

The Fasting Method #162 - Meet the New TFM Coaches: Heather Shuker

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.

Terri [00:01:19] Welcome back, everyone to another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. And this is your host, Dr. Terri Lance, Coach Terri. And I'm very excited. I know that, those of you who have been listening over the past couple weeks, I have gotten to introduce you to some new faces here at TFM. We have new coaches joining us and I'm very excited to have them as part of our community and also on our podcast. So very excited that you listeners get to meet them. And this one's a little different because you've met this person before, if you've been listening. So I'm very excited today to get to share with you our third new coach in this lineup this month, and that is Coach Heather Shuker. And I need the background applause here. [laughter] Heather, how are you doing today?

Heather [00:02:10] I am fabulous Terri. I could not be happier to be here today.

Terri [00:02:14] Awesome. That's so good to hear. So you and I have talked lots in the background about this, and just kind of talking about you coming on board and all that that means. And I-- like I said, I can't be more excited about this. And it's been so great to get to introduce both Amy Wiesner and Amy Medling, and now Heather Shuker. So, Heather, my hope is that anyone who didn't listen, or just recently started following us, will go back and listen to your podcast episode that you did with me... gosh, maybe a year and a half ago?

Heather [00:02:50] I think so. I think it-- I think it was December 2022, if memory serves.

Terri [00:02:53] Yeah, about a year ago.

Heather [00:02:55] I think it was episode #59 and replayed at #97.

Terri [00:02:58] All right. So there you go folks. You can listen to it twice. But that was such a powerful episode for so many people in our listening community and in the TFM Community, because you're just so real about your own experience and how you reach the success that you have reached. And now it's an update because, a year and a half later, that success has not gone away. So I am really just going to kind of toss it over to you because I know that you have a way with words and telling a story. And so I'm going to let you fill us in how you've been doing, what led you to us as a coach. And then, if there is

anything left at the end that I need to ask to fill in, I will certainly do that. So, Heather, I'm going to toss this over to you.

Heather [00:03:47] First of all, thank you so much, Terri. I said this profusely in the first episode that I was on with you, but, in case anyone hasn't listened to it, I'm going to say it again. My experience working with you was life changing, and it has been an integral part of why I am here today. And so of course I'm going to touch on that, but I first of all want to just very much thank you for having me and for giving me the trust to come be a coach with The Fasting Method.

[00:04:16] I think a good place to start is to explain what made me choose to become a coach in the first place, why I decided to leave my position as a primary care provider, which I spent a lot of money, a lot of time, and a lot of tears acquiring that skill set and that position. And I think that I can pinpoint an actual day where that decision was just crystal clear for me. And so I'd love to tell you about that moment because I think it really embodies the problem in our healthcare system, and, certainly, the problem I was experiencing as a primary care provider. The day started with two patients that came to me for surgical clearance. Both were women; one was in her 20s, one was in her 30s, and both were there to get their second bariatric surgery clearance. Now, these were not women that were familiar to me. They didn't come to me for advice on weight loss, but when I spoke to each of them (of course, individually, these are private appointments), it became clear, from both of them, that they had no idea the problem that they were trying to solve. When I asked them what was going to be different with this new procedure, both of them gave me some version of, "Well, this surgery is going to help me eat less." Neither could give me an answer that was in line with what I understand about insulin resistance, about weight loss, that made it sound like they knew how to get from where they were to where they wanted to go. And, as I sat there listening, I had chills down my spine. I realized that both of these women were fighting a dragon that they could not see. They were up against this issue of insulin resistance, and they didn't even know it. As someone who has lost 80 pounds through intermittent fasting and changing my diet and changing my habits and changing my mindset, I know how much that takes for a person to get to the point where I was able to get to in my healing. And here I am now, nearly two years out. I've been able to maintain that, and I've still had to work at it. So I knew all of that going into that meeting and then seeing how little of a difference that I could make in the 15 to 20 minutes that I had with them. And I thought of all of my other patients that come to me every single day asking for help with weight loss, and me trying to condense everything we do at The Fasting Method into a 20-minute visit three or four times a year. And I recognized it was an exercise in futility. I just don't think it's possible in primary care. And I truly believe that. As someone who came with all of this knowledge and tried desperately to make this knowledge fit into that structure, I truly don't think it's possible.

