



Episode 10

Five Healthy Habits to Avoid Stress Eating During COVID-19

Good morning. This is Toni Julian, and I'm the host of Toni Talks--Humanity Matters. Hope you're having a fabulous day today. And I appreciate you listening in today. We're going to talk about the "Quarantine 15" and five healthy habits to avoid stress eating during COVID-19. Have you noticed that maybe you're stress eating during this timeframe, we've been sheltering in place since about mid-March and so many people that I've talked to recently complaining about their eating being out of control since that time, since the orders that were issued for us to all shelter in place.

[00:00:36] So I have a test for you and you can take mental note. If you say yes to any of these questions, I'm going to pose to you right now to see if you are in fact stress eating or emotional eating. Here's the first one:

- Have you noticed you're craving foods that are high in sugar or fat? Now you may ask, yeah, usually I do anyway. Okay. So, the question would be more than *usual*?
- Have you desired, more baked goods, breads or other comfort foods, meat and potatoes, that kind of thing?
- Have you been consuming more hot beverages than usual?
- Are you finding yourself reaching for crackers or some simple carbohydrate food very often?
- Do you find you're eating when you're not truly hungry?

- Do you notice that you've eaten mindlessly either more than you realized like a whole bag of food? Say maybe a bag of chips or something instead of a small portion?
- Have you found yourself opening the refrigerator door and looking for something to eat, even though it's not your normal time to eat and you're not even sure why you're there or how you got there?
- Do you find yourself reaching for food when you've encountered a difficult emotional issue?
- Are you eating even when you're not hungry because you think you'll not have food in the future?

If you answered yes to any of these, then you are likely stress or emotionally eating.

So, let's talk about what is stress or emotional eating. In my mind, it's a series of emotional eating situations where we're either overeating or under eating we're binge eating or we're grazing throughout the day. You know, taking just small snacks all day long out of this low-level feeling of, of a negative emotion. Some of us restrict eating to feel in control, which is actually the basis for eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia.

Now we all know that emotional eating could lead to other issues. The first of which being weight gain that contributes to medical and other emotional issues down the road, like eroding your self-esteem or our weight being so high that we put ourselves at risk for medical diseases, such as diabetes.

[00:03:00] According to the National Institutes of Health and a recent survey about individuals and their differences in food intake in response to stress is roughly 40% have increased their food, 40% have decreased their caloric intake when stressed and approximately 20% of people don't change their behaviors during stressful periods at all. And these different results may relate to a specific type of stress or duration of the stress and variations in the satiety and hunger levels at the start of the study.

Now I find this topic really interesting because don't, we all really want to know and be consciously aware of the forces that are driving our behaviors? Like during this whole COVID-19 situation, I know there's been a lot of stress and some of it isn't so obvious, some of it is just kind of in the background, this little dark cloud, this thing that's been gnawing at us., right?

[00:03:43] And then some of us have just kind of sailed through this just fine. And it just depends on her situation. But it's great to be mindful. It's great to know that when you're under stressful situations, how do you react? Because you want to be ahead of your health. And especially at this point in time with COVID-19 still on the rise in some states, as our restrictions are beginning to lessen, it's just so important now more than ever to be hypervigilant about our health and boosting our immune system and if we're eating in ways that aren't supporting that, that's when we can get into problems.

The first healthy habit is really be very mindful about what you're eating; very deliberate. So being able to pay attention to everything you're eating your portions, your food quality, how often you're eating. So that's the first thing is how are you eating differently now that you didn't before? If you're sheltering in place and you're still not working, then obviously you're going to be home more, maybe more sedentary, maybe not, but your lifestyle is definitely going to be changing. So rather than having the same routine that you had before is now you're in a situation where maybe you don't really have a routine.

[00:05:00] Number two, healthy tip would be to create a routine that maybe isn't driven by your work schedule or other outside influences, but create a routine for home that you will do every day, especially around your meal time. So, have breakfast, when you would normally have had breakfast before, have your lunch around that same time, have dinner, try not to snack at night, and you'll be able to keep that schedule--at least you're eating portion of it--as consistent as possible as before. COVID-19 set in and before these orders were put in place.

The third habit that you can develop, and this is something that I say consistently all the time to all of my clients, I apply it to my own life is eat a well-balanced diet balance out your macros.

