

Ep #40: Step 4: How to Decide What to Eat



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With Your Host

Diana Murphy

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Welcome to *Empowered Wellness for Leaders*, a podcast that teaches CEOs, entrepreneurs and sales leaders how to deal with the unique challenges of balancing a high-stress career, family, AND their own health. Here's your host, Certified Executive Wellness Coach, Diana Murphy.

Oh, good morning my friends. I hope to find you in great shape this Monday morning, and I am thrilled to be bringing you all these core tools. You're dropping into a beautiful series I'm creating and I'm having a blast. And what I'm realizing as I'm writing this is how impactful these tools have been in my life.

You know, I don't think about food all the time anymore. And after a lifetime of yo-yo dieting and being very focused on it, this is truly a miracle. It has become pretty natural to sink into the moment as I'm sitting down to eat or deciding what to eat and to know how much and what I need.

And that's what I'm going to bring to you today. How do you decide what to eat? Are you a little confused on what to eat? I think there just might be a little problem with too much information in our world. I Googled healthy food choices just out of curiosity. You want to guess how many articles came up? 192 million.

192 million opinions and discussions on what to eat. No wonder we're confused. And you know what we left out of that discussion? Your body's feedback. We have moved all of our food decisions to our head and that's why it's so confusing.

As a culture, we're either thinking about food all too much and diets and what we should do, or the opposite of that because of the overwhelm of running our businesses and living our full lives, we have totally checked out on listening to our body's physical signals on what to eat.

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What is it for you? What is throwing you off your game? Or are you so hyper-focused on it that it's just gotten confusing? Take a listen today and see how you can develop a more natural appetite by really listening in to what foods work for you. Not your friends, not your spouse, or the most recent article you just read. You.

Today's podcast is all about taking your confidence back in this discussion around making healthy choices. You know, your body is truly a miracle. Your body provides a lot of information on what works for you, but you have stopped listening. I know I did when I was so frustrated with weight gain.

And I might add here that when we start listening better and just take some small steps, it is grounding and creates a momentum that just helps this whole process give you momentum going forward. It creates grounded confidence around food.

When food works well for you, you'll feel energized, light, and satisfied. When you eat foods that aren't for you, typically, your body responds with feeling bloated, sluggish, tired, or being left with cravings. And then there are those good foods that we eat that someone else has told us that are really healthy, but they end up leaving us wanting when we realize we're hungry and hour after we eat them. What is going on?

Over time, when we eat foods that are for us or what I call fuel, your body will drop excess weight more easily because you're getting what you need and nothing more. The tool I'm sharing with you today is fuel testing. This is a process of paying attention to how your body responds to different foods. Then, you create a fuel list for your foods. Those are the ones that you know you should keep in your core diet.

And then developing a list of not fuel for you foods. Ones that really you know trigger your body or you just don't feel good after you eat them. As you build your list, it's so simple. It boils down to asking yourself three

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questions after you eat to develop this criteria. And if a food meets all these criteria, then it's fuel for you.

And what are those questions? I've got them for you. And of course, they're in the show notes for you. Dianamurphycoaching.com/40. Can you believe it? 40. We are a mature podcast for sure. Alright, the three questions. I'm getting back.

The first question is this: When you eat this food, does it give you good energy? Do you feel good and lightly energetic after you eat it? And then listening as well, like, do you have trigger responses? Do you feel bloated? You don't feel good? Notice extreme negative reactions, but just ask the question. Does this food give me good energy? Do I feel light and energetic after I eat that type of meal or that particular food?

The next question is: Does this food sustain you for two to three hours? Even when you're eating to the hunger scale, what I call light fullness or plus two, does this food sustain you? Does it last?

Now, this last question is really helpful and sometimes frustrating. The last criteria are: Can you stop easily at plus two or fullness, or do you feel out of control? This is really important. One of the key reasons that we think we don't have willpower, for example, is just because we're eating a food that is not fuel and it just makes your body want to eat more and more and more of it.