[00:07:21] And so I decided, then, if I really wanted to make a difference in this space, that Coach Terri was such an angel for me to help me get to where I want it to be, if I wanted to be that same light for someone else, then I couldn't do it in that environment and I needed to be in this one. And so part of what I wanted to talk about today, and I think why Terri gave me the mic on this, is because I think a lot of people out there kind of need to hear what we do it at The Fasting Method in kind of more of a storybook way. So I decided to run with that dragon analogy a little bit, because, of course, we all talk about the insulin beast in The Fasting Method Community, and we know what we're talking about when we talk about the dragon or the beast that we're fighting. We're fighting insulin resistance. And that's the thing that these two patients that I referred to didn't know. That's the thing that

most of my patients don't understand when they come to me for weight-loss help and it is very difficult to condense that into a short timeframe, and I found it nearly impossible.

[00:08:33] So step one of insulin resistance and managing it, or taming the dragon, if you will (because of course we can never slay it, we can only tame it), is to know what you're up against, right? If we want to have any chance of getting to our goals, to getting to the weight loss, the blood sugar control, or any other of the myriad of reasons people come to us for dietary and fasting advice, then we need to know what we're up against. That is insulin resistance. And we need to know how we got it. I believe that you need to understand that step, step one, in order to understand step two. And, of course, step two is knowing what you can do to lower your insulin. Now, the main thing that people think about is what you should be eating and how often you should be eating it, right. Those are two fundamental things that we teach at The Fasting Method, but I think a bigger-picture thing, I think the more nuanced thing, and definitely something Coach Terri would agree with, is that a big part of step two is not only knowing what you need to do from a physical standpoint, you also need to know what your obstacles are.

[00:09:47] Let me tell you just another quick story to try and relay what I mean by that. Imagine you are the Wednesday. It's a fasting day for you and you're driving home from a tough day at work. You're kind of thinking you might need a fasting aid to get through dinner tonight because you had a really stressful day, and so you're already kind of planning to make an adjustment because your day is-- it was rough. And as you pull up to your road, you notice that there are a bunch of flashing lights of emergency vehicles on your road. And then you look across the street at your neighbor's house and you see your children standing there holding your wiggling dog, watching as your house burns to the ground. Right? Now, fortunately, you have a really kind friend that takes you in and offers to give you a place to stay. And while you're ugly crying in the shower, she goes ahead and orders pizza. Right? She knows that's your favorite comfort food, and she's just trying to be as kind as she can possibly be on this terrible day. Now, when you come out of that shower, and your family and her family are all sitting around eating pizza, and she hands you a plate, tell me this. What are the odds that you're going to say, "No, thank you. I'm fasting," or, "Mmm, pizza's not my food anymore," or that little white lie that sometimes we use, "Oh, I'm not hungry. I already ate." I'm going to guess those odds are not high. Right? They're zero, frankly. You've just had one of the worst days of your life, and, you know, all of what you know about what you need to do to stay on track has just gone out the window. And you need to-- you know, you're in crisis mode. And, fortunately, all of our days are not like that, right, but I wanted to use that story to illustrate that we experience micro versions of that story on a near daily basis. We've got a customer yelling at us for something we didn't do, we're caring for a sick parent, our youngest is getting in trouble in school because they're not doing their homework, we walk by a pizza party in the break room over lunch time and have that smell, somebody comes to our house giving us fresh baked cookies, right? We are constantly bombarded by things like temptation, and stress, and people being polite and us not wanting to turn down their politeness, and cravings, and addiction, and a million other things that make fasting and eating the right things incredibly difficult. And so when I talk about what a person needs to know in order to reach their goals, in order to, you know, make the transformation they're looking for in this journey, it's not enough to know what insulin resistance is, it's not enough to know what you're supposed to eat, and, you know, what fasting protocol is the best. What you really need to know is how are you going to combat those obstacles in your day-to-day life so that you can stay on this bus with us, so that you can continue to learn to tame that dragon and get you to where you want to go.

