

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger



The
Unstoppable
Mom Brain
podcast

LIVE LIGHTER
LOSE WEIGHT

Feel Unstoppable.

with
DR. PRIYANKA VENUGOPAL

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Priyanka Venugopal

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

Hey, this is Dr. Priyanka Venugopal and you're listening to *The Unstoppable Mom Brain Podcast*, Episode 80: Emotional Hunger.

I'm recording this episode in real time, which I'm going to share with you in just a moment. And this topic is such an important one: emotional hunger.

Emotional hunger feels like real physical hunger, but there are some important differences when you start to pay attention. Emotional hunger cannot be satisfied with food, unlike physical hunger... and trying to do so can create some serious heaviness for your body, all the while taking you farther from what you're deeply needing.

Let's get into it today.

If you want to reach your ideal weight and create lightness for your body, you need to have simplicity, joy, and strategic decisions infused into your life. I'm a physician turned life and weight loss coach for ambitious working moms. I've lost over 60 pounds without counting points, calories or crazy exercise plans. Most importantly, I feel calm and light on the scale and in my life. There's some delicious magic when you learn this work and the skills, I'm going to be teaching you.

Ready? Let's get to it.

Hey there. Welcome back.

I wanted to record this episode in real time while I was actually experiencing emotional hunger... like in the actual experience of it and really reflect on all of the lessons that I have learned over the past few years, in my experience with emotional hunger. As I'm deep in

the experience of emotional hunger right now and as I've been reflecting on it, I realize that for the past many weeks and months I have been on the go. There has been so much happening in my personal life and with my work and I think that what many of us have a tendency to do is to get into problem solving into creating solutions and sometimes just the act of doing that can really naturally force us to bulldoze over our emotional experiences.

And this might work from time to time for short periods of time, but what I have realized over the years and with my experience with emotional hunger is emotional hunger presents itself when we've been either ignoring or not bringing awareness or bulldozing, or really not allowing and processing certain emotional experiences.

Here's the very first thing that I have learned: emotional hunger feels very, very similar to physical hunger. So what's so important for all of us to really intimately get to know the difference.

Here are the differences that I have noticed. Physical hunger for me is much lower in my body. I notice it in my gut and my lower belly, and I can feel a certain kind of grumble when I actually get physically hungry. I have become intimately aware of the different levels of hunger in my body. I know what a whisper of hunger feels like, or when I have a real grumble ready to eat, or even when I get ravenously hungry.

I'm deeply aware of how my body physically feels and the sensations and cues she's giving me in real time when she wants to have food for fuel.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

And this has been incredibly important for me and really one of the most powerful tools that we have at our disposal all the time to lose weight or to maintain it with ease.

It's actually really one of the core reasons that I have it as a part of my free resource, The Power Start Weight Loss Guide, because really understanding and knowing how to engage with different levels of physical hunger is one of the most powerful things that you'll always have.

If you haven't yet gotten your free guide, I highly recommend that you go grab it at theunstoppablemombrian.com/power.

So physical hunger, we can get to know the different levels of sensations and really start to identify where in your body you start to feel it. The other difference that I have noticed with physical hunger is that she's fairly easily satisfied with food. She dissipates easily and she eventually goes away.

This is very, very different from the experience of emotional hunger. I experience emotional hunger, much higher in my body. So at the top of my stomach or gut, maybe, but a lot more in my chest and even up to my throat.

There is this empty, hollow, heavy sensation that lingers, and it has a texture of hunger. Like I truly feel like maybe I'm hungry. I notice this desire to eat, to try to fill it up and make it go away. But no matter how much I eat the sensation doesn't go away.

So that is emotional hunger.

I've had my personal fair share of experiences with both physical and emotional hunger and I would say that over the course of the past few years, I have really intimately gotten to understand what it is that emotional hunger visits us for in the first place.

So in my experience with emotional hunger and all of the things that I have tried, I will tell you that I have eaten a lot to try to fill that void-- and here's what I've discovered. The closest that I have come to feeling that hollow sensation is maybe just a few moments of respite.

And then the hollowness comes back.

Food cannot and does not ever solve it and it cannot actually fill that hollow sensation that I'm talking about. Trust me, I've tried.

And I share this on here because I want you to learn from some of these lessons and then come up with a plan for how you want to engage with emotional hunger whenever you experience it.

