

Episode 117 Transcription

Say goodbye to the food police and hello to peace. Welcome to the Love, Food Podcast, hosted by dietitian and food behavior expert Julie Duffy Dillon. This authentically engineered series is in the form of a love letter welcoming you to reconnect with food. Now pour a cup of coffee, or a margarita, and let's begin.

Transition/Music overlay

Hi and welcome to Episode 117 of the Love, Food podcast. I'm Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey. I'm so glad you're here! Thank you for connecting today.

Have you ever described your relationship with food as an addiction? Have you ever experimented with intuitive eating or making peace with food, but felt like once you started eating those foods that you're avoiding or restricting or were not allowed on your diet, you just you couldn't stop and "I've tried over and over again" but keep coming back to this way of seeing it as an addiction? Certainly, if you identify in that way, please know that you're definitely not alone. And I feel like so many people who are trying to make peace with food and see so many people like me (*laughs*) um, a dietitian that identifies as weight inclusive and non-diet or using intuitive eating, to kinda be a bit like a horrible fit for those who are finding themselves describing their relationship with food as a food addiction, and maybe just won't work for them. And this show is for you. Those of you who have ever identified in that way, I am reading a letter today from someone who definitely describes her relationship with food as one that feels like an addiction. And so, this is—this is for you. Those of you who feel like the approach of intuitive eating or mindful eating or anything that just sounds like making peace with food could just not work because it just feels plain and simple like an addiction, I am thinking about you as we go through this letter.

Before we get to this episode's letter, a word from our sponsor: This episode of the Love, Food podcast is brought to you by my PCOS and Food Peace course. So, PCOS, otherwise known as Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, or this really crappy endocrine disorder that at least 1 in 10 women experience that there's barely any research on (*laughs*)—ahh yeah—it's this condition that is just *so* um--encompassing the whole body yet probably because it's a female condition, there's just not a lot of research on it and one thing that I have found is so many people with PCOS also have a negative relationship with food or feel like food is chaotic or they may even identify as a food addict. And I developed this course after working with hundreds of women individually and in groups to help them to make peace with food while also promoting health with PCOS. And it's a 12 step system that I put down in a downloadable digital format, you can have access to it forever, you can take it with you wherever you go and I have all the details on the course at pcosandfoodpeace.com If you have any questions about the course, shoot me an email at julie@juliedillonrd.com. So, if you enjoyed this episode of a Love, Food podcast, I would appreciate a rating review, sharing an episode or subscribing. Doing any of those four acts

of kindness really help the show grow, it helps more people find it, it kind of boosts the ratings in iTunes so it helps more people just be able to find it when they're looking for another way to experience food besides just dieting and hating themselves. And so I appreciate in advance, any of those acts of kindness. Again, they mean a lot to me and they do help people find the show. Alright, enough of all of that. Let's get to this episode's letter.

Transition

Dear Food,

Why can't I look at you as fuel? Why do I think about you constantly even as I'm finishing the last bite of one meal, why am I already thinking about the next thing I will eat? Why do I think of you as a reward and even feel adrenaline when I eat the high sugar high calorie versions of you? Why can't I refuse you or eat you reasonably? Why can not getting food I've been fixating on all day make me angry? Why do I hide you from others and pretend we don't have an unhealthy relationship? Why have I stashed you and eaten you in secret, as a child? These things have been going on with you and I for as long as I can remember.

I can control our relationship for a while, losing x pounds over the span of a year but then I crumble and gain x pounds in one week. Is this normal, Food? Do others have the same relationship with you? Do you have any advice for me? How can I make our relationship healthy? I feel like I don't have a choice like other addicts do. If I were addicted to alcohol, I could try and not drink or be near alcohol at all but I can't just not eat. I can't go to a grocery store without being near all of my weaknesses or visit a friend's house without an array of you being pushed on me out of a showing of "hospitality."

Look, I'm sorry to overwhelm you with all of my questions, Food, I know it may be overwhelming for you to answer all of them. I'll give you the simple answer; I am truly and honestly addicted to you. I have a serious problem that sometimes leaves me in tears and feeling hopeless. I am a food addict. I eat you when I'm feeling happy and in social settings, spending time with close family and I pretend not to eat much when I'm around people I don't feel safe with. It feels so good to eat you, too good. Eating is such a burden. I honestly wish I could choose to eat or not, but that's not how this works. Bottom line is I have a problem and I need help. I truly believe it's not you, Food, it's me. But where do I go from here?