[00:13:05] The reason I bring this up is because I'm guessing that there are many listeners out there that have listened to every episode of this beautiful podcast, that have watched the YouTube videos, that have read the books. You know this stuff cold, and yet somehow you're still running around in circles with your hair on fire, because this dragon [laughs] is the bane of your existence and you can't quite figure out how to tame it. And that is because some of you have not committed to step three. And step three is keeping your head in this game long enough to make this your way of life, your new normal, your new automatic pilot. And the way that you do that is through support.

[00:13:53] When I decided that I was no longer going to be a part of the healthcare system, specifically, trying to teach people how to combat this very complex disease, a disease so complex that the treatment for it currently is somewhat abysmal, right? Abysmal. People are given medications, they're doing surgeries, they're doing all kinds of things to solve this problem, and we're losing. And the reason we're losing is because there's a dragon that people can't see. People don't quite understand how to deal with the dragon, even if they knew it was there, (you know, it goes against what we've been taught), and they don't have the support to stay on track to manage that daily version of the house burning down. And so that's why I'm here. I'm here because that support is the missing link that everybody's looking for. It's not enough to know. It's not enough to start and feel really motivated if, every time something stressful happens, you can't quite get yourself back in the game. The difference that changed my life, enough so that I am here to try and change yours, is I finally understood that. I knew about low carb since the 90s. I knew about fasting for, you know, a couple years before I was able to execute. It was only when I joined this community and I hired a coach, that I had that third link in the chain that I needed to be successful. So if your dragon has beaten you up and you don't have help, I'm here.

Terri [00:15:39] So true to form, Heather, you have said so many things in there that I feel like we could launch into five, six, seven different episodes. So much powerful stuff in there. But you also reminded me of something in my own professional journey, not my health journey, but I started as a middle school teacher and, in my family, that was like I had made it. You know, I went to college-- my parents didn't go to college. I had gone to college, I got a job, and I said, "I think I want to quit my job and go back to school," and my dad's head was spinning. He was like, "What do you mean you're going to quit your job? You don't quit a good job." But I knew there was something else, there was a different way that I wanted to reach people. And it takes-- in my mind, from my experience, it takes a lot of guts to leave what feels pretty secure. Like, pretty sure you were always going to have enough patients there in your clinic, and you knew that you were kind of set. You had worked to get to this point, you were set, but it wasn't the right fit because you couldn't do what you really wanted to do. You couldn't reach people in the way you had been reached and the way you wanted to-- the role you wanted to play in people's lives. You know, I think I experienced that, too, because, one, I left teaching and then I became-- I went back to school and became a therapist. And even that, I loved it, there's so many good things about it, but I was watching people who were treating their adolescent kid with donuts in the morning to get them to go to school, and then picking them up at noon to take them to the psychiatrist to get two psychotropic medications. And I couldn't really talk about maybe if you didn't give them donuts, something might change. And so I had to leave that job to come here and do something that felt much more in line with who I am and the message that I want to get to convey to people. So I give you a lot of credit for transitioning like this. I know that it's not easy, and, based on what you've described and how you just laid all of that out, I think you're going to find that you get to be that light, you get to be integral in people's lives in a very different way, even though you won't be writing prescriptions

anymore, you won't be doing those medical treatment plans or those approvals that you are talking about. I think you are going to get to see you get to do this very differently.

[00:18:10] So I'm so excited that you're here, and I was thinking about, again, I knew you would tell it in a story, but just that piece, and you and I have talked about this before and I talk about this often here, but that knowledge alone is not enough. And I see so many people get frustrated with themselves - "Why am I not accomplishing what I want? I have the knowledge, this should be easy." And then they get very mad at themselves - "I'm flawed. I'm weak. Obviously, I don't want it bad enough if I'm not doing it." Like, all of these kind of self-destructive ways that they make sense of it. And you bring it back to-- you know, it's almost like this kind hug that says, "No, no, no, it's not something's wrong with you. It's the system around you that's not supporting you yet. And you need that in place to make these significant changes."