I'll say that for all of the times past that I've experienced emotional hunger and tried to use food to fill it, I have left the experience feeling physically, Ugh. like literally U-G-H... Ugh in my body. I feel seriously heavier in my gut, which sometimes lasts for days. I feel bloated and heavy and puffy.

What's worse in all of this is that the hollowness still remains.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

So I've been around the block a few times with emotional hunger, and I've tried to use food to fill what feels like a bottomless pit of emptiness and hollowness and what I can say is I have walked away from those experiences almost every time, gaining the most weight in the shortest amount of time.

And I mean like real weight gain.

So not just a sleepless weekend or maybe a salty meal, or maybe you are ovulating and you're up a couple of pounds. I mean, real weight gain, like multiple pounds over a weekend from overeating in an attempt to fill emotional hunger.

The other thing that I've learned, and this is a tougher lesson that's taken me a while, is that really emotional hunger can sometimes linger. Sure, she may be around for just a few hours.... And when you become practiced at catching her and paying her the attention that she needs, she might dissipate.

But often, and maybe more often than not my experience is that sometimes she comes to visit and can last for a few days-- depending on how much I've been ignoring, blocking, bulldozing over my emotions and depending on how much emotions have built up, I would say that the amount of time that she lingers is fairly equally correlated.

Now there is no magic formula to know how long is emotional hunger going to last?

Is it going to be a few hours? Is it going to be a few days?

We just don't know and that's okay.

But there also doesn't need to be any suffering or drama or worry around the experience of emotional hunger... And that's really what this episode is all about.

We want to understand from a sensation perspective, what it feels like in your body.

To understand that she is there for a reason.

And then take tangible steps to giving her what she needs so that she can dissipate.

Here's the thing-- emotional hunger will visit from time to time and she does not feel so great and that's okay. She will visit you as you lose weight. She will visit you when you reach your dream, ideal weight and nothing is going wrong. So there's never a reason to try to outrun her, or try to solve her, or try to bulldoze her.

What we want to do and what this episode is dedicated to doing is to understand her.

To catch that sensation with compassion and not leave yourself in the experience, both heavier and hollow at the same time. I've noticed that when emotional hunger visits me, it's usually when I've experienced some sadness, some worry, some anxiety, some nervousness, kind of all at the same time.

And I have, because I'm just a go- doer. I have bulldozed over those feelings.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

Maybe I only gave them some fleeting attention or maybe I sat with them for a few moments and they dissipated and so I didn't give them any more attention than that.

Maybe I tried to solve them or troubleshoot them.

Ultimately in some way, shape or form I blocked or resisted them and I might not have even realized that I was doing it at the time. Somehow when I resist any of these emotions for any length of time, after a while, emotional hunger will come knocking on my door. It's like, because I am a problem solving ninja and I anticipate all of you are too we are like the doing and moving masters, these emotions for many of us just get ignored because we're not used to having the practice of really paying them attention.

We're going all the time because we're busy working mom.

And I'm able to maintain this until at some point we start to experience overwhelm. I think that for me, what I've noticed is that overwhelm comes in so many flavors.

There could be just an overwhelm of tasks.

There could be overthinking, which is something I'm extremely guilty of doing.

There could be an overwhelm of things to do, and an overwhelm of the goals that you have set. For me, it could also be an overwhelm of many emotions at the same.

It's like when we spend a lot of our time thinking a lot about yesterday's and tomorrow's, and when we have that experience, we start to ruminate about yesterday and worry about tomorrow. It's like a deluge of emotions starts to overtake us. It's like one of those, you know, those rubber band balls or like a ball of yarn. It's like all of [00:11:00] these rubber bands kind of scrunched up and mixed up together that we haven't really been paying attention to.

And eventually the rubber band ball is like, we need to pay some attention.

I want you to think about what emotional hunger is like for you?

What is the experience that you have in your body?

And just like The Power Start Guide walks you through the steps of understanding physical hunger, I want you to take a few moments here to get familiar and almost a scientific and describe what emotional hunger feels like in your body.

So for me, it feels like a heaviness and a hollowness in my chest, my upper gut it goes up to my throat and it doesn't get satisfied with food. I've noticed whenever I experience emotional hunger, I rarely actually feel hungry in my lower gut, in my stomach at all. So our very first piece together is to just understand and recognize the difference.

