

Ep #90: Belonging, The Holidays, and Weight Loss



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Mom Brain
podcast

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with
DR. PRIYANKA VENUGOPAL

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With Your Host

Priyanka Venugopal

Ep #90: Belonging, The Holidays, and Weight Loss

Hey, this is Dr. Priyanka Venugopal and you're listening to the Unstoppable Mom Brain Podcast, all about belonging and the holidays. I'm raking back this episode that I initially aired last year, all about belonging and the holidays. I share some of my stories from my own youth around how important it was for me as a young person, and I think for so many of us to fit in and belong in all of our social gatherings, particularly during the holiday season. What I have found when we're not aware of it, when we're not really paying attention to that desire to belong, sometimes we will find ourselves making decisions to eat and drink in a way that we actually don't want to be doing. And unfortunately, we start undoing our results on the scale. This episode is intended to really just plant a seed for you to think about the holidays, social events, gatherings, a little bit differently. I'm not here to take away that desire to belong. I think it's so normal for us to all have it. And what I'm here to do is to help you navigate that feeling that you have, the feeling that you desire while also eating and drinking in a way that you will feel so good about that you won't regret on January 1st. The worst reason in my experience to eat and drink in a way that you don't actually want is because you have a fear of missing out, or you're worried about looking awkward or being different than the crowd. I'm here to help high achieving working moms really feel powerful in how they show up this holiday season in any social gathering at any holiday event, while feeling like you're having connection and fun and relaxation with your friends and family, but also honoring your dream body goal.

And before I get into the episode, I want to make sure that, you know, about my upcoming webinar that is happening in just a couple of weeks, 'The 3 Proven Steps to Weight Loss Success in 2024' is happening on Thursday, January 4th, I'm going to be teaching you my proven three step formula. It's science backed strategies where I'm going to be teaching you exactly what you need to do to create your custom road map for you to lose the weight that you want to lose. It is happening at 12 PM Eastern on the 4th. Mark your calendars now because, listen, we know how it gets. Life gets busy. We are busy working moms. So don't put this off for later. Sign up now. You can grab your seat over at theunstoppablenombrain.com/webinar, and I will email you all of the details. Make sure you check your inbox and you'll get all the details there and mark your calendars now, block the hour out, it is so much more fun to come live to these webinars because we get to actually interact with each other. You can ask me any questions that you have, any thoughts that you're having, and nothing is too big or too small for me to address. And I love doing that. Also right after the webinar, the *Unstoppable* group is going to be opening for enrollment. This is my six month intimate small group coaching program for high achieving working moms who want to lose weight with science backed strategies and feel confident in maintenance. This is going to be such a great opportunity for you in 2024. I'm here to support you every step of the way.

Let's get into today's episode. 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. I actually want to start with a little story time. I had this very, very specific memory come up last weekend when I was visiting New Jersey where we were having Thanksgiving weekend with my family and I was on a drive about to visit one of my friends. We're going to catch up from high school and I had this very vivid memory come up that I really wanted to share with you and it kind of sparked the whole episode that I'm sharing with you today, which is that feeling of belonging and connection and love that you want to experience with our family, our friends and our loved ones during the holidays.