[00:19:07] And I love that you also highlighted the fact that it's like having a dragon with you, and your hair's lighting up on fire, and, gosh, you can't get enough food in that dragon, you know, that you need support in order to figure out how to make the knowledge you have fit in your life. And as you highlighted, we all face a lot of complex decisions around, "Am I going to eat?" "What am I going to eat?" "How frequently am I going to eat?" It is hard to accomplish what you want when you don't have the structure around you that supports you in doing that.

[00:19:44] So I am very excited to get to bring you into this team and introduce you to this listening community as a new coach with us, because you are that structure, you are that system of support. And I think people who decide to work with you, people who get to know you in the Community, are going to find that taming that dragon is going to be so different with that support system.

Heather [00:20:15] Yeah, exactly. And I think it helps when people understand that we all have a dragon. That's one of the unique parts about all of the coaches at The Fasting Method; everybody has had to deal with their own dragon. And that experience, that personal experience-- I've been where you are, I've dealt with this too, and I've been able, through these skills and techniques, to tame my dragon. Other coaches have different skills and techniques they used. In our community, there are hundreds of people who have their own techniques and skills that they've used, and who also have been there when, you know, you're getting burnt on the neck, right? They've been burnt too. We all have. And that feeling that you're not alone, you're not the only person struggling here. Even those of us who have kind of made it and are in maintenance, we are not made of stone, we still have those days. And understanding that we started right where you are. We are not unicorns and special. We're regular people just like you. And that is kind of the most overwhelming part when you join the Community. Left and right, people are saying, "Oh, I lost 62 pounds," "I lost 125 pounds." I mean, it's gobsmacking. It becomes-- you become numb to it after a while, there are so many successful people in the Community. But you also hear, "I've come this far. I've struggled." "I came this far, I backtracked." And understanding that you're not alone, we're all in the same boat, we all have the same struggles, you know, it's uplifting. And when you're living in a food culture where pretty much everyone around you is eating exactly the opposite of what you are trying to eat, as a pack animal, that's incredibly difficult to combat. And so when you're flailing around feeling alone and you come to a community where you're like, "Yeah, I went to a party, there was nothing there I could eat." "I went out to dinner. Everything was fried in seed oils, and there was nothing that I was willing to eat." Right? "I'm trying to fast and

everybody is up in my business." We've all been there and it just makes a difference to know that.

Terri [00:22:28] Absolutely. You know, Heather, as you were just talking and you mentioned the idea of people who have reached a level of success and kind of achieved their goals and that old love affair/hate affair, that love/hate relationship people have with this concept of maintenance. I think one of the things that you also bring to the table as a coach is your own maintenance journey, not only your getting-there journey but what it's been like to maintain the successes that you've reached. And, you know, I've gotten to talk with you a little bit about it, and I know it hasn't been like, "Oh yeah, I got to this point, and then I just sat back on the couch eating bonbons." Like, you had to continue the lifestyle that you built, and, in some ways, maybe even had to work a little harder at some of those pieces that you had built, now, in this maintenance phase.

[00:23:24] And one of the things I'm really excited about for our listening audience, as well as our community, is that each of the new coaches-- I'm hoping to bring all of you and the other coaches in for more of these kind of conversations, so that people get to hear that we are human. We, too, are challenged by certain things in this journey. We go through tougher times, we have some easier times. But I think sometimes people look at the coaches and think, well, "Ugh, this must be easy for you. That's how you're in this position." And I think you really have highlighted today that that is not the case. It's work. It's a lot of work. And I think, every time I've talked to you, it's work that's been well worth it for you. I'm looking forward to having you come back, Heather, and share more about your maintenance journey, because I know so many of our listeners either are nearing maintenance and wondering how in heck they're going to do that, or are a little bit earlier in the process and just feel like it's daunting to even think that there might be a maintenance phase, and, for sure, "That might be the phase that where I fall down." So I'm really looking forward, Heather, to having you come back as we get going here and talk about that.