Sincerely,
Your confused, lifelong devotee

Transition

Hey there, letter writer. Thanks for your note. And I need to begin with, I don't believe it's you that has a problem and I don't believe it's Food's fault either. I really don't believe the blame belongs on either one of you. I do believe what you're saying, though. I can appreciate the *feeling* addicted. I really can and I don't want to argue over whether or not you're feeling addicted cause, hey, those are your feelings. Your feelings are what you're feeling and, you know, my job is definitely to, like, believe you on that because if someone's feeling something, you always believe them (*laughs*). And so I want to communicate to you that I definitely hear what you're saying and I don't want to argue with you on that because, again, it's legit. It's what you're feeling. And, for a moment, as you're feeling so trapped in this very stuck place because like you said, it's not like any other kind of addict where you can just abstain like alcohol or drugs because you gotta eat. You gotta stay alive. You need to be around food in order to be alive. So, if you're taking that frame of reference of addiction, you're kinda like stuck in this corner. I almost picture like a video game where a person is kinda walking in a corner and the person's still walking but they're not going anywhere. You know, you just gotta turn it around in order to go anywhere.

So, for this moment, I want to pivot a bit and just look at it in another direction. Kind of like on that video game, to keep just going and going and going in a place of feeling stuck. And by pivoting, I don't necessarily want to like force you or kick you in another direction. I just kinda want to turn your head a little bit to pivot and consider another way. And, in order to do that, I think we need to dig deeper—dig deeper, peel back those layers of the onion—on to how this feeling—how did it develop? And I think by really considering this deeper option, I think it can give you some other ways to go on your food peace journey.

I think it starts with examining one part of your letter. You mentioned the word “reasonable.” And when I was reading that letter, that word was like huge on the page for me. It wasn't as it was written but, in my brain, in my very visual kind of brain, that word was like highlighted, in bold, and maybe like 72 point font (*laughs*) or something. You know you mentioned to quote here “Why can't I refuse you or eat you reasonably? Why do you fixate on it?” And that word “reasonable” I think speaks volumes to the addiction experience with food. And I don't think, again, that it has anything to do with food and it also doesn't have anything to do with you, letter writer. Or anyone who can identify with feeling addicted. We live in a world where controlling our food and having a certain body size are considered synonymous. They're considered, well duh if someone's in a smaller body, well *obviously* they're disciplined around food. I really want to challenge that (*laughs*). I can't just let that be. But I feel like, that's where we live. This is just how culture is for so many of us. And for those of you who are walking this great Earth at a higher weight, I appreciate the stereotype is that one is not then disciplined with food. And, I have to tell you, I have sat with, for the last 20 years, hundreds, I wonder if it's even thousands now, of people with so many diverse life experiences and body weights and how a person is eating and the variety of food that they're eating and the amount of fruit and vegetables they're eating and things like that, has nothing to do with they're body size. It doesn't have a

relationship, really. They're so many other things that contribute to those kinds of behaviors and the foods--rather the body size doesn't have anything to do with it.

So, if that's the belief. That higher weight bodies equals *well obviously not disciplined*, and lower weight bodies is *ah they're so good, they know how to do this, they are so disciplined with food*—well, there's a belief system that gets internalized for us. These are tapes that so many of us have in our heads, myself included. You know, I live on the same Earth and the same culture. And I appreciate, that as someone is walking this Earth at a higher weight, one of the ways to feel more accepted is to demonstrate *working on* having more control with food or to be more reasonable. So, when I read your letter about, "Why can't I just be reasonable with food?" I heard so much more. I heard internalized fat phobia. I heard cultural expectations. I heard, "I just want to be accepted. I just want people to see me as someone who has her shit together." And uh, it wasn't about the food and it wasn't about you. It was more of our expectations in this current fat phobic, thin obsessed kind of culture.

And someone who's trying to work towards that expectation with food, of being disciplined, and working on more disciplined, I would imagine that they're not allowed to have much pleasure with food. And I would also take it a step further that someone who's trying to fit in and to feel more acceptable and to appear more disciplined, isn't allowed a lot of pleasure in other things. Not just food. I think pleasure with sex. Pleasure with relationships and career and pleasure in anything. So, uh when a person is lacking pleasure, to me, I can see all these things kinda being off balance. Again, not for your fault or the food's fault or anything else. It's just cultural expectations, internalized beliefs that I really wish we could help unlearn. I wish we could just make society have a shift so that it could just not be so fucking fat phobic (*laughs*) about things.