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I really wanted to share the specific memory with you. Let me bring you back to my youth from a time when I was about nine years old. I distinctly remember it was fourth grade and, and hold on, wait, let me actually back up even further because even before me telling you the story, you need to know a little bit more background about me. My parents are from India and from the ages of zero to four, my parents only spoke to me in Hindi, which means when I started preschool, I did not speak English. I started preschool and there was one teacher who was of Indian origin and she spoke Hindi. She was able to help me out. But I remember so distinctly having so many feelings and memories where I felt other, I felt a little different, I felt a little excluded. And I remember this very common experience for me from a very, very young age, that I just wanted to fit in and belong. I wanted to fit in and belong with the other girls in my class. And I remember around that time, this is now when I was four years old, I started to learn English. The teacher told my parents, like, you need to talk to her in English so she can learn the language. So, of course, I started learning English. But honestly, being of Indian origin at this point in my life meant that despite me learning still had many things that were different about me compared to most of my friends in school. So I started speaking English, but the music that we listened to at home was totally different. At home, we were playing Bollywood soundtracks and the food that I ate at home and the food that I used to bring into school was totally different than the food that my friends would eat and the food that they would bring to the cafeteria. I still remember my mom would send me to school with these coriander chutney sandwiches. I'm laughing at this memory. I mean, it's funny right now, but it was definitely not funny then. Coriander chutney, if you're not familiar, it's like a green kind of gritty textured chutney that you put on the sandwich. I want you to really think about if you were not familiar as a child, if you were not familiar with what green coriander chutney was, and you saw a kid eating a chutney sandwich, what you would think of that. I mean, I can like look back with some compassion right now, but at the time I was made fun of, like kids would look at me and be like, Priyanka, what is that green stuff on your sandwich? That's so gross. Ew. Now. I don't really think that children at that age are trying to be malicious. I mean, this is just the thought that I choose. I don't think that they were trying to be malicious, but I was just different. And I remember at that time in my life, particularly during this green chutney sandwich fiasco, I felt so embarrassed and I felt separated and I felt this need to defend it. I felt this need to defend myself and who I was while at the same time desiring to belong. It was a very, very confusing time for me because I enjoyed chutney sandwiches, but I also did not enjoy being other. I still remember I convinced my mom to start sending me to school with PB&Js, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, simply for this reason, because I wanted to belong with my fourth grade class.

So back to fourth grade, I still remember in fourth grade, We had this assignment where we had to get into groups and we had to put together a little mini dance performance to a popular song. I cannot even remember what the reason was, like what was the class that this was even an assignment, but I distinctly remember we were told that we had to create a performance. And here's the thing, in fourth grade, this is the era of the early 90s, Mariah Carey was all the rage. And I want to just tell you, I, at this point, when this assignment first came out, I had no idea who Mariah Carey was. Guys, I had no idea who Mariah Carey was. I had no idea what Dream Lover was. Like, none of it. I had no idea. Now, I want to tell you part of the dread that I had in this assignment is I hated having to pick our own groups. Do you guys remember from back in the day when you got assigned on the teams? Like, You were being picked at gym for like being on a soccer team or you had to get picked into groups. And maybe, maybe if you were like me, you didn't get picked anywhere in the first or the middle of the class. I was a kid, and at least this is my memory, where I always felt like I got picked last. And so one of the things that I dreaded is if I heard a teacher saying, get into groups or pair up with a friend, I remember feeling such dread because I would look around and just feel like I had no group to go to.

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Thankfully, in this specific example, the teacher assigned groups and I remember I had the sweetest girl in my group. Her name was Jill. So Jill, if you're listening from fourth grade, you were so kind. Thank you for not making fun of my chutney sandwiches. But back to our story, we got assigned and Mariah Carey was our assigned song. Her hit, Dream Lover. Guys, I felt so completely out of place because as I just shared, I did not know who Mariah Carey was. I didn't know any American dance moves. Now, if you had sprung on a Bollywood song, you would see me bust out all the dance moves. But a popular American song, popular American music was such a no. And at this point in my life, I just felt very uncomfortable. If I can go back in time. And really think about how I was feeling at that time, I just remember feeling uncomfortable and at the same time desiring connection and belonging with my peers. And here's what I want to share with you and why this memory is even relevant to this episode because it feels kind of like a tangent story around chutney sandwiches and Mariah Carey in the fourth grade. But I want to tell you that desire to belong The desire to fit in, the desire to be like the people that you're around is normal. And I wanted my Bollywood loving self and my chutney sandwiches to somehow mesh in with this Mariah Carey culture. And the only way at that time in my life that I knew how to do this was somehow to conform. And so what I started to do at a very young age is not really pay attention to what I loved. And I stopped paying attention to what I wanted and instead became very focused and very good at thinking about and paying attention to what other people loved and wanted. How much do we all do this? I think this is especially true for women where we stop really paying attention to what we love and what we want, but we become very skilled and really good at focusing on the wants and the desires of others.