Heather [00:24:39] Well, Terri, you know that I always have plenty to say. [laughter] I can assure you I have some strong opinions on, you know, what it is like to live in this lifestyle, in this environment that is-- feels like it's working against us on a regular basis.

[00:24:55] I want to give the listeners a couple of takeaway points that I didn't mention in my last podcast and I really, I think, are crucial. I think it's crucial. And the reason that I told the story of coming home to the house fire and that big stress ball that drops itself into our lives, is because so much of our weight-loss strategy is actually a stress-management strategy. And I know that's something that you spend a lot of time on. I happen to take a walk every day in the woods with my dog after work, and it has become, you know, a crucial part of my weight maintenance, not just because of that exercise piece, but because of the stress-management piece that it brings with it. And, you know, we have a coach in our community, Coach Jamie, who is a certified meditation instructor. Now, I think it's pretty telling that The Fasting Method, as part of our community meetings, has someone teaching us meditation for stress management. Well, I mean, I don't know if you would say it that way, but recognizing that mindfulness can be a tool in your tool belt for weight management because of how it makes you present in the moment when you're making these choices, how you're managing your emotional reactions to things, and the million other things that I'm sure Jamie could tell you about why meditation and mindfulness is so good for you.

[00:26:21] So those two pieces - the mindfulness and the daily walking or daily movement - are critical, and not because of what you think. The reason I consider both of those habits a critical part of my maintenance strategy is because the stress is coming for all of us. None of us get a pass on that. In daily life, that's just part of being human. Knowing ahead of time that that's something that is going to continuously be an obstacle in your weight-loss journey, you can be proactive about that particular obstacle by doing the mindfulness practice, by doing the daily walk. Now you're setting yourself up for success because, although you might not-- when your house burns, which I hope doesn't happen to anybody after this episode, but-- if something huge happens, give yourself grace, please. But if all those little micro stressors come along and you have those tools in your toolbelt, then you're more likely to stay on track. This is a long game. It's got a lot of moving pieces, it's very complex, and that piece is a big one. So if you're not already going to Jamie's meditation, if you're a member of our community, then I don't understand why not. It's a huge piece of this puzzle, the mindfulness. So ten out of ten, highly recommend.

Terri [00:27:39] And, if you've watched any of Heather's social media videos, you know that she walks every day. So she is not just saying that she thinks that is important, she lives it on a daily basis.

Heather [00:27:53] Thanks for saying that, Terri, because let me just tell you a quick little story. I've worked with the same medical assistant for the past two years. Her name is Delaney. She is an angel, right? I called her 'my gift' in Spanish. I'm not going to butcher the Spanish, but-- and when we first started working together, I was a lot heavier. And she would hear me, day after day, talking to patients and recommending they reduce the carbohydrates in their diet, and they exercise, and do all the things. And one day-- she's very direct. One day, she said, "Now, Shuker, are you actually doing the things that you're telling all these people to do?" And let me just tell you [laughs] that cut to the quick, okay. Like, I mean, that was as blunt and as straightforward as you could possibly be. And all I could say was, "I try," right, "I try. You know, obviously, I'm not perfect at it." And the obvious being, you know, I've got 80 extra pounds on me and here I am telling other people what to do and when, quite obviously, if it worked, it wasn't working on me. And she was there with me and she watched me lose all that weight, and she watched patient after patient come in and say, "Is that my doctor? Like, I'm seeing someone new?" And she's like, "No." And then she would defend me because they would all say, "Oh, she had the surgery," "Oh-- right? You know, we use whatever tools we can so I'm not knocking anybody that does, but she would, every-- "No, no. She did what she's telling you to do. You need to do it." And that moment with my medical assistant was basically that crossroads moment where you're like, "Yeah, you know, you gonna be all talk or are you going to walk the walk?"

