm going to propose it this way. And I don't mean this in a negative, harsh way, but sometimes our want is a little bit more of a either kind of primitive or emotionally-based aspect. So, "I want this yummy snack food," "I want this thing that reminds me of family times," "I want this beverage that makes me feel more relaxed," "I want this food that makes me feel safe." So they, again, are a little more emotionally driven, almost a little bit more of that lower brain want versus what do you need? This is often coming more from that place of that kind of the prefrontal cortex in our brain that knows, "I have certain goals. There are certain steps to achieving this goal. This food helps me. This food gets in the way." It's very rational. It's non-emotional. It's not driven by desire. It's really driven by values and logic, so going back to whether what you want or what you need should be driving your decisions when it comes to food. Many of us who have a complicated relationship with food, it's probably more likely driven by what we want. We've learned to use food as comfort, we've learned to use food to soothe us as a companion, as a safety net, and it's a want versus what do we physiologically need and what do we need to accomplish our goals. So really important kind of questions to be looking at there. And, obviously, you know, as a psychologist, I very much care about what we need emotionally. I just don't think food is the best way to get there.

[00:21:47] All right. Then I encourage you to really make a decision, decide - are you all in? Because many of us come to this journey knowing we have big goals and things that are really important to us, but, realistically, we don't really want to have to make the changes to get there. Are you all in? Are you willing to make significant changes, not just do something for a period of time, not just avoid the problem for a period of time and hope it gets better, hope that if we reach our goal, if we lose the weight, or change our health, that that's going to motivate us enough to keep the new behaviors going. Are you all in? If so, then the really important next step is to start addressing changing your relationship with food, changing your eating behaviors. This also then requires a little bit of reflection. "What patterns do I have that need to change?" So for some of us that might be something like, "Oh, I eat pretty healthy meals. I feel really good about my choices in those foods and, you know, putting what I need in the meal. And then about three hours after my last meal, I start snacking. I go to the cupboard, almost like a zombie, and just start grabbing things." All right, that's a pattern that probably needs to change.

[00:23:22] So really explore honestly, what patterns do you think you have that might be getting in the way? What choices need to happen differently? You know, if I'm choosing this food or this food, and my natural kind of tendency is to go toward this one that gets in my way and creates issues, you know, spikes my blood sugar, or makes me have more cravings later, is that a choice that I need to work on doing differently? Because I'm going to keep facing these decisions. What barriers do you need to let go? Are there things that you've been telling yourself that prevent you from making progress? Some people might say, "Yeah, I know all of this. I know what I should be eating, I know what's healthy, but the people that I hang out with don't eat like that, so I really can't do it." Okay. Some of you might say, you know, "I can't really help it. I've been doing this for so long. This is so much a part of the way I just approach my daily life. There's just no way I can change it." That's a barrier that you're identifying, that you're placing on yourself versus, you know, "How can I start to change this? How can I break down some of these habits? How can I build some other habits?". So recognizing that, oftentimes, the barriers that we see holding us back, it's really our decision to allow them to be barriers, or to figure out how to remove them as barriers.

[00:25:01] Then the next thing is to focus on eating what you know is in your best interest. And, you know, many of you have listened to so many episodes where we've talked about food or you've been in our Community and you know we really support people who have different approaches to eating, but we are biased and really support eating whole food, not the highly-processed foods, not the Frankenfoods kind of things. We really encourage people to avoid certain things that we know are really problematic when it comes to insulin levels and things, so, obviously, there are things to help you know what is in your best interest. And I did an episode a couple of months ago, maybe six weeks ago about how you decide what is the right food for you. So if you're kind of questioning this again, I would go back to that episode.

[00:26:01] So once you've kind of really thought about all of these things and been working through this, now you're going to focus on, "I'm going to eat what I know I should be eating." And I don't mean 'should' as shoulding on yourself, not like, again, shame or blame, but just, "If I want to have good health, and healthy body weight, and feel good, and not have joint pain, and all of these other things, what food would help me with that?" Then, start eating time-restricted eating, meaning, "I only eat meals." If I'm a two-meal-a-day person, that means I only eat twice. If I'm a three-meal-a-day person, I only eat three times. I don't eat twice and two snacks. That's eating four times. I don't eat three times and three snacks. That's eating six times. So really focus on time-restricted eating, the number of meals that works best for you. This is really important to give you that opportunity to practice the changes that you're committed to making. Again, if I say, "Okay, I need to change my relationship with food. I need to make these decisions differently. I need to focus on these foods. I need to release these things. So I'm going to fast for four days." You're not going to get to practice any of what you just figured out. So practice the changes about your food behaviors, your relationship with food, so that you can really move forward.