[00:05:47] Get a combination in every meal of lean proteins. Your complex carbohydrates and your healthy fat, so that you stay satiated longer and you can manage your blood sugar. It will be far less likely that you'll be giving into bingeing or snacking on things just because your blood sugar is low and then you need some carbohydrate to kind of self-medicate and perk you back up again.

[00:06:12] I'd like to read something I thought was interesting that I found on the National Institutes of Health and you'll hear me quote NIH quite a bit

because they are just such a great resource of, of government information from studies that the government has conducted to other companies that have been able to write papers and post them here.

And this is from the National Institutes of Health. They're saying during prolonged stress, our bodies release cortisol, which increases the hunger sensation,"--which is true and is also grehlen that's involved there—"and the best recommendation for staying healthy during quarantine is to follow general health advice that is eating a balanced diet, staying hydrated, being physically active, getting enough sleep and managing stress."

And one thing that they say about eating a well-balanced diet is they say "focusing on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, plant, and animal proteins and healthy fats is the best way to get all the essential nutrients we need for good health and normal immune function. Whole grains provide benefits relating to the many individual nutrients and bioactive compounds or phytochemicals they contain. This diet formula contains essential vitamins as D, E, zinc, omega-3 and poly-unsaturated fatty acids. Vitamin D has an impact on the function of immune cells..."

Basically, this goes on and on, but it talks about the ability of our cells to function well to promote the membrane integrity so it keeps those cells strong; it talks about T cells and zinc being essential for maintaining homeostasis of the immune system. The Omega-3's have potent anti-inflammatory properties through inhibition of the production of inflammatory mediators, like cytokines, chemokines, adhesion, molecules..." it goes on and on. So probably a little bit more technical and in-depth than we would need to hear.

But essentially this balanced diet gives you helps you boost your immune system so you can stay strong. So, balanced macronutrients. I've been saying that forever.

Now, not everybody eats balanced macros. I understand that. Some people don't eat animal proteins. That is fine too, as long as you're getting your proteins and other ways, but, you know, but we get the idea. We don't have to take this completely, literally, but work like, like find the diet that works best for you with a focus on getting the protein that you need, making sure you get lots of greens, lots of veggies, lots of fruits, lots of grains, things that are helpful to building your immune system.

And also, especially those essential fatty acids; the avocado, the flax seed, the of olive oil, those kinds of foods will help you be able to metabolize your food more slowly so, you stay fuller longer. You balance your blood sugar and you get those nutrients that you need to boost your immune system.

[00:09:06] Number four healthy habit is take your unhealthy foods and put them in a place where they're harder to get to. So, you make your healthy food, 20 seconds more accessible and your unhealthy food, 20 seconds less accessible. So, what does that mean? That means taking healthy food in the refrigerator, either meal prepping or say you have like apples and papayas, make a beautiful fruit salad out of it.

If you have carrots or celery, cut it up in advance, like make those things easier to get to. So, when you open that refrigerator door, you'll be like, "Oh, look at all the awesome produce that I get eat right now that are quick and accessible. Don't make our laziness of like, eh, I don't really feel like slicing that or washing that.

Don't make that a hindrance or a roadblock to eating that healthy food. And I know sometimes when we're hungry, we just want to get to it. We want to eat that right away. So, if we give ourselves that, like where you remove that sales objective, right. Remove, remove that roadblock up front you'll be that much more likely to indulge in something that's healthy and good for you and helps you build your immune system than something that is unhealthy.

So, say you've got an apple in the refrigerator, usually like to slice it up, you'll have to wash it. But then in your pantry, you've got these great crackers and they're crunchy and are salty. And maybe you feel a little stressed. Maybe you've got feeling a little emotional that day, or maybe something just happened at work where you're feeling a little frustrated. Maybe you've got a roadblock at work. And so, in the background, this little dark cloud is behind you or over you and you may not have consciously acknowledged that frustration, but, but it is there. And maybe you are using that food, maybe that crunchiness, that saltiness to self-medicate, make you feel better, right?

Maybe it helps make that problem go away or at least emotionally, temporarily. So that is tip number four.