[00:29:30] And so I don't ask anyone to do something that I'm not willing to do. I mean, people think three 42s sound crazy. I did it for six months. People think giving up refined carbohydrates is crazy. I don't eat them. Right? I'm not recommending to anyone something I'm not willing to do myself. And I'm not special, truly. I struggled till I was 46 years old. I've been there. I'm just determined. And I know that if you're kind of on the fence, like, "Should I join the community?" "Should I hire a coach?" "Like, I don't even know," let me just tell you, if you're one of those people that's like, "I'm at the end of my rope. I'm willing to do what it takes. I'm willing to put in the work. I know it's going to be hard, but I'm willing to try," then, yes, this is for you. If you're one of those people that has convinced themselves, "I can't do it. I can't fast. I can't change my diet. I'm too set in my ways." There's a beautiful quote that I can't attribute [Henry Ford] that says, "Whether you believe you can or you can't, you're right." So if you don't believe in your heart that you can

do it, you probably can't. But those of us who have dug deep, who have focused on what our WHY is, who have been willing to put in the work, who have fallen down and gotten back up again, who have been consistent, and who have gotten the support we needed, we get to heal. Something that I like to say all the time is nothing tastes as good as this new body feels, as this healed body that doesn't have to use a machine to sleep in the night so that I don't choke on my fat, this body that is no longer pre-diabetic, this body that no longer is swollen with severe joint pain, this body that is no longer ashamed to go clothes shopping or to eat in front of other people. That's what we get when we believe that we can. So I hope you do.

Terri [00:31:26] Well, I mean, there's a big mic drop there, Heather. I mean, there's nothing more I can say with that. Holy cow! I will say something from a technical perspective before we leave this episode. Heather and I have had the most interesting evening of podcast recording that I think I've experienced so far. Right as we were getting started, my lights started to flash, it became dark in this room, I froze. Heather texted me and said, "You disappeared." I couldn't send her a message, my internet was out. So it took us another ten minutes or so to reconnect and come back on here. And then I have a geriatric dog who is standing like 15ft away from me, barking at me just enough so that I can't make her stop. And she's deaf and so I can't call her over. And during this time, I feel like I'm in a tornado in Kansas. There's all of this wind [laughter] blowing around my house. And it just happens to be a day that we have all of our windows wrapped in plastic because the exterior of our home is being repainted, and so the wind is blowing and the plastic is rattling and the rain is pelting on the window. And I am sitting here just waiting to hear what Heather's going to say next and hope that I don't have to say anything because there's so much noise going on in my background that Daisy can't possibly edit it all out. So, thank you Daisy for your hard work, thank you Heather for continuing through all of that noise on this side. I've watched as every time my dog would bark and you just kept going on your thought. It was great. And thank you, listeners, for tolerating a little bit more distraction on this end today. So it's been, like I said, an interesting day of recording today.

[00:33:20] So, Heather.

Heather [00:33:21] Yes.

Terri [00:33:22] Welcome. Welcome to TFM as a coach. I can't wait to hear your experience as this unfolds, and get to hear our Community members and your clients and their experiences as well. Thank you so much for being here with me tonight. I know it's late where you are, so also your willingness to just hang in here with me tonight. I really appreciate it.

Heather [00:33:44] Thank you so much for having me, Terri. And it's funny that you're welcoming me to TFM, but I feel like-- I've been in TFM for a couple of years now, right, so it's my TFM, too, already. But starting in this new role is-- it's honestly a dream come true. That's just the best way to say it. I feel like TFM will take people through every step of taming their dragon, and to be able to be a part of that and hopefully help change people's lives in the way that TFM changed mine is-- it's my purpose, it's my passion, and I look forward to it. So thank you for the opportunity.

Terri [00:34:19] Yeah. Thank you. All right, listeners, if you enjoyed this episode, please give us some feedback. Share it with someone else who needs to hear this message. This is how people find out about us. When you share it, more people learn this message. So please don't hesitate to share and we will be back with another episode soon. It won't be a

new-coach introduction; we have now introduced our new coaches and look forward to you getting to know all of them in the Community and here on the podcast. All right, everyone, happy fasting and take good care.