[00:27:37] Then, when you feel like this is becoming consistent and doable (it's running pretty smoothly and you're ready to stretch), then, and only then, do you begin dialing up that fasting dial that I've talked with you about before. If I'm still shaky about changing my relationship with food, if I'm still struggling with overconsuming problematic foods, or I'm having a hard time not snacking, I should not start fasting more yet. I should work on these relationships with food, these eating behaviors, until they are strong, until my confidence has increased, and I know how to do it, not just because I fell upon it one day, but because I'm doing it consistently. Then, turn up the dial. Move into doing maybe some alternate-day 24-hour fasts. It's a little bit of a test. All right, now I skipped a meal. Did I still follow up with my appropriate eating behaviors afterward, or did I overconsume and go to the cupboard and get snacks later? If I did, the best thing to do is to dial the dial back down. Go back to your two meals a day or your three meals a day, wherever you are with that. Get back on track again, focusing on what you eat, why you're eating, how often. Are you doing good TRE? Get that solid again, go ahead, turn the dial back up. So it's not all-or-nothing, it's really that sense of, "I'm doing well with this, I'm going to the next level."

[00:29:27] You know we've talked often about the analogy of people going to the gym. You start with maybe the 5-pound dumbbells. Until you can manage those really well and it almost becomes too easy, great, move up to the 7.5-pound dumbbells. When that becomes really consistent and almost too easy, you can move up to the 10-pound. But just because you want to be doing the 25-pound dumbbells, you don't just skip steps. You don't just increase it because you want to hurry and get there. You have to master where you are first before you can go to that next place.

[00:30:06] I also think if you get to this place where you start dialing up, what I see a lot of people do is they start to struggle a little bit (totally normal) and they start to blame themselves. They start to see it as, "I'm never going to be able to do this. Something's wrong with me. I'm too weak." They get into this kind of self-critical place. The reality is, it just means you weren't ready. If I'm doing the 5-pound weights and I feel pretty good and so I jump up to the 25-pound and I can't do it and I drop them, or I can only do a half of one, you know, overhead press, I jumped too fast. My body wasn't ready. So I have to go back and retrain. I have to build that muscle just like the fasting muscle. And if I struggle with what I'm eating and then turn up my fasting dial, I'm probably going to struggle just as much or more with my eating. So what should I do? Dial it back down. No shame, no blame. Get really strong with my eating patterns again. Then see if I can turn it up a little bit. If that works, I do well with that fasting and I maintain the eating behaviors, that's great. Let's make that work for a while. Then I may be at a place where I'm ready to dial up again.

[00:31:37] So, big picture, what I'm really trying to encourage is take some time to dig in to this. Even though I'm coming to you from The Fasting Method podcast and really want you to be very successful at fasting, I really hope that you will consider, "Is what I'm doing with my eating patterns when I'm not fasting holding me back?" "Is it making my fasting less effective?" "Is it making my fasting more difficult?" Oftentimes when I have clients or Community members say, "I can't get to a 36-hour fast. I kind of crash and burn each day at like 22 hours." If we play a little detective and circle back and see what they were doing, they usually can identify, "Oh, it was what I ate the day before that really set me up in a way that the fast didn't work," or, "Oh, I'm trying to fast so much that I'm not getting enough food. No wonder my fasts are getting so complicated. No wonder I'm not able to complete them."

[00:32:54] So this whole thing that I'm talking about is in no way trying to find blame in what you're doing. It's really trying to help you empower yourself to get your foundation so strong. Your food foundation is so strong that when you then combine it with fasting, it is a super power. It's amazing and you've got these two synergistic behaviors really supporting each other. Then doing the fasting that you're working on helps you, you know, maintain your eating behaviors. And then your eating behaviors help you fast more successfully and more comfortably. It's a win-win. But, again, this is where a lot of us struggle because we're really emphasizing one over the other and we're not seeing them as this synergistic thing, that they both have to be strong.

[00:33:58] So I hope that this has been helpful today. I'd love to hear some feedback if this episode was helpful to you. I'd love it if you would share it with someone else that's important to you and see if it might benefit them. And also if you would leave a review: that really helps me to know that this content is helping you and that you'd like to hear more of it. So take good care, everyone. I will be back soon with another episode. I'm looking forward to hearing how everyone is doing. Take good care, everybody.