I still remember after this Mariah Carey fiasco happened at school, I went home and my dad, who was just the sweetest, sweetest dad, took me to a local store, it was called Jamesway, and he took me there so that I could get the A track tape for Mariah Carey. Now, it just so happened that I fell in love with Mariah Carey and I'm literally obsessed with her album, the same album to this day. But the point of the story and the reason that I'm sharing this experience with you is I want to show you how strong my desire to belong was. And this desire to belong drove me to not pay as much attention to what I loved and what I wanted, but really more to focus on what was happening around me. Here's the thing, this starts when you are just a few years old. You can probably think back just like I did to your earliest memories where you wanted to fit in. Maybe with some friends, maybe at school or on a playdate, maybe even with your own family. And here's the other layer of this that kind of makes it hard for us to recognize until we become really conscious of this. Belonging and conforming is reinforced by our society, our parents, our teachers, the people that raise us. They give us accolades and they reward us and celebrate us and give us thumbs up and good jobs for "getting along" with others. And I'm going to put getting along in quotes because I think that what we're talking about today is not just being kind to someone. It's getting along with someone at the expense of ignoring your own wants and needs. Somewhere along the way and somewhere along this journey, our personal identities somehow become diminished or blurred. And we learn in our youngest years that we should strive to belong and conform. But here's the trouble. What might have been a great skill for us? To learn at this young age to conform and belong in a classroom setting isn't a skill that is serving you now when it comes to your adult life. So while it worked then, I want you to know that it might not work so well for you anymore. And here's how you can tell, here's how you can know if that desire to conform and belong isn't working for you anymore.

I want to ask you a few questions and I want you to think about what comes up for you. Do you feel uncomfortable being your most authentic self? Do you feel uncomfortable asking for what you really want? Do you focus more on what other people will think as you're trying to figure out what you want? Do you find

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yourself saying yes to things that you want to say no to? Do you focus first on what other people want or what other people will think and only then consider what you want? Do you find yourself changing parts of you, your behaviors, your mannerisms, your thoughts, and your feelings to fit in with a group of friends or colleagues? If you heard yourself saying, yes, I want you to just know that there's an impact to doing this again and again and again, and it's absolutely going to impact weight loss. I want you to really think about the impact of feeling uncomfortable being authentically you. What's the impact of you saying yes to things that you want to be saying no to? What's the impact of focusing on what other people will think or what they want before you think about your own? Really think about the impact of this. And what I have found in my own personal journey and in my own lived experience is, as it starts to shut down the real you. You end up overworking over committing and eventually feel such fatigue and resentment and then confusion and why it is that you're feeling so shut down. I have coached so many women who have uncovered that they have been making food decisions for years and years of their life, just because of how other people are eating in social settings. They'll eat past comfort. They'll eat foods that they don't even like simply because other people are eating it. Listen, if you've done this, I want you to know that it makes sense that you have, and we never have to make you wrong for having experienced this. But here on this episode, we are getting to uncover that we have this natural desire to belong with our peers, our friends, our family, our colleagues.

