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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. Hi, everyone. It's Megan Ramos here with another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. Today, I'm joined by my incredible co-host, Dr. Terri Lance, and we are going to be discussing how to navigate all of the holiday weekends that are coming up now that the nice weather is here. Terri, how are you doing today?

Terri [00:01:39] I'm good, Megan. I'm getting ready to celebrate some holiday weekends, so couldn't be more perfectly timed. [laughter]

Megan [00:01:47] Yeah, we've got some trips planned for the first time in quite a while, too. And one of the reasons for this episode (when you and I were chatting about what to discuss today) is that a lot of people we're hearing from in our Community, they're getting really great results at the start of the year when things are more socially quiet, but now that everyone has recovered from the December holidays and the New Year, well, a new set of holidays are starting to pick up. People are finding that they'll end up going to this holiday (some of it is traditions that might be popping up around specific holidays or they're more vacation-style holidays) and the eating is not necessarily how they desire to eat, and it really throws off their appetite long term. We're hearing a lot of this recently in the Community.

Terri [00:02:39] Absolutely. I've been hearing it a lot with my coaching clients as well as in our larger Community groups. It's a recurring theme that people circle back to many times throughout the year. So I wonder, Megan, in all of your years of experience with this, what are some of your, kind of, overarching things that you work on teaching people to start to think about, about how to navigate holidays, vacations, weekends? In essence, partly just social things. For some of us, that just might mean a Thursday night, but what are some of your go-to themes for this?

Megan [00:03:17] Yeah. I think the first one that I try to share with my coaching clients and Community members is that this is really a journey - progress, not perfection. So when you go to, say, a holiday event or you have a long weekend celebration and the eating goes off plan, don't kick yourself for it. Think of what you've learned from it, right? So if you've learned that having a glass of wine for dinner, for example, can trigger an evening of poor eating that spills into the rest of the weekend of poor eating, then maybe forgo that wine. And I know, like many of you, the enjoyment of having something special along with all of

your peers that might be having something special. So I'll put my sparkling water in a fancy glass or I'll ask for it in a fancy glass at a restaurant. Everyone gets a good laugh about it, but it makes me feel good and like I'm participating, too.

[00:04:17] So I encourage people to think about it and find what lessons are there. That's the victory, you know - never failure, always a lesson. And then apply that the next time. We sure as heck have a lot of holiday weekends coming up - summer vacations, spring break, all kinds of things - so there's lots of chances to apply this stuff.

[00:04:37] The second thing I always share is, there is no perfect way to start a fast. While it is true if you have a more real-food-based diet that it enables consistent fasting easier but that's not always the case. When Jason and I started out in the clinic in Toronto, we barely had patients willing to do anything with the nutrition. They were going to eat the same. They would try to eat less junk food. And they were still able to do three 36, three 42s, two 48s. We were still getting people off of insulin in just a matter of weeks, let alone months, but weeks they were coming off of insulin.

[00:05:18] So I think what we see a lot of the time in our Community is people trying to make all the stars align for the diet to be perfect. So they might have a long weekend that goes sideways in terms of eating and think that they need to eat for a week or two in order to fast again. And that's not true. You wouldn't want to jump into a five-day fast after a long weekend. That might be too much for your system and hydration issues, we talk a lot about that, but you can absolutely go back to your intermittent, therapeutic fasting plan. So you don't have to wait for things to be perfect. Just take some extra carbonated water that day and push through. And to be quite honest, pushing through one 36 or 42-hour fast, you're going to recover from that holiday meal a lot faster than you will trying to eat ketogenically or low-carb over the course of a week. So rip off the bandaid and just do the fast.

[00:06:13] So those are a couple of things we'll talk about because I truly think it is a journey that takes time and practice, but also a lot of self-compassion because we can't be perfect all the time. What about you, Terri? What do you share with your clients?

Terri [00:06:30] Well, one of the things that you just mentioned, Megan, that I think is really an important concept is kind of looking at recovery. I remember when I was training to be a therapist, one of my professors said, "Look, you are going to make mistakes. You are going to make choices in that room with a client that don't turn out well. That's not the most important thing. The most important thing is how you recover from it." And it's easy to think, "Oh, no, I just asked that question and it was so problematic and, all right, what am I going to do now?" And so if you say, "Oh, I was really off track with my eating and fasting this weekend." That's not the most important thing. The most important thing is now what do you do to recover? How do you get back on track? How do you minimize the longer-term impact of that? Because what a lot of us do is we get so caught up in the shame and blame and the chastising ourselves for it that we can't pick up and make new momentum coming into the week after or the two weeks after.