[11:00] Number five, be aware of your feelings. Ask yourself, am I hungry or am I *not* hungry? Why am I eating right now? If you find yourself going to the

refrigerator, and I have done this many times, I'll be sitting at my desk and I'll come up on something and maybe it's a little bit hard and I'll just be like, oh, you know, a little frustrated or can't find the solution right away. Worked at it. My computer is not, not cooperating with me, so I'll get up and I'll walk to the kitchen and I'll open the refrigerator and I'll be like, what am I doing here? Have you ever done that? It's just like, okay. So that was pretty mindless, right? So, me not recognizing that I was feeling frustrated at the time and heading to the refrigerator, right? That's the disconnect. But if you were at the refrigerator, like I've done lately and I'm saying I'm opening it, I'm like, what am I doing here? Okay, hold on. How am I feeling? Am I really hungry? No, I'm not really hungry.

What am I feeling right now? Am I feeling fearful? Am I feeling anxious or frustrated? Am I angry about something? Did something just, just happen in my family or with a friend or somebody that pissed me off? Did somebody say something that, that set me off?

I don't know. What is it like? What is it with us? Being angry or frustrated, like frustration is just that first step to anger, right? So, we have these kinds of negative emotions that we're not trained to deal with. And none of these emotions are bad. These are all emotions that we are meant to feel. But if we are experiencing these emotions and we're not aware of it, that's where the problems happen.

Maybe we're confused about something or are you like this? Sometimes I'll do this; I'll just be bored. And I've got lots to do in my life, but sometimes I'm just like, okay, well, what do I do next? Yeah. I don't know if I really want to start that project. I don't know if I want to delve into that, have to have my mindset a little more this way to do that.

So maybe I'm just kind of like bored; that could very well be. And maybe that boredom--and I've seen this with maybe some friends that are lonely or bored is that they'll just eat--because they're trying to fill a void. So, we often use food to fill those voids, to try to soothe over our feelings that we think are either negative or that we aren't aware of, or that we don't know how to manage even if we *are* aware of it.

Maybe we're tired, you ever do that? I'll do that every now and then I'll, I'll, I'll be tired. I'll be sitting at my desk. I'm like, ah, I just didn't sleep well the night before, you know, I'm menopausal, I get hot flashes. It wakes me up. It

disrupts my sleep. So sometimes I truly am tired and maybe I just needed lay down or rest for 15 minutes.

Once I lay down a rest for a few minutes and I wake up, I'm in that kind of groggy, not quite awake state, and I'm very conscious of this, but I wake up and I want something sweet. And I know for a fact that that is happening because I am not fully awake yet. Like I'm not fully, I'm kind of lethargic still.

And it's not that I'm tired at that point, but it's the feeling of my body not being 100% awake and aware and functioning, that my first thought is I want something sweet to eat. And so, because I am aware of that, I don't go straight to the cupboard to get something sweet to eat.

I will like, sit there, get a glass of water with some lemon in it. Let myself kind of get back to full, full awareness, full consciousness, full wakefulness, and then it passes. So that is my way of being able to deal with that, is just being consciously aware of it.

[00:14:46] So, what if you think about it, what kind of situations trigger stress eating for you? Are these, do you get these feelings that I'm talking about? You know, the fear, the anxiety, frustration, anger, confusion, boredom, loneliness, tired, sad, depressed, like which of these things? And, you will find one probably in there that is a trigger for you. So, once you identify it, then you're able to figure out how to move beyond it.

[00:15:08] Number five is, are you confusing, thirst with hunger? That happens so many times. Ask yourself, are you thirsty? Am I thirsty? If you think that you're hungry and you take a big glass of water, it could be that it was just your thirst. That was making you feel like you were hungry. Now, if you're hungry again, 10 minutes later, clearly you were hungry as well, but the water is absolutely great for us. Sometimes that water is really all we need. So rather than going for that extra meal or that extra snack, just try a big glass of water, 16 ounces of water. You can add some lemon to it.

[00:16:05] I have this great recipe on my website at ToniJulian.com and it's called *Luscious Lemons* where you can juice lemons. You can juice the rind and the flesh of the lemon and freeze it into ice cube trays.

And then I pop those out into Ziploc baggies and keep them in the freezer. So, it is amazing because it not only helps kind of cut that craving, cut the appetite, cut the feeling of needing to eat when maybe you really don't need

to. Maybe you just ate two hours ago and you really, truly don't need to eat that often if you're eating properly.

