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Food. Why's it so hard to follow a food plan?

Which food plan qualifies as the “hardest” to stay on? So many of them have their unique challenges. Some are prohibitively expensive. Others are intensively laborious. Many lack the flavors you love and the excitement of favorite dishes. Some are just impractical. But at the end of the day, every food plan is hard because it's not what you want deep down.

You may be nodding your head along with me. You might also simultaneously be screaming inside, “Why is food so hard?!”

I would like to share an insight with you about that.

Over the last few months I've spent a lot of time discussing self-care - the challenges of achieving it, making time for it, it's importance, etc. I have a radical thought for you to contemplate - what if going to a luxurious spa and pampering yourself isn't the ultimate path to self-care? What if it actually moves you away from self-care? What if your down time is really taking away from taking care of yourself?

What do I mean?

Well, ultimately the basic building blocks of self-care start with maintaining a low stress environment, creating a sleep routine that affords you the amount of sleep you need at the right times, eating nourishing foods when you need that food, and finding ways to move your body without overtaxing it. And yes, most of us struggle with at least one, if not all, of those things. I, for one, would much rather spend 3 lavish days in a spa than work on my erratic sleep habits. Regrettably, three days in a spa, or an afternoon nap, or a quiet afternoon at a friend's house can't undo the harm of weeks of poor sleep, eating, and exercise habits, and it can only solve stress temporarily, at best.

And this is where we need to talk about “parents”. Parents and parent figures are the main building blocks of all of our habits. The good ones and the bad ones. They are our teachers and our role models from our first moments in this world. We learn by watching them and listening to them. And we also learn when they are not around to watch or listen to. Like it or not, we are largely shaped by those who parented us.

I have to point out that this is not a blame. Parents, in the vast majority of cases, are truly doing their best. There are many reasons why different parents struggle in raising their kids perfectly. Sometimes it's the middos they inherited from their parents, or difficult situations, like war,

poverty, abuse, or illness. But mostly, parents make mistakes because they are human and therefore by definition are not perfect.

What that means is that somewhere along the line, no one taught you or showed you how to put yourself to bed. No one taught you or showed you how to manage difficult social situations and disagreements. No one taught you or showed you how to nourish your body when your schedule or your budget are limited.

Does that mean that you are forever trapped in the state of the helpless child?

No! You can reparent yourself. You can do the things for yourself that you never got as a child.

Most of us never realize that we have the ability to reparent ourselves and due to that lack of knowledge we turn to others to reparent us. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

You get into a fight with your husband. You feel like there is something he should say to you or do for you. You are frustrated. Between shallow breaths you declare, "You don't really love me. If you did you wouldn't behave this way." Your husband, of course, is flabbergasted because to him that is a ridiculous statement. Of course he loves you. That's why he keeps telling you he does. So what's the missing puzzle piece?

YOU! You are the missing puzzle piece.

The child inside all of us wants so badly to be parented. So you run to your husband and beg him to fill that void you feel inside. But he can't. Because he doesn't know what you need. Self-care means learning how to care for yourself. It means not turning to other people to parent you and understanding what phrase or gesture YOU need. You have to be able to say it to yourself before you can have your husband say it to you. Even if your husband is smart or sensitive, he cannot know what you don't know.

The harsh reality of childhood is that there were moments where we weren't heard. We voiced or expressed some struggle in life and it was brushed over. From that moment you learned that - your hunger during school or hatred of spinach or exhaustion or frustration or need to be in wide open spaces - were unimportant and warranted being brushed aside. As a result you never learned what it was that you really needed in those moments. Your husband doesn't know either.

And so when you look at the challenges in your life, the places where you lacked parenting - good sleep habits, feeding yourself mindfully and consistently, creating healthy boundaries, reacting to stress, finding ways to gently exercise, understand social nuances, creating space for kindness, having patience, whatever it is you notice is missing from your life; you get to choose your role. You can choose the role of the child, hoping others will succeed in parenting you (which they often can't), or you can parent yourself. You can put in the work and really

narrow down those areas in your life where you can see yourself struggling, and then work on the tools to fix them.

The amazing thing is, once you have learned to reparent yourself, you can share those tools and methods with others and they can help you with your regulation, if they choose to. If you understand what a healthy sleep routine looks like for you, you can request your whole family to help you in maintaining it, and in the meantime, teach them how to parent themselves, again, if they choose to. Now, instead of getting frustrated with everyone because you are frustrated but don't know what you can do about it, you can work toward a goal, and show others where they can fit into the path toward that goal.

Now let's go back to that food plan. You know, the really hard one.

Most women invest a lot of effort in maintaining a food plan that will eventually stop working for them because everything inside of them is rebelling and wishing that food could stop being so hard. The alternative is to invest that effort elsewhere. Take the time and the energy to get to know yourself and what you need. Understand your cravings and your patterns. Develop the tools to parent yourself. If you do that your whole life will change. Oh, and in my experience, you won't need a food plan after that. Food will become a lot easier once your inner parent helps you learn what mindful, calm, connected, creative, clear, confident, consistent, compassionate, curious, non-judgmental nourishment looks like.

So, I leave you to ponder, which of those two paths is actually the world's hardest food plan - the one where you invest time and effort into a food plan which is restrictive and doesn't suit your lifestyle, or the one where you invest time and effort in providing yourself with the reparenting you need and food will fall into place on its own as your whole life changes for the better?

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