[00:07:30] So really thinking about your recovery process. Are you someone who really benefits from using some fat fasting after you've been off track? Do you need to jump back into that fast? Do you need some time to focus on your food? Everyone's recovery is going to look a little different, but I think it's important to know you have recovery strategies so all is not lost when you go off track.

[00:07:57] The other thing that I try to talk about-- I recorded an episode with Nadia about self-sabotage and that topic comes up all the time in these conversations. But the idea that I believe a lot of us-- it's almost like we've signed a contract with our lower brain that it gets certain times where it gets to be in control. And for many of us, these are weekends, holidays and vacations, or social times out with friends or family. So people will come to me and say, "Terri, I do really well when I buy my food and make my food. I do really well when I'm doing this with my family, but social nights out... And then I just, you know, go completely off track," or, "It's that holiday," or, "It's the weekend. I do really well Monday through Thursday night, and then I spend three days of the weekend just completely off track." Again, I try to talk to them about it's almost like you've signed a contract with that lower brain that, "If you give me these four days of being on track, I'll give you these three days of being off track." We work it like it's a contract. Instead of saying, "Wait, I don't have to give my lower brain three days out of my week because then I have a setback. I have to spend the first few days of the week getting back into the right place for me. So I'm not seeing the progress that I want to see." Same thing with social things. It's like we have a contract that the lower brain, the lizard brain, whatever people like to refer to that - we give the permission slip over to it, that, "Hey, we're going out socializing tonight. It's your call." And starting to own that - we can make that call. We can choose if we're having an alcoholic beverage or how many. We can choose what food we're having and whether we order dessert or whatnot. But a lot of us fall into this old pattern as if we can't manage that our lower brain gets those times.

Megan [00:10:02] That reminds me of myself earlier in my journey. So I had just got diagnosed with diabetes and I'd gained all of this weight coming out of a very long-term relationship. And it was very stressful, especially financially. A lot of finances were tied up in legal matters at the time. I was living with my parents. [laughs] It was not a good time for me. And one thing I really looked forward to was I had a group of girlfriends and we would go out on Friday nights. So we'd have these long workdays, you know, some of them had young families, but Friday night was mom's night out to connect. And I thought, "You know, Megan, you've just worked all week." And because of the situation with my former partner and finances being tied up, the amount of money I spent on that meal out was significant for me every week. And I thought, "Oh, you know, like, you deserve to get what you want." And then I'd feel like garbage for the rest of the weekend. And I just remember waking up one Saturday morning after Friday-night dinner thinking, "Do I really deserve this? Do I really need a weekend of feeling awful?" And also being in a house surrounded by just awful foods, as well, made it even more difficult. "Do you really deserve this? Like, what does Megan deserve?" And I was going through a lot of transformation at that time, obviously. Getting out of a 12-year relationship at 27 years old, there's a lot of self-discovery that needs to happen. And I thought of future Megan and what was this future Megan? Who was she going to be out of this era of her relationship? And who was she as herself? And what was everything going to look like about her? And I wanted her to be in good health, really good health. Like, I was doing all this investment into fasting throughout the week. Why was I doing this to myself? And I thought, "Well, healthy Megan, future Megan - she deserves salmon and Brussels sprouts or steak and Brussels sprouts on Friday night girls' dinners. She can still go and she can still eat. She might like the starchy stuff much better, but this is what future Megan deserves." And I remember that first Friday when I ordered steak and I ordered Brussels sprouts - it was weird and people commented, my girlfriend's made a joke. And I said, "You know, I'm trying to work on some health stuff here," and everybody forgot about it and started focusing on their food in a matter of minutes. But that was the first time that I fed future Megan the food that she deserved at that meal. And it took-- there was a lot of internal resistance I had to fight to do that, but I knew if I did it once it would make it easier, it would spark that chain of behaviors

that would make it easier to do that long term. And that restaurant we'd always go to-- it's back home so I don't go to it anymore today, but for years after that, we would go for our Friday dinners, and I never-- I didn't even think about some of the old foods that I used to order there.

[00:13:13] So behavior change is truly possible. I think, you know, sometimes it's just getting over that initial hurdle, that first time making a change in what you would order.

