

## *Module 13 Lesson 1*

### **Transcript**

Clients come to us every day and they use words like guilty and terms like out of control to describe their eating. They focus so much on what they should and shouldn't eat and their ideas of good and bad. And really, there are countless and endless emotional nuances that people attribute to their relationships with food that we hear about on a daily basis.

I think we really need to start talking about good old willpower and empowered eating. So, in this lesson, you'll learn how willpower propagates a negative relationship with people's relationships with food. Why reframing willpower into empowered eating can help improve outcomes and strategies to create empowered eaters out of all of your clients.

You already know how I feel about the word and the idea of willpower. I can't stand it. I loathe the term. Nothing makes me sadder than any one of my beautiful rock-star clients hating on themselves because they ate something they wish they resisted. If I hate willpower so much, why am I doing a whole lesson on it? Well, in 2011, 27% of stress in America survey respondents reported that a lack of willpower was the most significant barrier to change, and that's why we're talking about it here. Counseling your clients towards change.

I have a beautiful client, Susan, who's in her sixties, survived two rounds of breast cancer and treatment. She's a total go-getter at work. You meet her and she's like one big ray of sunshine. I promise you she glows. In a session with me that I'll never forget, she berated herself about wanting to resist the bad things at a party she was going to. She wound up giving in to the puff pastry and the champagne and the truffles, and was so mad at herself that she didn't even enjoy them. She was so mad at herself that she didn't have willpower. She felt doomed to be fat and sick and unable to feel in control.

Willpower is just the ability to resist short-term temptations in order to meet long-term goals. So, it sounds simple, but my argument is that the idea of willpower is innately negative and sets us up for failure. Here's why. When your willpower fails, people go overboard and overdo the thing they didn't want to do in the first place. Studies actually show that repeatedly resisting temptation drains your ability to withstand future enticements. I see this all the time. People feel so deprived from resisting and resisting, that when they give in, they give in hard.

According to other studies, willpower depletion has a physical basis. People whose willpower has been depleted have decreased activity in a brain region involved with cognition and have lower

---

blood glucose levels than do people whose willpower has not been diminished. Yes, people who kill themselves to be in control actually have poor brain functioning and lower blood sugar. Yikes. Research likens willpower to a rubber band that gets stretched and stretched until it snaps, fails, or whatever you want to call it.

I often say, you may have heard me say this before, that willpower is a muscle and you use that muscle throughout the day and it gets tired and more tired and more tired. So, again, the bottom line is you give in. And finally, willpower gives a lot of power to the negative. It is a power struggle within the person to not have something they innately desire, which is truly focusing on the opposite of what behaved or change is all about. We want people to focus on the positive. It feels so much better focusing on what you can do and what you're going to gain from doing something positive than focusing on what you can't do or you can't have.

I spend a lot of time with my nutrition counseling hat on reframing the idea of willpower into empowered eating, that big pillar of a nutritious life. Empowered eaters are exactly the opposite of willpower eaters. Empowered eaters look forward to what they can eat, and when they get really good at clean, healthy eating, they know there is truly nothing they can't eat. You know my favorite old adage, it's not that you can't eat the chocolate cake, it's that you can eat the blueberries. So, even if you do have that chocolate cake, you feel empowered doing so and you're less likely to go crazy with it.

Empowered eaters are successful and feel great about their food choices because they avoid temptation and plan ahead. They avoid temptation by not putting themselves in the position of being hungry, tired, and stressed out in the presence of tempting foods. They plan ahead by having a snack ahead of time, feeling good eating, prioritizing their sleep and managing their stress.

Empowered eaters also look forward to what they can eat by practicing eating healthful foods in the right portions and listening to their bodies, and they feel great meeting their goals. They know how to eat a conscious indulgence in an empowered way, just like that cake I just mentioned. They maintain steady blood glucose levels by eating regular healthy snacks and meals, and avoid crashes and spikes that come from eating in a haphazard, deprived way that comes from willpower.

We also see that rather than focusing on self control and what can't be had, empowered eaters support themselves by saying things like, "I'm really looking forward to a slice of cake on my birthday," or "I'm going to have a delicious glass of wine on this Friday night." Saying a goal out loud to someone who can help keep your client accountable is a great strategy for success as well. It's not easy to undo a lifetime of a willpower mentality. It's really not, and I absolutely understand that, but when you get a client to change their ways, it is so fulfilling.

Here are some steps you can take with your clients to help them tackle the process. Point out the negativity to your clients to help them see a new way of looking at their wellness work. Come up with new terminology that gives permission to your client to be human. Conscious indulgences or a mindful decadence sound and feel so much better than willpower ever did.

Acknowledge that it's human nature to like sweet, salty, crunchy, creamy, and favorite foods. Your client is not out of control or a failure. He or she is human for having cravings for these types of foods. Just like everything, practice, practice, practice. Have your clients see if he or she can be satisfied with smaller portions or have him practice not finishing something that isn't as wonderful as it looked.

Okay, let's review. The idea of willpower is innately negative and sets us up for failure. Reframe the idea of willpower into empowered eating. Empowered eaters avoid temptation by planning ahead, eat healthful foods in the right portions and proportions by listening to their bodies and having confidence in their bodies. They eat regular healthy meals and snacks, and say their goals out loud almost as maybe a form of a mantra.

You can help clients become empowered eaters by pointing out negativity, coming up with new terminology, acknowledging that your client is human, and reminding your client that it takes practice, but they can get there. They will get there even if they have to practice, practice, practice. All of your clients can become empowered eaters. I'll see you in the next lesson.