[00:16:25] Right. So, it's just enough to keep your hunger curbed, but also to hydrate you. And the third benefit to that is balancing out your, your pH. So, it's very, as you know, lemons are very acidic, but they burn in an alkaline way, so they help bring your body back into homeostasis, back into more of an alkaline balance instead of leaning more toward the, the acid. So, I would try that. So, ask yourself, am I thirsty and not to confuse it with being hungry?

So those are the five tips and I'd like to move on now to this really interesting study that I found regarding some people in Italy, as well as locally in the United States.

[00:17:12] And also just one thing that I noticed right after we got our shelter and place orders, mid-March is that people were really starting to post on social media. They were baking breads and they were doing these beautiful works of braided breads, and really getting into the kitchen and, and baking and doing these amazing things and pies and cinnamon rolls.

And, oh my gosh, cinnamon rolls are my complete weakness. I try not to eat them. My husband makes them, but you know, what I'm saying is like these foods that just make us feel so comfortable and, so we feel so nurtured when we eat them. And then I started noticing that not just on social media, but I started talking to friends and they are like, yeah, I'm making this and this, you know, this, this brisket and this red meat and like heavier foods and foods with sauces and drinking a lot more wine and here's, here's my drink of the day.

And it just, it was so interesting to see how people's behaviors changed. And it went from people on social media posting about this restaurant that they had gone to and this beautiful meal and all this gorgeous presentation. And I was looking at that like, wow, that's gorgeous, but that's not to me anyway, in my mind, that's not a sustainable way of eating because it's just not as nutritious, right? And, you're getting lots of sodium and fats and things that, and portions that you wouldn't ordinarily eat on a daily basis, but I would admire these beautiful works of art that these chefs would put out.

[00:18:45] And so I saw this shift in social media, from eating at restaurants and all of that to cooking at home. And typically baking is from what I saw more than anything else. And I noticed in our household that our eating

changed, I noticed that our dinners got a little later, like I like eating around six or seven, but not everybody in my family does. So, I noticed dinner started getting a little later. Our schedule started getting more slack. We started doing more baking and that kind of thing, which I love to do. I am a cupcake connoisseur. And so to me, it's not the cupcakes. It's what you put on them. It's the decoration that I have lots of fun with.

But anyway, you can --and I think a lot of people started getting into crafts and baking and doing things that, that they, you know, that we all had a little bit more time to do--but in this, our diets started shifting early on. And what I noticed is that when I went to the grocery stores and you know, you'll recall like our aisles look much better now than they did three months ago, we've got toilet paper, we've got toothpaste and those basic things that were, we were running out of. But going down the grocery store shelves, at first, all the things that were bought up were like the eggs, the cheeses, the red meats, the sugary cereals. You go down the, the cereal aisle and you know, what was left on it, it blew me away.

[00:20:14] What was left was Bob's oatmeal. Right? I have a product, it's Toni's Protein Meals, which is kind of like an oatmeal, but it's way better--has lots of protein in it. But anyway, Bob's, and Toni's. I'm like, Hey Bob, how you doing? So, it was just the two of us on the aisle, right? So, our products are sitting there all by themselves, tons of them in stock, nobody's buying them.

[00:20:40] And I was like, what the heck? What is going on here? Like to me, and I think people are catching onto this. It's like a perfect meal replacement. If you don't want to cook, if you want something comforting, if you want something healthy and it's got the protein and the flax and the balanced macros.

So, so I am absolutely befuddled. I'm like, I don't get this. People are going for, you know, what I call holiday foods. So, every kind of right around Thanksgiving or Christmas, I will see our product slowdown, which I understand, and then the sales of pancake mix and syrup and eggs and bacon and people, or make them waffles and all these other comfort foods.

So I am finding that during COVID-19 we are adopting those same behaviors as we do over the holidays. Like, *Hey, let's make every day a party!* So, you know, that's great in short term, but a lot of people are putting on weight

because of this. I have this one gal that I know told me she gained 20 pounds being that she was on work furlough.

I'm like, wow. That's like a lot of, a lot of extra food. And I started thinking about it and it really isn't that hard to put on extra pounds because I remember doing this, calculation when I was pregnant, like, okay, so I gained 40 pounds in 40 weeks. That's a pound a week. That's not bad if you're pregnant, when you're pregnant.

But how did that happen? Like, I didn't feel like I was overeating. My diet was really good. And then I realized when I broke it down to simple calories, simple math, all you need to do is eat a bagel a day, extra above and beyond your normal, like what you would just eat normally a day, to have gained 40 pounds in 40 weeks.