I think it would help you, letter writer, and anyone in this experience of kind of food addiction and feeling so addicted to food. I think it would help you to see a different way or even, rather not needing to use that way of describing your relationship with food because I think if you had permission for pleasure with food and other things in life, well then that addiction would feel so different. And I almost can hear, like if we were sitting across from each other, uh, hearing your kind of response and I wish you were cause I wish this was a dialogue but I'm just putting you in the place of other people I've talked to who are in a similar place on their food peace journey where they feel really addicted to food. Where, so many people have said, "Well, Julie, um I'm getting pleasure *all* the time with food because I am *always* eating it, I'm always thinking about it, always planning about it, and always eating it." And that's a really important point and I also think it's important to recognize that when you don't have *permission* for that pleasure, when you have the expectation that you must be reasonable, that's not really permission. I feel like that's still restrictive. I think that's still looking at it through a lens of "I'm being bad" if the pleasure is not also with permission. And I know that can seem nuanced, but I think it is a really important distinction.

So, as you're working towards making peace with food, because I hear that's what you want, I hear that you don't want food to be like your number one thought every second, and I am really wanting that for you too. I'm wanting food to have less power. I think part of it is really working towards that unconditional permission to eat. I say this because, remember, I don't think you're the one, letter writer, or anyone listening who can identify with this letter, I don't think you're broken. I don't think you need to be fixed. Nothing is broken because here's the thing, when our brain is exposed to restriction, whether it's through dieting, whether it's through famine, whether it's because we're on some deserted island somewhere, our brain reacts, and our body, reacts in the same way. It sends tons of messages to be occupied with food. It sends messages to keep thinking about it no matter what. And, as a person's body goes through restriction and then eating in a way that may feel like bingeing, or maybe is bingeing, it still doesn't take away the restriction and so restricting in itself keeps food preoccupation going. So, the only way that I've seen people be able to move through that food preoccupation is to honor when it's there and to give themselves permission to really, honestly have unconditional permission to eat. And also having compassion when you don't have that (*laughs*). I know it sounds kind of—a bit bonkers but part of the healing process is honoring when you're feeling that craving to eat reasonably or to restrict, to notice when that's happening because it's just a reflection of the healing process and living in our culture.

So, what that means from a big picture point of view, is to really be a lot easier on yourself. The more you can notice the judgement and trying to restate it in a way that's more compassionate, and honestly just noticing when the judgement happens, calling it out and almost kind of looking for it and saying, "Oh, there it is. I was looking for you," is a really powerful way to help like deneutralize it or just give it less power. And naming when something has too much power, is a way to take away it's steam, to like break it's back.

So, next time you feel just ah so exhausted with having to always think about food, and feeling like you're broken, I encourage you to pause and say, "I'm not broken. My brain and my body are helping me to stay alive because whenever there's a threat of deprivation, whenever there is deprivation, my body and my brain just want me to stay alive. And thinking about food and eating past fullness and feeling addicted is the way that my body is being a successful human. Period. Being preoccupied with food and feeling addicted to food is the way that my body has stayed alive when it's felt threatened."

So, if you could just stay with me for a few more seconds on this, I want to dig even deeper because I think there's this cultural expectation for so many of us that meeting our needs is a burden. And I got the sense of that reading your letter too. And when we think about meeting our needs as a burden, well there's not going to be much pleasure there and there's not going to be permission. So as you're trying to experience food and connect to it, and trying to heal your relationship with it with permission, remember that your needs are not a burden. They may feel overwhelming and I think that stems from a belief that we're too needy or that we could never

meet all of these needs. We will meet our needs. You're not too needy. You are enough the way you are and you will get to a place where you'll feel safer around food. And I think that will happen by redefining your expectations. What are your expectations with your relationship with food? What are your expectations with meeting your needs? Part of framing those expectations, I think needs to include the cultural bullshit that we have to live with. You know, we have to live in this world that really is promoting thin privilege. You know, people who are walking this Earth in lower weight bodies are considered to be more disciplined and um rewarded in a sense. Appreciating that and getting angry at that, instead of saying *I need to be fixed*, or *I'm too much*, putting that where it needs to be. This world and all that bullshit, that's what needs to be fixed. And it's not a way to necessarily fix it in the moment, but it's putting the anger and the burden where it belongs because the more it focuses on, for you letter writer, your own way of relating to food, and that addicted kind of feeling, putting the burden on you there, it's just going to keep you spinning your wheels and again like that video game character who's in the corner and still walking and not moving anywhere, it's keeping you there but if we throw it over to where it belongs, it doesn't necessarily fix it but at least it puts the energy where it belongs to go. You know, belongs to go is not probably the grammar I want to use (*laughs*) but it puts it where it really you know just needs to be because it's not about you. It's about really how our world has this messed up belief system and the more that you can reframe it, I think the more you'll have permission to be in your body. To be embodied. And experience pleasure that food brings and all the other pleasures we can experience with our body. And that brings satisfaction and when we frame it from a food addiction perspective, there's no way to meet that satisfaction. And, like you said, we live in a world where we need food to live. And it's really hard to frame food as addiction in that way. I really got to appreciate that better, I was um at an eating disorder symposium and got to hear Amy Pershing speak and she framed it as, "How can we be addicted to a substance that we need to stay alive?" And I encourage you to just let that sink in. How can we be addicted to this very substance that we *need* just to stay alive? And so, we need to go to birthday parties, we need to go to funerals, we need to go to celebrations and food is always going to be there. And I don't care what macronutrient is under the gun right now as the evil one, we need them all and they're all going to be here and they all should be here (*laughs*). So, reframing it as you're not the one that needs to be fixed. This world's belief on food is what needs to be fixed and let's put our heads together on how to do that.

