

Ep #243: Normal Eating?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Well hello, my friends. Are you ready? I'm ready. I'm ready to talk about normal eating. I love the word normal, it's so fun. It's like I spend the most of my time, my training of coaches and my coaching of clients really arguing about what is normal.

And so before we start talking about normal eating, I want to ask you the question, what is normal? How do you define normal? And why are we so worried about being normal and doing things that are normal?

If you guys listened to my last, I can't remember, a couple episodes ago, about neurotransmitters, you'll know that being normal means being the same and being part of, conforming to a usual or typical or expected thing. And that means that we can feel connected in our likeness. We all feel part of a group when we conform.

And so the pull to conform is incredibly primal and it's really important that we're aware of that natural inclination to conform to what is normal without even questioning what is normal and why it's normal. I think of a lot of things that, throughout history, were considered normal that people just went along with that now we're horrified by.

One of the things that I like to think about and I talk to my husband, Chris, about is that people used to smoke at work. Like, you would be sitting at your desk working in a cubicle, and the person in the cubicle right next to you would be smoking. Or you would be on an airplane and the row in front of you would be the smoking section. People would smoke in restaurants. Like, what? It's so wild to me.

Now, if you're a smoker or not a smoker is not as relevant as exploring what is normal. It used to be very normal to just smoke and there was no, like – now, if you smoke, people are like, "Go outside. Don't blow that in my face. Get away from me." It's not normal to be smoking on an airplane.

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You can get arrested for smoking on an airplane or tampering with the smoke detector device, whereas before, it was just normal that people would just be smoking. And so I wonder, like, what is normal now that we will be tripping out on that people were doing?

I think one of the things that's become pretty normal in our culture now is to be overweight. And I think the reason why it's normal is because we have normalized eating food that doesn't serve our body. So what's more normal than apple pie or birthday cake or a cocktail?

That is normal. Of course, you're going to have a birthday cake on your birthday, of course we're going to have cookies in the cookie jar and we're going to have sweets and candy and dessert after dinner. We don't question what's normal; we just accept that that's what is normal.

And even if it's normal to smoke all the time, which my mom talks about when she was younger, she used to smoke even though she didn't like it because just everybody smoked. It was just weird if you didn't. And so, I wonder about that now. What are the things that are normal that we're not even questioning for ourselves?

And I think my work is really mostly about becoming aware, first of all, of what you're thinking and what you're believing and why. Just because it's normal to believe something, doesn't mean that's what you have to believe.

For example, is it normal to get married? Is it normal to have children? Is it normal to work at a job and then retire? And if it is, why is that normal and is that a desired normal?

So let's talk a little bit about normal eating and when we look at what's normal in our society, what do people conform to, what do people feel pressured to do? It's very interesting to think about this scenario.

I want you to imagine that you're at a party and there's a buffet full of sweets. And if I'm at that buffet with a friend, or maybe with a stranger and I'm not choosing any of the desserts on the buffet and I don't put any of

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them on my plate, it's very normal for someone to say, "Oh, aren't you going to have some sweets..." or, "Aren't you going to have a cupcake?" or, "Wouldn't you like to have that?"

And if I was to say no, "Oh, why not? You only live once. It's just fun. It's just a special occasion..." very normal for that to be happening. On the other hand, if I were to add a cupcake and a piece of cake and a piece of candy and a brownie to my plate, it's not normal for anybody to say, "Whoa, why are you eating all of that sugar? Why are you eating so much?"

That would not be normal. In fact, that would be super rude for someone to say that. Now, why? Why is it okay to ask why someone isn't eating sugar or why someone isn't drinking alcohol, and it's not okay to ask why someone is? Because it's normal to overeat sugar and it's normal to overdrink alcohol, and so we don't question the things that we conform to, even if they don't serve us.

We have been socialized to believe that it is normal to have dessert and that it's special to have dessert and that it's good to have dessert and that it's wonderful to splurge. That's what has become normal to us. It's very normal to eat sugar and flour in our society; why? Why has that become normal?

Has that become normal because it's good for us as a human species? Did someone really think that through as, "Hey, let's think about the environment of our body and make sure we preserve it."

I often think about how often we think about the environment and the planet and how we want to take care of our planet and preserve our planet for the long run and how certain things that we're doing is killing off the planet, and yet, how often do we apply those same things to our bodies? Like, if we keep treating our body the way society has deemed normal, we will destroy our species if we keep doing it this way for our health.

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And so, there's this contrast between what we've been taught is normal. I have a lot of experience with going through and talking with people who have gone through eating disorder rehab centers.