This brings me really to this very first step is just naming it and noticing it and observing it is going to give you space to really take action on the next few steps that we're going to talk about.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

And then the next piece of this is to give yourself permission to do whatever you want.

I know, I can't believe I'm even saying this, but I'm saying it.

If you want to go to town through the pantry, in your fridge, on all of food, give yourself permission and own it. Don't judge or shame or blame yourself.

But you can also equally give yourself permission to not use food, to fill that hollow void because food can never actually fill it.

What I would say on this episode and between you and me is that choosing the latter is possible and it comes with practice. And choosing the latter is what has allowed me to free myself of emotional hunger faster and lighter.

Now, have you asked me "Priyanka,? So how did you actually start to piece this together to learn the steps and to understand how to overcome emotional hunger?" My most simple answer would honestly be Coaching.

Now, coaching doesn't take away sadness or worry or anxiety or nervousness, but it does give you the tools to more masterfully, navigate your human experience of them.

To unpack those emotions, to take that rubber band ball and pull out one rubber band at a time. And then to allow yourself being present in the moment to navigate what you want your experience to be.

This last time that I took this pause, caught myself in the bag of M & Ms, and sat down and really asked myself, Hey, what's going on?

So much started to come up when I started writing on what it was that was creating my experience and how much I have been trying to muscle and hustle myself through over the past few weeks and months when it comes to this move in my personal life.

This in itself is a start of a self coaching practice.

It starts with the very first tool that I taught you in episode one: the narrator tool, a simple question, which starts with, "what am I telling myself that is making me feel this way?"

And this question for me has. Been incredibly powerful to answer the practice of self coaching or being coached is what has leveled up my awareness and observation so I can see where I'm blocking myself or where I'm feeling resistant to an emotional experience. And then just the process of being coached or self coached creates a small shift.... and honestly, sometimes it is just that small shift that my emotional hunger needs to be satisfied.

Sometimes though that is not enough.

And this is what brings me to the next piece of what I have discovered and decided to really engage with my own emotional hunger around.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

Know when it's okay to take a break.

Like actually take a rest from your goals.

For example, with weight loss. Sure, you want to reach your ideal weight and you're in the car and you're driving to the Land of Forever Weight Loss. I want you to imagine that you get free rain to really decide when you want to stop for gas, or if you're driving electric, when you want to take a pit stop. Knowing that you are in a state of emotional hunger, and you want to just take a pause means deciding that you can also pause on losing weight.

And this doesn't also mean that you go start eating all the things, right?

Taking a pit stop means that you can just maintain.

Practice being with yourself and befriending yourself in that emotional experience. Similar to what we discussed in episode 12. I find that when we are experiencing emotional hunger and we add on a really big goal, like losing weight, sometimes the goal backfires and I think that it's the perfect time. It's our body trying to slow us down to teach us. "Hey, we need a pit stop."

So I want you to think about what it would feel like for you to take a break, to slow down and to take a pit stop. You aren't going backwards, you aren't throwing anything away and you don't have to gain any of the weight back. Just pause and maintain for as long as you choose.

And just giving yourself this permission to take a rest, to take a pit stop might be enough.

It might be just enough where the emotional hunger and your body feels heard and listened to.

Sometimes though we need more and this pause and pit stop, and this agreement with ourselves isn't enough to satisfy emotional hunger.

So today what I want to invite you to do is to join me in making a personal self soothing plan whenever you notice yourself experiencing emotional hunger. The very first thing that we've already talked about on this episode is to Pause.

And the next thing I want to bring your attention to is to bring yourself to this present moment. I find it overwhelm of emotions and having that rubber band ball of emotions, which often leads to emotional hunger is because we are so occupied by, like a deluge of thoughts ruminating about yesterday and worrying about tomorrow. Sometimes it takes us completely out of the present moment, which can be the very first step to simplifying that rubber band ball to one simple rubber band.

So now we've noticed that we are in emotional hunger.

We've named it.

We've taken a pause...

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

and we've brought ourselves to this present moment.

And now we get to implement a self soothing plan.

I like to categorize self soothing techniques as actions that we can take to relax our nervous [00:18:00] system and to really allow and help emotions, move through our body more simply.

And really to give our body a break.

I like to break up self soothing techniques in into three categories.

Category 1: is self soothing techniques that have a net negative outcome.

Category 2: are self soothing techniques that have a net neutral outcome

Category 3: are self soothing techniques that have a net positive outcome.