If you would like to know more food addiction, food addiction science, if you want to get down to the nitty gritty of that, I encourage you to listen to Episode 70 of the Love, Food podcast. That's where I interviewed Marci Evans. She's a dietitian that lives in Cambridge, MA and is really, totally like in the food addiction research and really is um examining it and has taken her time with it and I think if you're yearning for more details on it, you'd really benefit from it. Those of you who are affected by Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, I know I talk a lot about PCOS on this podcast because it's one of my uh passion areas, one of the areas I specialize in, that's an area in particular that I feel *really* um enraged about the food addiction conversation because

there's a particular part of the physiology of PCOS that um increases insulin levels and other hormones that when food is restricted, whether it's just all food you know eating enough total energy or calories from food or carbohydrates or sugar, it will make that feeling of food addiction just even more intense and primal. It will definitely be at a level where we'll feel like an animal around a loaf of bread. And those of you with PCOS, I know you're totally nodding your head right now because for so many people with the high insulin levels associated with PCOS, that's what they're experiencing but they're told to cut out carbohydrates. And one thing that I always say, my like kind of battle cry with that is that carbohydrates are not PCOS enemy, fat phobia is. Because the more we fear higher weights, the more pressure people with PCOS are going to have to cut out foods, in general and the pleasure with food and carbohydrates and when someone has high circulating insulin like you do with PCOS and you just cut out carbohydrates, it's going to make a person really feel out of control and addicted to food. Really the primary treatment needs to be let's find a way to lower insulin without food. There are ways to do it with supplements, medication, stress management, there's so many things we can do and then see about sorting out food. And honestly when I help people find a way for them that helps them lower insulin, usually they find their own way to manage food that looks so much easier. It's much different than let's just cut something out, which honestly is torture. And you don't want to feel tortured (*laughs*) with food. It's not sustainable long-term. It's not health-promoting. And I feel like it's discriminatory. There are other ways. So, I see food has written back, letter writer. I hope these points have been helpful and I want to um extend just as much compassion as possible over a podcast and you're definitely not alone and I hope you can pivot and just look in a different direction for a little while and consider what it would be like if you no longer thought you needed to be fixed. That you didn't have this unreasonable relationship with food. That actually you're a successful human. And this whole world is the one that needs to be fixed.

This episode of the Love, Food podcast was brought to you by my PCOS and Food Peace course. You can get all the information—because enrollment is open now—by going to pcosandfoodpeace.com. If you enjoyed this episode of the Love, Food podcast, I would love it if you could leave a rating or review or share the episode or even subscribe. Doing any of these 4 acts of kindness helps the show grow and helps more people find the podcast and I think you fans for all of your support.

Alright, I see food has written back like I said. And writer, keep us posted on how things are going and until next time, take care.

Transition/Music Overlay

Dear Confused Lifelong Devotee,

How did this happen? How did this necessary requirement for staying alive get twisted into a character defect? Eating is like breathing. A crucial, physiological experience to stay alive. We think there is nothing wrong with you. You don't need to be fixed. Rather, the world and all its

fat phobia needs to get a clue. It's literally killing us and robbing us of connecting to joy. We encourage you to radically reject diet culture in any way you can. Practice compassionately nourishing yourself with pleasure and permission. Rather than an addict, you're a soul successfully living life.

Love,

Food

Thank you for listening. I am Julie Duffy Dillon and this is the Love, Food podcast. Do you want access to more food peace? Jump on over to my website and join my-mail list. There, I share exclusive content that I don't share anywhere else. Get access to these tips and strategies by going to juliedillonrd.com/signup, and I look forward to seeing you here next week for another episode of the Love, Food podcast. Take care.