Terri [00:13:25] I also love that concept, Megan, because what it really focuses on (as I'm listening to you) is this piece that I often talk about of making it part of your identity and this idea that part of your brain cares most about immediate, feel-good. In your example, that part of your brain knew it wanted to order the starchy food. It had had a long week. This was the reward, this was the treat, and it wanted it now. But what you forced yourself to do is to think about, "What does that mean for future Megan? Oh, that means more metabolic disease and that means less mobility and all of these other things. What does Future Megan really deserve? Health, vitality, energy, none of these disease states." It sounds like it really helped you to go between, "What does this part of my brain think I deserve in this moment?" versus looking at longer term. And that's complicated for us because our brain is set up-- that one part of our brain wants immediate gratification. It wants us to act quickly, have the starchy thing, have the fun thing. "You'll pay for it later, no worries." But you actually interrupted that pattern and said, "I'm going to focus on this is a vote for future Megan. I'm creating a future Megan now with this choice." And my guess is you enjoyed that food anyway, but you also really enjoyed the future that it created for you.

Megan [00:15:04] Yeah, it wasn't easy but it became easier, and then it became the norm. Something that I work on with clients when it comes down to this is that food is always something we should enjoy. We shouldn't ever look at food as punishment. You know, it's full of nutrients and stuff that helps build us, keep our hormones good, keep us strong as we age, enables us to create life or maintain disease-free for as long as we can.

[00:15:34] But we've got to seek out other methods of enjoyment that aren't food. So one of the things I thought of on those Fridays was my enjoyment, what really is going to give me that satisfaction and feeling like I'd relaxed at the end of a week is spending time with my girlfriends, engaging with them, hearing how their weeks are going. I'm getting that reward. It's happening whether I like it or not. I'm sitting there and they're all talking, they make me laugh nonstop. It's a great time. I don't need the addition of food in that moment to give me something that makes me feel good.

[00:16:14] And I think so often we lean into food for that and that we think that some of these other things that can provide us with that instant gratification-- they talk to us about doing meditation or going to the gym, but those are big asks of us to do, especially when we are looking for some form of instant gratification. So when you're struggling at these holidays, think about all of the great enjoyment of the holidays - connecting with friends, connecting with family, the beauty of having fresh ocean air if you're on vacation, or the air of the mountains, or the fresh snowfall if you're out there skiing. You know, there's so many other things that, if we just redirect our attention away from food, can provide us instant gratification, giving us sort of that dopamine response and that really positive sensation that isn't food. And we're just surrounded by it, especially in these long-weekend or vacation events.

Terri [00:17:14] Absolutely. You just touched on a theme that I think is so prominent is that we, many of us at least, have learned to think about these things as being focused around

the indulgence of food. When I ask someone, "Where are you going on your vacation?" one of the first things they tell me is the place, but then they tell me why - because of all of the special foods that are there.

[00:17:38] We've learned to focus on many of these fun activities about food. Many of us may recognize if we're having a family get-together-- I know in my family there was an aunt who always brought that one special dish. It was horrible for us [laughter] but you knew she was going to bring that dish, and you knew what the table was going to look like. It was going to have all of your favorite things. And so I think for many of us, we got out of the habit of, or learning how to focus on, "Why am I actually here? I'm here to enjoy this connection with the family," or, "Enjoy the scenery," "Enjoy not being at work," whatever it is that's enjoyable about the experience because we learn to focus so much on, "It's the food that makes it enjoyable." You go on vacation for the food that you can have. You spend time with family at a holiday because of the food that you can have. You, you know, enjoy your weekend because of the food that you allow yourself to have.

[00:18:39] So for most of us, it really does require that pretty big mindset shift. "My enjoyment this weekend is not about the food that I have." Again, like you said, "I want to eat food that tastes good, that I don't have to sacrifice, but having certain food is not what is going to make or break my weekend," or, "my vacation," or, "my time with my family." So I think that mindset piece that you touched on is so important.

Megan [00:19:07] We talk about it a lot during fasting, right? Riding out the hunger waves. If the thought of food pops up, do something else. You know, pick up a book, call a friend, go for a walk. You know, instead of going into the kitchen if you need to stretch your legs and you're working from home, go into the laundry room and just doing something to distract yourself. And then the thoughts of food sort of subside. And we learn on our fasting days-- we hear this from all of our clients that they eventually stop thinking of food on their fasting days. There is a physiological component to that, absolutely. You know, they become better at burning body fat so they're fueling on body fat. There's less fatigue and, you know, headaches, mental fog, that type of stuff on their fasting day. We truly forget about it. We are fasting and we start to associate fasting with doing x-y-z chores, events, or activities.