I recommend moving forward that you bolster up and fill out your net positive or net neutral soothing techniques that you can easily refer to like tools in a toolbox. I would say that eating food and drinking alcohol is absolutely a soothing technique, but more often than not, it has a net negative outcome.

First of all, it doesn't actually help you move the emotion through your body. It never really helps you uncover why you're feeling, what you're feeling. In fact, it [00:19:00] actually creates more heaviness for your gut, your body feels bloated and puffy, and it takes you no closer to resolution. And not only does it not help any emotions move through your body or help you uncover why you're feeling this way, it often interferes with other activities and it takes you farther from your dream goals.

So this is what I would categorize as a net negative, which eating and drinking alcohol falls squarely in.

The next category is net neutral. So for me, this might look like bingeing on Netflix or watching a movie or scrolling my phone. In certain quantities, these activities don't create net negatives, but it also doesn't allow or help emotions move through my body. It doesn't get me closer to resolution, but since it doesn't take me farther from my weight loss goals, farther from any dream goals I have, or interfere with any actual activities it's considered a neutral activity.

Now, if you find any of these activities like bingeing on Netflix or scrolling your phone, starting to interfere with your day to day life, it starts to become a net negative.

My last category, and this is the category that I recommend you spend the most amount of time on is a category that also creates net positives.

This could be a good cry.

It could be more sleep.

Meditation.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

Journaling, or writing.

Walking, and getting outdoors.

Movement, dancing, even jumping.

Listening to music.

Talking, calling a friend, laughing.

Getting coached.

These actions I think of as net positives, because they allow more movement of energy and emotions through your body. They bring you to the present moment and they bring you closer to awareness of what is actually creating your experience. The thing is that all of these emotions, the rubber band ball of emotions that we are experiencing, like sadness and worry and anxiety and nervousness, they don't need to linger in our body.

They want to move through us like any vibration that we are experiencing.

But sometimes they require our attention and they require us to move the blockages out of the way. I think we spend a lot of time and I know I'm absolutely guilty of this, of not wanting to feel sad, not wanting to worry, not wanting to feel nervous that we actually create resistance to allowing these emotions to just flow through us.

And honestly, it takes us out of the present moment.

Of course, we spend so much of our time not wanting to feel a certain way, thinking about the past or worrying about the future it adds a tremendous amount of emotion. Of course, it's overwhelming.

The solve for this is really to simplify.

To name it and to notice it, to pause, to bring yourself to this moment in time... to this emotion, and then utilize a soothing technique that creates a net positive outcome. And all of this is so much more manageable to do when we bring ourselves to this present moment.

So, whether it's coaching or writing or meditation or dancing or talking, or being outside in the sun, give yourself some compassionate recognition and pause long enough in the pit stop.

Pause long enough on the food.

Of course you could eat, or you could equally just not.

Make an agreement with yourself when you notice that you are in an experience of emotional hunger to actually journal for just a few moments. And to purposefully allow those emotions to flow through you and start to choose a self soothing technique that creates a net neutral or a net positive outcome.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

Most recently, as I am in my own experience of emotional hunger, I was at Rita's Italian ice with my son, and I could feel just the rubber band ball of emotions because I had that hollowness in my chest, the heaviness, the feeling up in my throat and I could feel that it was a mix of many emotions with the worry and the nervousness and the anxiety and the overwhelm and it's a sensation that I've become intimately aware of that I could just catch myself being in it.

And very reflexively I wanted to fill it with food. I thought as my son was ordering what he wanted. I thought about ordering the custard with my favorite topping of Oreos mixed in. And honestly, I almost did.

But then I thought about these steps that I am sharing with you here.

I paused, I stepped back for a moment while my son ordered his ice.

I brought myself to this moment in time and I remembered, wait, food, can't solve this.

It's a soothing net negative.

And somehow in that moment, the sun started shining strongly on my back, like the universe knew I wanted a hug and it reminded me-- oh, yes. I just wanted to be soothed.

Pausing in this warm sun was also really good, and I could choose this net positive action instead.

It didn't create the heavy gut, the bloated and puffy experience I always get from overeating. Oh, I could choose this net positive, soothing technique of being outdoors, walking outside and feeling the sun on my back and honestly, when I paused here long enough, that hollow feeling didn't feel so intense.

And I got to just prove to myself that I didn't actually need the food and on reflection, it wasn't hard at all.... and here's what supports all of these actions that I'm sharing with you.