So be gentle on this question. If there is a food that is very hard and difficult for you to stop at plus two, just know that that is not fuel for you. Even what other people might say, it is a fuel for them, for you, it just might be something that your body is just not fuel and just wants to keep overeating it.

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The good news is you do not need to go on a full elimination diet to figure out what foods work for you. Now certainly, if you're having difficulty with some foods or suspect allergies or any sensitivities, get nutritional support right away. But what I'm digging into here is learning what works for you individually and helping you to increase the percentage of fuel for you that you put in your body.

And this is simply by listening and noticing how you feel after you eat. This type of work is not putting yourself on this big plan. None of us have time for another plan and another thing to put on our to-do list, right? This is integrating it by asking these questions often when you're eating.

Alright, so sometimes learning what is triggering you takes a little tweaking and experimenting, and for me, that was my story of egg yolks being a not fuel for me. I had been, during my whole time at Weight Watchers, was eating egg whites because they're so low in points so I could eat a massive amount of them and it didn't throw me off of my point count for the day.

Well, as I was moving off that type of thinking around my food, I was in a lot of 5K and 10K races. One almost every month. And the routine came that I would go and have a big brunch meal the minute I'd gotten out of the shower. I was just absolutely starved. So eggs benedict became my food of choice, and I really didn't think much about it.

I'd eaten that food before, but it really was a treat food. It's not something that I eat very often, and it took me like, three brunches to figure out it wasn't the grits, it wasn't the toast, it wasn't the bacon or the cheese. I truly dropped each of these items as I went along and I realized, yup, that's a lot of egg yolk, I bet that's what's going on.

And I started eating egg whites and felt great. You know, I thought this was race recovery, and this is what's really important, realizing how much foods

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affect us. I thought I was having race recovery by getting home, not 15 minutes after I'd eaten this meal and being really thirsty and really tired.

Well, I was on a training run and had a turkey sandwich and didn't have any of those effects. I was like, wow, that's a pretty big result that that was telling my body that egg yolks are off. Alright, so I don't eat them anymore, and it does work for me to stay with what I have learned from those triggers.

You might be asking what about sugar and white flour? There's a lot of talk today about no sugar, no flour. And actually, I kind of queried this process of dropping a food totally and I put them to my own fuel testing. And my friends, the testing works. I encourage you to try this out for yourself. Nutritionally, we all know that sugar and white flour are not great for us, especially in large quantities.

You know, it's just simple. They're over-processed and they do create cravings because they hit a brain center, a pleasure center in us and make us just want to eat more. Our body loves pleasure and it just creates a natural craving. But where do these fail the fuel test for me?

For me, neither of them sustain me for any period of time. In fact, when I eat anything with white flour in the morning, I am wanting for carbs all day long. Even if it's just one simple treat or that's all that was there for breakfast was a roll, I'm a mess the rest of the day. It's almost better for me to let myself get to minus four hunger, for sure.

And if I nosh on something sugary or carby in the afternoon, can I stop at plus two? Nope. The chips are all gone. I encourage you to test these foods for yourself though. It's fascinating that oatmeal is an absolute fuel for my husband, but it doesn't work for me at all. I love grainy bread with peanut butter on it for breakfast. Who would have thought with all the points I'd done in my life that that would become my fuel?

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And it really is good to play around with different fats that you like and different meats and foods, really focus on the things you're drawn to and test them in this way. So obviously, in general, lean and green and fresh can be your core foods, but what about the rest?

This is where you take some time to note how you feel after every meal and decide, was that my fuel? Did I feel good? Keep a journal. Keep your phone handy and just take note. It's fascinating that I'll forget - like, I love kale. I absolutely do. Kale salads, I have great energy after I eat them. But if I don't remind myself by having like, a core grocery list, I might forget and get into it but just a habit.