And all that has happened is that we have intertwined food with it. Because belonging and food are deeply connected in our culture and they are definitely connected in special occasions like holidays. Let me just say that again. So far in this episode, I've been talking to you about how we have this deep, intimate desire to belong, but the reason that this is a problem is because we have deeply connected belonging and the way we eat. They're intertwined. Just think about Halloween and Thanksgiving and every winter religious holiday. And not just the holidays between Halloween and New Year's Day. I mean every holiday. Any special occasion like a birthday or a special three day weekend are marked by special foods. We gather together and we dine together. Now this wouldn't be a problem at all if we separated our desire to belong and connect from the way we ate, which is the whole intention of today's episode. I want you to know that you've just had years and decades of not having done this. I mean, my chutney example, while small, is a potent example. As a kid, I felt ridiculed and separated for having a different food choice. My food looked different and the way that I ate was different. I want you to think about how that translates to your adult life right now and how you eat during the holiday or during any special occasion. So let's break this down together. The thing that we really want is to not overeat. The thing that we really want is to reach our ideal weight. The thing that we really want is to never eat past comfort ever. Let me just say that again. We never ever really want to overeat. So why is it that high achieving, brilliant working moms ever go against this? It's because we have intertwined eating with belonging. So what now, what do we do now that we know this information? We are not doomed. Okay. So what I want you to first ask yourself is how is it that you actually want to feel if you did belong? For me, if I could go back to that nine year old version of me and if I asked myself this question, if we just imagined that you did belong with all those girls in the class, if you did belong, how do you imagine you would feel? And for me, the most powerful emotion that comes up is acceptance and connection. I want you to really think about how putting food in your mouth actually has nothing to do with creating that emotional experience. The way that you want to feel this holiday season or at that next special event is acceptance, connection, and maybe love. And putting food in your mouth is just a totally separate thing. Let's just really think about this between two humans or two groups of people your friends your family your peers or your colleagues, feeling acceptance connection and even love, comes from your thoughts, your thoughts about them and your thoughts about you with them. And the same is true for them. What if we could give ourselves complete permission to completely unravel food from that emotional experience and made them totally separate things? And then you got to choose. You got to choose the way you ate in a way that felt good for you. You got to eat foods that you

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actually liked. You got to eat when you're hungry and stop when you're not. And instead of trying to store specialness through overeating, which never works, you actually instead focused on creating specialness and connection in other ways. Seriously, so many of my clients tell me that they're able to be so much more present in their conversations, so much more engaged with their friends and their families. They can actually enjoy stories and be genuinely interested in what is happening because their brains are not so focused on the food. I call this real food freedom. And so here's the intention of today's episode. I want you to know that the holidays are a substantial portion of the year. So it's really important to not think about losing weight when it's not the holidays, because if you really count it up, you really saw how many days of the year is considered a holiday. It is quite a lot. Writing off the holidays will not work if you want to reach your ideal weight permanently. So a much more powerful exercise is to ask yourself, how would you want to engage with yourself and your friends and your family during the holidays in a way that had nothing to do with how you lost weight? I think that sometimes we're under this limiting belief that we have to agree with the people that we're around to connect with them or feel belonging. Like if somebody is holding a glass of wine, then I need to hold a glass of wine. Or if somebody is holding a piece of pie, then I should have a piece of pie. And I think that we get kind of under this limiting belief that we have to be doing the same things or agreeing on the same things to connect or feel belonging with each other. And that's just not true. I mean, think about how limiting that is and how boring that would be if we were all the same. If we were all the same, if we all acted the same and ate the same and said the same things, how boring would that be?

First of all, the world would be completely deprived of you being your authentic self, but how boring would that be for you? I want you to really imagine that it's possible for you to be your most authentic self, for you to discover your own opinions and your own wants, and to give it serious significance, and then act on them first before you start filtering through what other people might think about how you're eating. I think that this is a foreign concept because we've been so afraid to even consider any of this because we've been afraid of not belonging or being judged, being other than the group. I want you to really think about the worst case scenario. I want you to imagine that you get to a holiday and let's just say that you say no to a cookie platter and maybe someone looks at you with a little eye roll and says, Oh, great. You're on that diet again. Listen, there are going to be people like that in your life. They're going to be people that look at you saying no to a cookie platter or no to the second glass of wine that will roll their eyes at you. It's true. They're going to look at how you make your decisions and they're going to have thoughts laced in judgment about you. But here's what I want to tell you. That is about them. And it has nothing to do with you, which is seriously the most liberating realization that will set you up for so much success and freedom this holiday season. Do you really want to let someone that rolls their eyes at you saying no to a cookie to dictate how you eat the cookie? No! Let me tell you, if we just knew. If we knew that we were never actually alone, that we actually do belong with our people, that we couldn't actually be cast out, and that what we cared for, what we wanted, actually mattered, what would be the impact of that for you? Now, I want you to know that doing this and recognizing this does mean change. You might notice that friendships or relationships change as you do this work, and I want you to know that it might feel hard at times. And also, I want you to know that it will be the best thing ever. This was hard for me because I always had thought of myself as the yay saying people pleaser that struggled with being different than the crowd.