When I was young, my brother was a drug addict, and so we used to spend a lot of time going to those rehab events. And a lot of the people at the rehab were suffering from eating disorders, which, of course, I was fascinated with at the time.

And many of them, one of their philosophies was you need to eat like a normal person. You need to eat dessert. You need to eat sugar. You need to not restrict yourself because as soon as you restrict yourself, that means that you're going to overdo it at a later date.

So the answer is not to restrict yourself, which I found totally fascinating that that was the approach with sugar and flour and food, and yet the approach with alcohol and drugs was always abstinence; like don't touch that. So it's really interesting to question everything.

Why is everything the way that it is? And do I want my normal to be what society has decided what is normal, or do I want to create the exact life that I want? Now, I believe that it is the privilege of our lifetime to be able to design our own lives and to be able to create our lives from scratch and evaluate all of our decisions based on our programming, and maybe go against the programming.

Maybe you were raised to believe that you should be a doctor because all the generations before you were all doctors. And maybe you questioned that and decided, "But that's not what I want for myself." It's a beautiful thing and I want you to be able to look at that in terms of your body, in terms of your career, in terms of your life, in terms of getting married or not getting married; all of the things, and question what you want your normal to be.

You can always see in different cultures, in different religions, in different households what normal is. And if it's very normal to have dessert and

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every meal or if it's very normal to drink soda or if it's very normal to snack, you will see, most of the time, the effects of that in the household.

So I want to kind of review a few of the things that have become normal in our society and I want us to question them. Now, one of the reasons why what's normal remains what's normal is our desire. And our desire is what drives all of our behavior.

And if you look at the way, especially in America, we have been exposed to food and snacking in our culture, it is based on how can these companies get us to buy their product more often? How can these companies get us to give them money so we will eat and consume their foods?

And they have studied us and our brains as a human species to make the food the most desirable it can possibly be because, remember, they understand that desire drives all of our behavior. Dopamine is what keeps us motivated to stay alive, which we needed back in the day, but now, of course, we don't need as much dopamine driving us to eat food as we used to because food is now plentiful.

And yet, all of the urges and the cravings that we have and the desire and the over-desire we have is a product of taking our primitive brain and mixing it with a modern culture of capitalism, basically, that is trying to make money off of the purchasing behavior of humans. Now, that's not to say that we shouldn't have that; it's just to say that we should understand it.

We should understand that what has become normal is not because of our best interest, often. So why do we eat breakfast? Why is cereal a breakfast food? Is it because somebody studied the human body and said, "Yes, we need to absolutely have sugary cereal for breakfast in order to function well?" Of course not. It was the cereal companies telling us that we should buy cereal for breakfast, and so many of us believed that.

And even when you think about how is the normal way to lose weight was ingrained in us for so long, and what's so fascinating about it, when I was growing up, the way to lose weight, eat less, exercise more, cut down on

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fatty foods, never really worked. And yet, we just kept getting fatter with that advice and yet we just kept trying over and over and over to make that normal way of losing weight the answer for us.

So let's talk about it; one of the normal ways of eating is that eating should be unrestricted. That's kind of referring back to this idea that when you restrict your food intake, that you will then overeat later and you should never restrict your food intake because you can't handle it emotionally, which is, I think, ridiculous.

And although I experience restricting my food and then overeating, the answer was not to stop restricting my food. The answer was, why does restricting my food make me freak out? Not, "It just does, so don't do it." It is, why. And the reason why was, of course, I was using food to manage my emotional life.

So the answer wasn't to stop restricting. The answer was to keep restricting that food that I was eating to manage my emotional life, and manage my emotional life. What?

But so many of these organizations kept telling me, like, "No, don't you notice, when you restrict your food, you end up bingeing, so stop restricting your food." It's kind of like – I laugh about it now – it's kind of like, can you imagine if they said that to us about cocaine? Like, "Hey, did you notice that when you restrict using cocaine, you want it more? So then you go and you actually do more cocaine. So the answer is to just keep doing cocaine all the time."

What? No. the question is, to maybe understand that cocaine makes me want to do more cocaine and when I restrict myself from it, my body freaks out. Let me ask why and what is the answer?

Three meals a day and two snacks has become normal. Going to Starbucks in the afternoon, in between lunch and dinner to get a Frappuccino and maybe a brownie, super normal. Getting a really high-

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sugar drink from Starbucks, very normal. Having a snack or a bar in between breakfast and lunch, very normal.