This fuel testing work is so helpful because we get to the bottom of our own biological reactions that our body is having around particular foods. But by eating more fuel, we can truly see, and don't you want this? A decrease in the craving for foods that aren't healthy for us. It really brings a lot of peace when we eat more fuel.

I want to give you a frame of reference, and I'm not going to go deeply into this, but in my program, there are four types of eating. What we should be doing the most of is what I'm talking about today. Fuel eating. But there's also fog eating, and many times, this might be a food that again, it's not fuel but it's really easy to nosh on. And fog eating is just eating behind our own back.

And then there's joy eating. And that is when we intentionally plan ahead, go hungry, and eat something. Just absolutely delicious. That's joy eating. We should be doing a little bit of that. And then what most of us call emotional eating or binging is storm eating. When we're eating out of an emotional response, we're raiding the pantry, we're watching ourselves overeat but we just can't stop.

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There's nothing wrong with you. That is just your brain wanting relief from overeating. Hey, if this is going on for you, definitely get on a quick call with me. I can help you with this. Alright, so if there's four types of eating, what should we be doing?

The majority of our eating should be fuel, but we should always be taking some time for joy. And then doing a little self-coaching, a little bit of being really curious why we're fog eating or if we are stuck in a storm eating cycle, really get some support. Really step back and see what's going on for yourself there.

If you're wanting to shift your energy or reduce cravings and lose weight, your goal can be to spend most of your time fuel eating, but always remember to plan some joy eats. There are a few things to remember when you're fuel testing. Our fuel lists are very individual. Start with nutritional guidance but watch for what works for you.

Some are meat eaters, some like a lot of that type of protein and others prefer more plant-based. Some love fruit. Some, it does not agree with them. See what works for you. Your body does not lie. Remember, your weeks can vary.

As you dig into what fuel works for you and what you have an appetite for, you may notice that some weeks you're hungry for fattier foods, like I have steak night, where there's times I'm just that hungry, and others where shrimp is just fine, or even a vegetarian meal.

With more practice, you can move from noting reactions after you eat to even sensing what your body is hungry for as you make food choices. I used to make these in my head. Is that the right points? Do I have enough room for that in my day? I ate too much lunch so I can't afford to eat this tonight. Now, I lean in and ask what am I hungry for. And you know what? My body's feedback does not steer me wrong.

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Okay, boring works. Now, if you like to be excited about your meals and love to cook, go for it. In fact, this has become a new hobby for me and I'm doing more cooking. I'm finding it's a great relaxing thing to do after work. But once you've established your core list of foods, keep relying on them unless you see an adverse reaction. Keep that core list and make sure you always have those foods on hand.

Now, another thing to be aware of, sometimes our fuel foods shift. And they can make a big shift with hormonal changes, like menopause, or after a serious illness. Honor how your body is reacting, even if a month ago you loved that food. There can be shifts.

What about alcohol? We know that alcohol, nutritionally, is the opposite of fuel. It's like sugar and flour for most of us. Such bad news. But when we get honest about how it truly affects our best intentions, it gets easier and easier to let go of it. It has been for me.

Notice for you what happens around food when you drink. Notice with curiosity and judgment. No judgment from me here. I drink bourbon. I just drink less red wine. I'm finding what works for me. There's times I really like an adult beverage and I don't restrict myself.

Now, what happens for me is I simply cannot sense my hunger scale of fullness when I enjoy wine. Sometimes I even use it to feel better after I've overeaten. Isn't that fascinating? But for me, I know that when I drink, even if I sip a glass of wine, I have to be really careful because most times I will overeat, even a little bit. So keep this in mind for you and see what's happening for you around alcohol.

Okay, so that might be your joy food. That's something that works for me a lot is a very good glass of wine and some charcuterie and it's a Friday night. In fact, that's what I did last week, and that's all I needed for dinner. It was fascinating. It was an amazing joy eat at a French restaurant.