[00:20:04] The first time I ever did a 36-hour fast which ended up being a 42, it was not planned. It was a fasting day that particular Wednesday and I thought, "Okay, it's a fasting day. So when I get home, you know, I've got this project I want to do. I've got to finish working on this. I've got to start some laundry when I get home." I didn't even think about eating, right? I had just programmed it in my brain as a fasting day. The next thing, I woke up the next morning and I hadn't eaten and I didn't die and it was really cool. I had just done my first overnight fast unintentionally because I stopped associating fasting with not eating but fasting with everything else that I can do.

[00:20:48] And so to your point you were just sharing and what I shared, you know, as I've started to think about all these other events in my life. We have a long weekend with the cousins at a cottage. What games are we going to play? What events are we going to have? What movies are we going to watch? That type of stuff. So it isn't focused primarily on what we eat. Eating, getting food, that's a necessity that we need to do, but the excitement aspects that I think about is the social stuff. It's very different and something I think that comes with training the brain. As a psychologist, you can speak to this better, but when a client says those thoughts of food are coming up or eating at an event, I say we

need to stop ourselves and we need to list down the other things that we're going to enjoy about this particular experience.

[00:21:41] We have a lot of clients that will go to somewhere like Italy every summer, right? And of course there's tons of great food and some carbby food in Italy. There's so much beauty in Italy, so many incredible things. So I'll notice during a coaching session that someone gets really bogged down in the nitty-gritty of the eating and, "How many-- if I have one carb thing a day, what do I do with the other meal? Do I fast?" And it's like, "Let's take a breath for a second. You're going to Rome. Let's talk about all of the amazing things in Rome," or, "You're going to the Amalfi coast. Are you doing a day trip to-- Like, what are some of these other things that you're going to be doing? Let's change the thought process so we're not hyperfocused on the food in Italy. Let's talk about these other great things." And then you start to look forward to them and your program your thought processes to be thinking about all of these things that aren't food related and it becomes habitual over time.

Terri [00:22:41] Absolutely. Another thing that I have-- a theme that has come up a lot recently in Community meetings and in some of my coaching sessions is, again, "I'm going on vacation. What am I going to do about fasting? I don't think I can fast while I'm there," or, "I'm having company come in for two weeks and I really don't think I can fast very well with them here. What should I do?" And it took me being a coach with TFM for a couple of years to really get to hear the cycles of this, but I remember it especially around-- for a lot of people around Christmas holidays, if they celebrate Christmas. This was the time when everyone got really nervous heading into it because they knew, historically, they gained a significant amount of weight over this time. And then they spent up until June or July trying to lose that weight and then they'd go back into the holidays and gain again. They would come back after the holidays and say, "Terri, I didn't gain weight." And they were shocked. They even ate some problematic food while they were navigating the holidays. And I asked them, "What did you do? How is it that you didn't gain weight even though you ate some of these things and even though you weren't doing longer fasts?" And so when they really looked at what they had done over that time, what they realized is they had a firm foundation in the basic skills that we always address - they did time-restricted eating. So even though they ate two meals every day instead of fasting during those couple of weeks, they weren't snacking and grazing all day. That was their old behavior, they weren't doing that anymore. And even though they had some special treats during those holidays, they weren't eating them all the time. They weren't eating them repeatedly throughout the day. So they often came back at the end of it having not gained weight. And every once in a while people would come back and say, "I actually lost weight over the holidays," because they were really focusing on their basic skills. Rather than focusing on the big, powerful, flashy skills, they focused on the lifelong maintenance kind of skills, and they really found that they worked.