Now, it used to be, in the 50s, it was normal to have three meals a day. Nobody even questioned that. We think – when I ask people why we eat three meals a day, people think it's based on human biology. They notice that they're hungry for breakfast, then they're hungry for lunch, and then they're hungry for dinner.

We don't understand that the reason why we're hungry at mealtime is because we've programmed our gremlin to ignite at the times that we normally eat. When I work with students that start skipping meals, they no longer get hungry during that time.

Our bodies are programmed based on what we repeatedly do. So when you think about three meals a day, or three meals a day with two snacks in between, or six meals a day, which is what I used to believe was normal for my body, you have to ask yourself, is that what I want to do for my body? Is that normal for me?

And the answer is, does it get me the result that I want? Is that activity, that behavior, that way of eating, getting me the result that I want? Do I feel energized throughout the day? Am I at the bodyweight I want to be? Do I feel like I'm managing my emotions and not always eating all the time so I don't feel the full vibration in my body because I'm always so full?

Those are the questions that you need to ask yourself to understand what is normal eating. Another thing that seems to be normal in our society is alcohol; having a glass of wine, having a champagne, having an after-dinner drink, all very normal. Why?

Why has drinking alcohol become normal? Number one, our desire for it. The companies that sell the alcohol encourage it and our neurotransmitters in our brains encourage it. It's the perfect marriage between our kind of prehistoric primal desire and modern technology that have come together to create a huge problem for many of us.

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For those of us who want to be at a different bodyweight and for those of us who want to stay in the best physical and emotional shape that we can, alcohol can be a huge problem for many of us. Sugar and flour have become very normal, as I mentioned before. It's super normal to have snacks, to buy things in the middle of the grocery store, to buy things in a box, to buy things that you unwrap and eat; very normal.

Is it normal to unwrap something and eat it? Is it normal for cheese to be on a shelf in the middle of the grocery store and to come in a huge block that you can slice a piece of cheese from? Yes, the answer is yes, that's normal. Is it normal for us to eat foods that are filled with preservatives? Yes. Is it normal for us to eat chemicals? Yes.

I'm not saying that it shouldn't be normal; I'm just saying that you need to question whether that's what you want, whether it's normal or not. If I see someone eating crackers or cookies out of a package and I point to someone and go, "Oh my god, look what they're doing..." No one's going to go, "What? Oh my gosh, they're eating cookies out of a package?" That's become normal to us. Overeating cookies, going back to the buffet five times, no one's going to say, "Whoa, that's not normal." It's very normal.

Another thing that has become really normal in our society is soda, ordering soda, which is filled with sugar as a beverage, and listen, at restaurants, or even at home. Now, again, I'm not saying that normal is bad. I'm just saying that normal isn't necessarily good. And it's easy for us to think, "Well if everybody agrees that we should smoke on airplanes then that's normal, then it's okay..." versus, "Wait a minute, this makes no sense. I don't smoke. The row in front of me, everybody's smoking. How is that okay?" That doesn't make any sense.

Can I raise my hand here and say whoa, the obesity epidemic in our country is off the hook? The low-fat diet is not working. Can I raise my hand and say, yo, something is going terribly wrong? I think it's our modern food supply. I think it's our inability to manage our emotional lives.

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I think that what has become normal, which is that we eat our feelings, is going to end up killing us as a species if we don't get a hold of it. I think we need to understand how to process and feel our emotions without buffering and I think we need to eat to sustain ourselves for fuel and manage our emotional lives elsewhere and get our pleasure elsewhere and get our dopamine hits elsewhere. That's what I think is normal.

So a lot of my students that are trying to lose weight with me will say, "It's not fair that I have to restrict my food. It's very normal for people to be able to eat whatever they want. It's very normal for people to not have to think about what they're eating. It's very normal for people to be able to eat sugar and flour."

That is insane to believe that. It makes you feel like there's something wrong with you when you eat a food that reacts in your brain like it's supposed to react. It's insane to think that you're not normal when your insulin reacts the way it's supposed to act. It's insane to think that you're not normal when you put on weight eating concentrated food that's designed to have you put on weight.

You are very normal. If you eat in this food supply and you gain weight, that is normal. You're eating like a normal person and you're gaining weight like a normal person. So the question becomes, why are you telling me that the people that are normal are the people that can eat the normal food and not gain weight? That's ridiculous. Question that in your own mind.

I want you to question whether it's normal or should it be normal to celebrate, reward, break, and escape with food, with sweets? Do you want that to be normal in your life? Do you want the way that you celebrate to be to eat food that doesn't serve your body?