Coaching.

Ultimately until I uncover what it is that I'm thinking, that's creating my emotional experience and the beliefs that I'm having I'll continue to repeat my emotional experience again and again. So really the final piece or the foundation of the work that I'm sharing with you is coaching and having a coach that can support you.

Now this practice that I'm sharing with you may not work the first time or the second or the third, because what I'm sharing with you feels kind of complicated.

Pausing, bringing yourself to the present moment, reminding yourself that food is a net negative soother, choosing a net neutral or net positive soothing plan, reflecting on what's creating your experience and getting coached.

And then repeating that again and again, it feels like a lot, and this is where I want to share my car driving example.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

When you learn to drive your car for the very first time, there's so many steps you have to take, you have to get in the car and then you have to put your seatbelt on, then check all the mirrors and then depending on like what year your car is from, you have to put the key in the ignition, or maybe you push a button now, then you look around, make sure that the other passengers in the car maybe have their seatbelts on and like the baby's buckled in and then maybe wanna put the air conditioning on or the heat... and then you look around, make sure there's no cars driving and then you take your foot gently off the brake and onto the gas.

And maybe it's a little bit bumping in the beginning.

You know, just side note. The funniest thing when I was a kid, is I intellectually thought because I had watched adults drive a million times that like I could just get in the car and do it.

And this happened until I actually got in the car and I actually tried it.... and let me tell you, the first few rides were quite bumpy.

But then I did it daily. I got in the car, I put my seatbelt on. I checked my mirrors looked around and eventually it got to the point where we get in the car and we just drive. That is the same of all of the processes that I teach you here on this podcast.

Intellectually, these concepts make a lot of sense and you get to start taking these steps and practicing them right now. But what I would say is the actual implementation also really is founded in you uncovering the thoughts that are creating your emotional experience to begin. Taking rubber band by rubber band off that rubber band ball and getting coached. And that's what brings all these pieces together so that you get to the point where you can jump in your car and go off on your ride.

I mentioned at the start of this episode that I wanted to wait to record an episode on emotional hunger until I was in it. And, oh, let me tell you, I have been in it. The peanut M & Ms were out, but I also realized just in pausing and not using food to fill the hollow and reflecting and getting coached that I have really been on the go these past few weeks, and really these past few months getting so much done.

Moving from our home, which felt sad and bittersweet and thinking about my kids starting school soon, and a twinge of worry and how they're going to transition and living my currently nomadic life with no clear moving dates. ,

I had a little bit of all of it in my own rubber band ball.

Sad, worried, nervous.... And it felt like a truck of emotions that I had been kind of bulldozing over solving and problem solving and not paying much attention to.

That's all. Seriously, this work that we are doing coaching is understanding your brilliant brain more deeply and it's everything.

This brings me to a special invitation to you, to The Unstoppable Group, which is my signature coaching program for working moms who want to reach their ideal weight and really live a lighter life permanently.

It's an intimate room and I'm your coach.

Ep #80: How to Handle Emotional Hunger

This is a room of truly amazing women who want and care about the same things, where you're surrounded by other working moms who have similar goals and I think that the energy of this room is infectious and naturally adds a fire to your own commitment.

We take the intellectual concepts that you have been learning here, and we commit to real life implementation over six months together.

You can get all of the details and even join the early access list over at theunstoppablemombrain.com/group. There's even a button there that you can click to join the early access list and you'll be the very first to have access to claim your spot in this coaching container.

I hope that today's deeper dive and exploration into emotional hunger was helpful.

It's taking some of what we've discussed back in episodes 11 and 12 around emotions and eating and overeating and taking it to a deeper layer that I thought was incredibly valuable for you to learn about.

I know that I have had my fair share of experiences with emotional hunger and what I wanted to share with you is that experiencing emotional hunger doesn't have to be a problem, it doesn't have to be dramatic ever again.

It can just be a sensation that comes to visit you every now and then as a gentle reminder.

Pay attention, there's something here that we are bulldozing over.

I love you all my friends-- I hope you let the sun hug you well today.

I'll see you next week.

I am so excited for you to bring this into your life and start implementing some of these tools today. I'll see you next week.

Thanks for listening to *The Unstoppable Mom Brain Podcast*. It's been an honor spending this time with you and your brilliant brain. If you want more information or resources from the show, visit theunstoppablemombrain.com.