Isn't that crazy? The math adds up. If you do the math, I think I was basing the bagel at about 300 calories per bagel. So, per day, over 40 weeks. So anyway, I just think people's behaviors are so interesting.

So, what, what was fascinating to me was there was a lifestyle change survey during COVID-19. So, this is recent.

[00:22:49] This is like just happened. It was on April 24th. They did a web survey and they did the survey in Italy to 4500 participants that completed the questionnaire. And they had something like a little over 3,500 people that actually responded and women responded much more so than men.

So this is 75% of the population that responded were women. Roughly 25% were men they're between 12 and 86 years of age. And what was so interesting as they took their regular lifestyle and they said, okay, what are you eating now? Have you increased your intake and certain foods, or have you reduced your intake in certain foods?

And what was amazing is just very, very much in support of what I was just saying is that there were increases. I'll tell you the top ones, the number one, top one was homemade sweets, right? So maybe that would be the cinnamon rolls and things like that. So they were making homemade sweets. The, it probably went up by about 500% is crazy.

And the next one was like all good Italians--of which I am--homemade pizza. And my grandmother used to make a thing called pizza Frit, which was

like a fried pizza dough. And sometimes she'd sprinkle sugar on it. And so that would fall into that homemade sweet category, but basically all that amazing homemade bread that you can turn into, the pizza frit or pizzas or, you know, making the cookies. Like my grandmother had all these amazing cookies that she used to make, so, so good. So, the homemade sweets were number one, homemade pizza was number two that was at about, 350%. And then what was next was cereal. So, look at all the carbs! These people are going for pure unadulterated carbohydrates which metabolizes really quickly, but those are comfort foods. They help nurture us. They bring our blood sugars up high. They make us feel good temporarily. Right.

And then after that was hot beverages. And one thing that I noticed is that I have been drinking more hot teas and hot and coffees, but decaf. Like almost all day long, I'm thinking, oh, I must just be trying to comfort myself. So hot beverages went up by about 200%, so that doubled, and then there was an increase and, fresh vegetables, but not by much, the beans went up. So, some people decrease their veggies and some people increase their veggies.

So that kind of balanced out. So, it was just really interesting. Everything else kind of balanced out, but there's this huge spike in homemade sweets, homemade pizzas, fresh bread cereals, right. And some beans.

[00:25:53] So that is very much in alignment, which with what I have been seeing in our society, right. So, people are people we're all going to pretty much behave when it comes to food and stress; pretty similarly.

So, to take this a little further, if we take that concept of those simple carbohydrates and, and boosting our mood with them is that, the NIH talks about stress. They correlate stress with eating behaviors, and they say that these eating behaviors it's supported by recent research in the addiction of these foods and that when we are stressed, we particularly want those highly palatable and energy dense ones. And that these dense foods may be addictive and in a way similar to that of drug abuse. And I have always thought of that. Yes, food as drugs and stress has long been considered a critical risk factor in the development of these addictive disorders and behaviors and relapse into addictive behaviors.

So, I just think it's so interesting. They call them hyper-palatable or comfort foods that may be consumed to reduce our stress.

I hope this has helped you given you some tips, at least to be aware of what's happening in our society, how our behaviors are changing, how our eating behaviors are changing, the feelings that are going behind these behaviors.

And maybe some things that you can do to help alleviate it in terms of being mindful, being aware, being present, slowing down and putting in like the 20-second tip, make those foods a little harder to get to that are unhealthy for you. And make it 20 seconds easier to eat healthy foods. Okay. So, I hope that all of this helps please drop me a note here.

Let me know what you thought about this. Are these stresses affecting you? In what way? What kind of feelings do you have around it? Are you finding that you are responding to a certain type of stressor or a certain feeling or certain emotion in a certain way? Has this affected your eating behavior at all?

I hope not. I hope you stay healthy and just please keep in mind to keep your immune system strong, especially during this time, if you can do that and you can help people around you to encourage them to stay healthy, keep on track folks.

Thank you for listening. I hope all of this helps and that you and your family stay safe and healthy, and I hope that this gives you some food for thought. Be sure to subscribe and check out www.tonijulian.com for more podcasts, blogs, resources and Toni's Protein Meals® to keep you healthy and strong.

From my heart to yours. Until next time!

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