You remember my story from fourth grade and the chutney sandwich. I mean, come on. I have this chronic desire to belong. I still notice it to this day. We don't ever have to make ourselves wrong for that anymore. We don't have to make our desire to belong or to conform or to go along with the person that's rolling their eyes at

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us wrong anymore. Now all you have to do is just notice it, normalize it, and validate it. Because you've had years of programming that has literally applauded you for really conforming to the needs of others. And in that moment, there's a moment of discomfort to challenge it. But here's what I want you to know. There's the discomfort in choosing yourself, in choosing your goal, in choosing what you really want, and then there's also the discomfort of conforming and not being authentically you. I'm always talking about how there's all the roads and they all have some discomfort. So instead of avoiding discomfort, what if we expanded our capacity to feel uncomfortable and then you chose the road that got you closer to where you want it to be? This is literally the work that I'm doing with my clients inside the *Unstoppable* group. And I want you to know that reaching your ideal weight isn't just about the food. We discuss specific plans and strategies on day one. We talk about the holidays and vacations and birthdays and our typical working mom life. But more important than that perfect plan on paper is how you're going to engage with that plan and yourself as you implement it. This is why coaching is such a critical element of what we do together. We're talking about time, work, bosses, relationships, kids, worry, everything, and how your perspective about your life and all of the pieces in it are what drive you to show up with yourself.

This holiday season, here is what I want to leave you with. It is normal that you have wanted to belong and feel accepted. It's normal that you have wanted it because it has been hardwired into you since you were your youngest, youngest years. And it's normal that you have tied that, your desire to belong and feel accepted with how you eat. You've been trying to store specialness and you've been allowing the eye rollers to dictate how you eat. But here's what I also want to tell you. It just doesn't work if you also want to reach your ideal weight with calm ease. And here's the biggest reminder, overeating isn't actually pleasurable. Forget the scale. Your body doesn't actually love it. So instead of focusing on what it would be like to belong with others and fit in and be accepted by others, I want you to just take a moment to think about what it would be like for you to just be comfortable with being authentically you. Saying yes to what you really wanted and no to the rest. It is incredibly freeing, friends, to know that you can eat the way you choose and it can be its own thing. And then you can go separately and connect and belong with your loved ones. I promise you this holiday season, when we start to separate food from our desire to belong and accept and feel loved, we start to skyrocket our weight loss goals. One of the biggest things that we get to do is we get to avoid the usual weight gain simply in applying this one tool. I hope you enjoyed today's episode around belonging and the holidays and my chutney sandwich stories. I know it seemed like a little bit of a tangent, but I really wanted to paint the picture of how normal it is from such a young age of our desire to not be different than everyone else. This is so normal. And also I think it's so possible for us to have that, for us to recognize it and have it not ever get in the way of you hitting your dream body goals. I'm here on a mission to help high achieving working moms lose the weight they want and feel confident in maintenance. And that means navigating social scenarios and social gatherings with other people powerfully.

You can take the first step in really implementing what we're talking about. By joining me on my upcoming webinar, 'The 3 Proven Steps to Weight Loss Success in 2024', it's happening on January 4th, on Thursday at 12 PM Eastern, you can grab your seat over at theunstoppablenombrain.com/webinar. I will send you all the details to your email inbox, and it is going to be so much fun. I hope you guys have an amazing week. Bye. 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 resources or information from the show, head on over to theunstoppablenombrain.com.