



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 112 – What is Emotional Eating with Hannah Whitcombe
February 9, 2022

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[0:00:30] Kathy: Welcome to The Athena Wellness Podcast. The show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach, and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

Hello and welcome to Episode 112. Thanks so much for joining me for the shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

Today I'm joined, once again, by Hannah Whitcombe, an osteopath, certified nutritionist and weight loss coach. During this discussion, Hannah shares some insight into what emotional eating is and how to take steps to manage it.

And now onto the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

[00:01:04] Kathy: Once again, I'm joined by osteopath and nutritionist, Hannah Whitcombe. Welcome back, Hannah.

[00:01:10] Hannah: Thank you so much. It's nice to be back.

[00:01:13] Kathy: In our last conversation we were talking a little bit about some of the psychology around eating and I'd love to get your thoughts on emotional eating. What is it and how does it develop?



[00:01:25] Hannah: Okay. Emotional eating in a broad sense is eating outside of hunger. Let's start with a really loose definition.

I think we most often associate emotional eating with sadness and I think that's the most common reason for emotional eating. However, I would like to say that emotional eating is eating in response to anything that's not hunger, so it could be boredom. It could be tiredness. It could be anger. It could be a habit as well because that's very comforting.

It's a process that usually develops, particularly in ladies, it will develop quite early on. Usually around 11 or 12, there are some sort of emotional eating patterns being set up. That's often because we're comforted with food. Food is very nurturing and that has nothing wrong with that. Eating is an emotional process. It's how we connect. It's how we are shown love, maybe by caregivers. But emotional eating can become dysfunctional when we stop seeking other solutions to our emotional needs and we just try and suppress the feeling with food.

That's when we really-- when we refer to emotional eating, what we are talking about is dysfunctional emotional eating. Dysfunctional emotional eating is not only bad, obviously for the physiology because we're eating outside of hunger, but it's also bad for the psychology and wellness because we're not looking at the areas of our emotional health that we need to be looking at.

[00:02:54] Kathy: Mmmm, okay. Then how can we begin to work with it? It sounds like the first thing is some sense of awareness.

[00:03:01] Hannah: Yeah.

[00:03:01] Kathy: How do we become aware?

[00:03:02] Hannah: Yeah.



[00:03:03] Kathy: And then how do we work with it to bring it more into alignment?

[00:03:07] Hannah: I think journaling is a really important part of the process. But something that I think is really-- takes a lot of practice and it's not going to be fluid straight away, but there's a really simple technique to use with emotional eating... And actually to sorta start with, some people don't even realize they're doing it. You say emotional eating and they're not even that aware. So you're right, awareness is definitely part of the process.

But every time you go to eat, you just have to ask yourself quite simply, if you're hungry. Just ask yourself, just say, "Am I hungry?" Now, if the answer is, yes, go ahead and eat. If the answer is no, you might want to then explore that a little bit further.

"Okay. Well, I'm not hungry. I know I'm not hungry because I ate dinner an hour ago. What's going on for me? Am I bored? Am I lonely? Am I angry?" Then you'll start to really try and explore the reason that you want to eat behind it.

Then after that, you can then start to think, "Well, how else could I satisfy that emotion, what else could I do?" It might just be writing about it. It might be calling a friend. It might be having that difficult conversation that you've been putting off, but whatever it is, try to go there first.

Then after that process, if you really still want to go and eat, go ahead, do it. But keep coming back to the process because over time, it will minimize. And it's not to put extra stress on you to say, "Right. If you go through that process, you can't eat," if that's your choice. But keep coming back to the process and really asking yourself about it.

[00:04:38] Kathy: Mmmm. It's funny, because it sounds so simple, but to put it into practice and do it... there really is a discipline to that. To be able to find the pattern.



[00:04:49] Hannah: Yep, absolutely.

[00:04:50] Kathy: Because it's buried. It's buried in all of this other stuff and we're busy and we're stressed and whatever is on our plate, no pun intended, at the time (laughter) and almost derail what's really going on for us.

I would try to do this from time to time, just to get a sense because, again, I'm a creature of habit, so mine is less emotion and more that habit of-

[00:05:13] Hannah: Yes. (laughs)

[00:05:13] Kathy: -"It's this time, I have to eat." And so, taking a step back and saying, "Well, are you hungry?"

One of the tips that I found to be really helpful is ask yourself, if something like an apple or a piece of celery, if that's what you're craving and if the answer is, yes, you're probably hungry.

[00:05:30] Hannah: I love that.

[00:05:32] Kathy: Instead of reaching for the candy bar, right? (laughter) Or whatever else might be, whatever else is disguised as a candy bar, be it a protein bar or a shake or what have you, right?

[00:05:40] Hannah: Yes. That's a brilliant tip, I think. Actually, that again, when we look at intermittent fasting and how intermittent fasting helps is because it gives you that experience of what real hunger is. You start to change your choices because you get to the end of a fast and once you've gone through the adaptation, you don't really then crave the candy bars or whatnot. You really want to have as much nutrition as possible because you've had this period of fasting.



I think that coming back to your little test of celery or apple, that is such a simple practical tool for people to use. “Am I really hungry? Would I eat the apple?” If the answer is no, do the work. (laughs)

[00:06:20] Kathy: Yeah. Hunger is so deeply ingrained in us. Maybe it's from our hunter-gather times. I don't know, but just this sense of scarcity of, well, what happens if, and if you just relax into that process, but it does take some time.

How long did it take you to get comfortable and to feel like intermittent fasting was a lifestyle rather than this thing I do?

[00:06:20] Hannah: Yeah, so that probably, I can't remember the exact timeframe of adaptation for me, but I think that after about, oh, after six months I was very comfortable with it. So it wasn't a huge process. It just became something I did. Six months is going to be the maximum timeframe. It might have been a bit shorter than that, but yeah, it just became natural.

What happened as well is that after that six months, it became almost strange for me to do the opposite, to then eat in the fasting period. I felt I was missing something because I knew I was missing all those benefits and I knew I was missing out on my fasting period.

We are creatures of habit and it became my new habit and anything can become your new habit. I think they say it takes 21 times and I think it's going to be different for everyone, but 21 times is a rough number to form a new habit. I think that if you look at it that way, yeah, just practice.

[00:07:44] Kathy: Yeah, I think that's wonderful. I think that gives our listeners some permission that this is something that you play with, that you experiment with and you find what works for you.

[00:07:52] Hannah: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely.



[00:07:54] Kathy: Excellent. Well again, I can't thank you enough, Hannah. Thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

[00:08:00] Hannah: My absolute pleasure. It's been lovely. Thank you so much.

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[00:08:05] Kathy: Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!

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[00:09:07] [END OF AUDIO]