Megan [00:24:54] I see that all of the time. Every single year in Toronto in January, I'd have these patients that traveled far and wide over the holidays. Canadians travel - we travel a lot. We are travelers. And they'd come back, you know, in the middle of January and they'd say, "Don't show me my A1C. Do not take my measurements." And I would, and everything was either the same or it had improved. Just as your observations are, that's what I saw, too. And I had one cl-- or one patient in Toronto who really highlighted this. He was an architect. When he was home, he worked at home. He had two little kids, he had a wife. I think his house was just crazy mayhem [laughs] by the sounds of things. I can't imagine working at home with two little kids and trying to maintain my sanity. But, you know, he struggled a lot with the basic principles and found himself always trying to get in

these longer fasts that were such a nightmare to do with his family situation. But then he'd have to go to New York for two weeks and then he'd have to go to Tokyo for two weeks. You know, he'd be in Paris for two weeks because he'd be there, you know, coming in to supervise, see where things were with certain projects. And he'd away lose weight. He came back to Toronto and he joked, "Maybe I just need to move out from my family." And I said, "That's not your problem. You know, what do you do when you travel? Well, you're at hotels. Okay." He's not one to gravitate towards mini-bar type of situations. "You don't need breakfast, you have coffee. You go to meetings, you go to sites, you have lunch with people. You spend afternoons in meetings at sites, you have dinner with people. You go back to your hotel room. You're not sitting around on the couch with your kids eating snacks and watching TV." I'm like, "This is the problem when you're home and you don't experience that when you're away."

[00:26:53] When we travel to big cities or more sightseeing type of events, we're barely in our hotel room as it is. Our hotel room isn't set up to feed us or to really enable us to eat. You know, some luxury suites every now and then have some treats, but even then you can call in advance and tell the hotel you don't want any of that stuff in your room and safeguard it. So when people go on these type of trips, they're amazing for their time-restricted eating. Right after I had lost 60 pounds, I brought my A1C 4.6, no fatty liver, no PCOS. And then two weeks later I got the opportunity to go to Europe with two good friends for six weeks - France, Italy, and Greece. And I freaked out. "What am I going to do? Oh my goodness!" And I said to myself, "Okay, we're just going to minimize the number of times a day you're producing insulin. In Europe, they don't really eat breakfast anyways, so you're fine there. You can still get in 16 or 18 hours of fasting and you're not going to have as many temptations in the afternoons or the evenings." And sure enough, I lost 10 pounds on that six-week trip.

Terri [00:28:07] And going into it, as you said, that sounded impossible because you knew what it would lead to. It would lead to gaining, it would lead to out of control, but you actually had the foundational, basic skills built in - you didn't snack and graze all day.

Megan [00:28:25] I think part of the problem is people think that this is all or nothing, right? We've talked about it so many times on this podcast. "If I'm not doing two 48s I'm doing detriment to my body." I think we see this all of the time, and this is just another reminder that the basics are so important and that we can learn to love things like vacation or spending time with family again.

Terri [00:28:50] Absolutely. We can enjoy weekends without them becoming food festivals and we can feel good coming out of the weekend that we're still on track, we're doing well. And we can use our recovery plans when we do go off track. But when we get into that kind of defeating mindset of, "I blew it," "I ruined it," "I'm never going to succeed," it's much harder to pick up again.

[00:29:15] So I think we've covered a lot of different angles of this today, Megan, that I hope really help people to think about how they navigate these social events, family events, holidays, vacations, and weekends to keep some balance in their lives rather than all-or-nothing, overly restricting, or overly permissive approaches.

Megan [00:29:37] I encourage everyone listening today to just think of all of these events coming up - long weekends, vacations, holidays- as an opportunity to practice because with practice you're going to get better at it and you're going to learn how to handle it. I often think no one ate worse or no one eats worse than I ate. [laughs] I was really bad.

And if I can, over time, work and train and continue on this process where-- I've got a couple of vacations coming up myself (a long weekend and a week) and I'm thinking about nothing related to food. It's all about the experience. And I so enjoy dinners out. You know, if I can get there, you can get there too. Have hope. You know, progress, not perfection. And every time you have this long-weekend event or a vacation, think about what you've learned from it and then apply it next time. And just be excited that there's a next time that you get to apply it to. You know, don't be terrified of the next long weekend, you know, think, "No, I get to practice these strategies that I came up with after the last one." And that's, you know, I think how people really succeed at doing this long term.

Terri [00:30:49] Absolutely. So it makes it a lifelong lifestyle rather than a quick fix, something that's not sustainable.

Megan [00:30:57] Well, everyone, thank you so much for joining us today. We'll be back next week with another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. And for more information on our Community and coaching programs, head on over to thefastingmethod.com.

[00:31:13] Bye, for now, everyone.

Terri [00:31:15] Take good care.