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Last but not least, the percentage game is so much better than perfection. Don't try to be perfect at this. Don't go 100% fuel. This does not work. This is dieting. This is really not honoring that we are human beings and love the pleasure of food.

Alright, so for all of you amazing hard-charging, high achievers that I know love my podcast, this is important to remember. This process of gaining trust with our body's signals, both hunger in the last few episodes and now here with fuel, this is not about eating perfectly all the time. Give yourself some slack because sometimes it's that judgment that kind of opens the door to what the hell and eating all the time.

But what I'm talking about here is really tweaking your percentage game. One of my favorite clients - I love this story. He was getting really hard on himself when I'd asked him - we were doing a check-in call and I asked him what his fuel percentage was over the last week. He self-reported around 80%. At that time, I was talking about how 90% fuel eating would create weight loss, and the good news is it really is a little less than that.

You don't really have to be even in the 90% range. So I asked him a little further and we looked at my notes when we started working together and he was in the 60% to 65% range beforehand. He was overeating on weekends, eating whatever he wanted, and he tweaked that behavior and really got a handle on overeating. And he tweaked it to 80%, he was following the hunger scale, and he was losing weight.

There was no reason for him to change anything. And even for some, it might be tweaking just one meal or one habit that is just throwing you off. And this is why journaling is so important. This is why I do this with my clients. We just act like scientists and dig in.

When we get honest about our overall fuel percentage but not judge it, we can get creative and look for very effective ways to tweak it. Tweaking

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works. Side note, I love this. This is really important to remember. Losing weight behavior will always look a little different than maintenance and maintaining weight behavior. But this journey of using the hunger scale and fuel testing is your journey to maintenance. It's the journey to permanent weight loss.

But what's really bad news is that our losing weight behavior does not look that different from how we can live during our life. And this is important to remember. When you go off a strict diet and gain the weight right back quickly, your body is showing you that the level of fuel or food during that diet was actually more on target than you might think.

Bad news, right? But 100% fuel eating is not necessary to get the body to drop weight. It will just take paying close attention to both the hunger scale and your fuel choices during that season of helping your body to drop it. Learning to eat in a way that you love, mostly with fuel foods stops cravings and it really brings so much peace doing it that it can become a lifestyle.

But don't try to be perfect. Even when you just think that that's the route to it, it's not. Be the B student. When you couple the work of eating to the hunger scale, up the ante of eating more fuel, don't be shocked, but weight will drop. And you just might start feeling a lot better. You should see a lot more energy.

Now also, if you're using these tools just to be healthier, don't worry. If you're following the hunger scale, you'll be eating enough to maintain your weight. Your body knows what it needs. You may be eating more than the person next to you that their body knows that they have weight to drop.

We just need to listen more attentively during that season. After hearing from me on my favorite tools, do you have more questions? Would you like more support? For a short period of time, I'm offering quick consults. This is designed for anyone that has a question on a tool or a podcast that you'd

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love a little strategy. Take a look at the show notes, dianamurphycoaching.com/40 for a link for my 15-minute quick call.

Why am I doing this? Well, I learn a lot hearing your questions. It might just help me with the best idea for the next podcast and I'd love to get to know my listeners. So if you're a fan, if you're enjoying this, and for whatever reason, you have something I wish I could ask Diana this question, please honor my offer and get on that phone.

I think we all a little sick of sitting behind a computer and engaging in all these great videos, which I've created some amazing ones, and podcasts, and we really want to start talking to real people. I know I have that interest. And if you do, get on a quick call.

I love bringing this to you. There's a lot going on in my world and I just can't wait to bring you more next week. Have a fabulous day. Dig in. Remember, this podcast series is meant to dig in practice. Focus on one of the tools at a time, and of course, I'm giving you these all week by week. Take one little thing and practice it in that week and build on it.

But if you're noticing that you need to go back to the beginning, go there and go practice the hunger scale or whatever is needed for your journey. Have a fabulous day.

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