Ah, come on Brooke, nothing wrong with a piece of birthday cake... No, it's, quote en quote, normal. We are socialized to believe that it's normal to drink and to overeat. And we tell ourselves that there's something wrong with us when we can't show up as normal.

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And I just want to tell you, on a little side note, when I decided that I didn't want that to be normal for me, when I questioned my socialization, when I questioned what was true for me and I went on my own path and I decided that I don't want to drink alcohol and I don't want to eat a lot of sugar and flour and that I want to process my emotion and I want to embrace discomfort – when I was able to kind of go away from the group and risk that, that's when my life got so fun because I wasn't following the crowd.

Because, I notice that a lot of people that follow the crowd struggle with what the crowd struggles with, and it's so slow to change its mind. The evidence about cholesterol, the evidence about sugar and flour, the evidence about the low-fat diet has been out for years and we still haven't turned that boat around.

I don't want to be on that slow boat. I want to be on my fast jet ski, my rocket ship over here. I want to be able to make those decisions for myself, and so I want you to question what is normal eating, and you decide what role do you want food to play in your life? Because if food is your best friend, if food is your comfort, if food is the way you celebrate, if food is the way you relax, if food is the way you escape your emotions, it's going to be very difficult for you to be at a body size that you want to be at.

But more importantly than that, it's going to be very difficult for you to feel like you have authority over your brain, authority over your life and the ability to create what it is you want with your life, because you'll always be a slave to those escapes that are so immediate and so temporarily gratifying.

So the question becomes, how do we change it? How do we question it? And here's some alternative views that I want you to consider and maybe make the new normal for you.

If you consider the fat on your body as fuel and a factor of fuel, it will change the way you approach eating. You will see how much fuel you already have on your body that can be processed for fuel. And you will

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understand that if food is fuel and the fat on your body is fuel, that between the two of them, you can create a life where you're energized and fueled.

I want you to consider how your body has evolved and how it was designed, what it was created for, and how we've now dropped it into an environment that is not serving us. The normalness of it is not serving our bodies, most of them.

Consider how you wish you would eat, or could eat, or want to eat, if you could hack your own brain. If you could eat only for fuel, if you could eat only healthy food, if you weren't using food for anything but fuel, what would you eat?

If you could manage your emotional life separate from food, if you could separate those out, what would you eat if the only purpose of eating was to fuel your body, which for so many years, that's what it was? It's only recently become normal to use food to enjoy your life.

What if you could separate those two things out again? Because listen, if I thought using food to enjoy your life served us as a species, I would be all in. But it has gotten to the point where the types of food we're using to celebrate and the way we're using food to escape our lives is harming us tremendously.

If you think about what you would eat only if you ate for fuel, I want you to imagine not only what your body would look like, but also how you would feel physically. What are the foods that you eat that make you feel the best physically? And then consider what that would require you to do in terms of your emotional management.

What would that require you to do in terms of your emotional health, your emotional skill set? If you weren't ever eating to handle your emotions, what would you need to learn in order to handle your emotions?

Consider how, if you change what's normal and you change that programming, how much you would have to use that prefrontal cortex and

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how brilliant it is when you require your brain to use it for planning things, for creating things, for living a deliberate life. That is the part of your brain that is the highest level of functioning. It is the part of your brain that no other animal gets to have the honor of using, to create the life that they want.

So I want you to consider that for yourself. Consider that for your life what it would mean if you used your prefrontal cortex for managing your health and your life, instead of just always being reactive to urges.

I want you to consider your life programmed by you, not programmed by society, not programmed by your primitive neurotransmitter brain self, but by you, by the biggest part of you. What would look different? What would be different?

How would you define normal if you took back control of that word for yourself and to find it for yourself? What is food for and how do you want to use it?

And I'll leave you with this; if you take food away from your life as something that entertains you, as something that you celebrate with, as something that brings you joy, what is left and is it enough? Because I feel like, often, so many of my clients are filling up the spaces of their lives where they are unsatisfied with buffering and with food, and when you remove those buffers, what it does is leaves a little bit of a void which people don't like in the beginning.

But if you allow the void to be there, you will be naturally motivated to fill the void with you, with the purpose of your life, with your essence, instead of filling it up with food. That will make a huge difference in your life.

I want to tell you, it's a courageous choice. It's a higher-level evolved choice. It's not a choice everyone will make. But the fact that you're listening to my podcast, the fact that you're interested in what normal eating is gives me an inclination that maybe you would like to fill up your life with

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something other than food and you'd like to fill your body up with something other than excess food and excess weight.

And questioning what is normal eating is the first step on that journey. Have a beautiful week, everybody. Bye-bye.

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