

Elizabeth B.:

Hello everybody and welcome back to the Primal Potential podcast. I am Elizabeth Benton and I'm so pumped to chat with you today about how you can enjoy the holidays without guilt, but also without surrendering your goals and feeling miserable and remorseful. I want to help you to enjoy your favorite things, enjoy what's really worth it, not feeling like you are white-knuckling yourself through events or parties or holidays, and sacrificing, but also like you're being really good to yourself. Right? That you're not surrendering the next two months of your life to food and alcohol and then feeling really down about it because there's so much more possible for you.

Now let's start with the obvious and I think sometimes the obvious gets overlooked just because it is so obvious, right? It's not a holiday season. They are holidays, not holimonths, right? There's just couple of them and they're just days and for most of us, they're just a few hours out of a couple of days. I know, I was talking, this was probably a couple of years ago to one of my one-on-one clients and it was in mid-October and she was a little bit concerned about the upcoming holiday season. I said, "Well, what holidays do you observe?" She was like, "Well, I just mean like Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas." Okay. Three days over three months, but sometimes we tell ourselves that this is like an extended period of the year, where all of our good choices and all of our self-care goes out the window. That is certainly a common perspective, but it is not the only perspective. They are days and likely only parts of days.

Yes, I get it. It's not just Thanksgiving, and Christmas and New Years. There's work parties and there's family parties and there's kid's parties. I get it. I get it. But that's also true of year round. There's birthdays. There's family dinners. There's celebrations. There's anniversaries. If we use that perspective that every special occasion is a license to just set aside self-care, we're really setting ourselves up to struggle year-round, and I don't want that for any of you. I want whatever time in the past where you have done that, I want that to be where it stops, where it ends. From this moment forward I want to help you develop a perspective that's going to allow you to enjoy special treats but not throw caution to the wind and go completely overboard to the point where you're not proud of your choices and you don't feel good about yourself.

I want everybody to challenge the perspective they have, especially about this time of year. There is a new perspective available to you and it's one you have to practice, right? Perspective along the lines, "I want to feel my best and enjoy food in a way that makes me feel good all year round, all year round. I want to retrain my brain so that I don't just carte blanche accept that party means overindulging. It doesn't." Party doesn't mean over-indulge. Holiday doesn't mean overeat. Right? Heck, celebration,

holiday, party, it doesn't even mean food or drink and dessert. It means celebrate.

I don't know how many of you guys listened to the episode I did over this past summer with my sister. We talked a lot about what it was like growing up in my house that was a little bit food disoriented. Which is strange in hindsight because I was the only overweight one in my family, really. There was a family motto which in my mind worked for the thin people but certainly didn't work for me although I don't think it really worked for them either. The motto was, "It's your birthday, eat like a pig." Birthday, you could insert Tuesday afternoon. "It's Christmas, eat like a pig. It's Easter, eat like a pig. It's Saturday, eat like a pig. It's Grandpa's birthday, eat like a pig."

Every special occasion with a license to overindulge. Yeah, there might be slightly more of those gatherings during the latter part of the year it's year round. I really want to help everybody reframe this perspective. Where's the middle for you? Where is the middle between, "I'm on a diet and I'm just going to pick at the turkey and vegetables" and "It's Christmas, eat like a pig." I don't want that for anybody. Where's the middle?

I've got a question for you. What would it look like for you to go to a celebration, a holiday, a dinner out. What would it look like for you to go to that thing and feel amazing during and after? What would that look like? I want you to really answer that question. I'm serious. I want you to write it down. When we write things down it concentrates our focus and the power of our brain. Think about it, and I say this to my Fat Loss Fast Track clients all the time. You know how if you're trying to solve a math problem in your head and you get stuck you'll grab a piece of paper and a pen and all of a sudden it's so much easier when you can see it? You know how that's true in math? It's true in everything.

You recruit more mental resources when you put things down on paper. It concentrates your mind on that thing. Seriously, the question is, and I want you to write this down for you. What would it look like for you to go to a holiday, a dinner out, a party, and really feel amazing while you're there and afterwards? Maybe you're thinking things like, "Well, maybe I indulge but only when it's really worth it and even then I don't overindulge. I'll indulge in things that are amazing but I will stop before I am stuffed silly." Right? Maybe you say, "I establish some boundaries and then I keep the promises I make to myself as opposed to throwing them out as soon as somebody offers me that plate of cookies."

I don't know what it looks like for you. Those might be some of the things you're thinking but I want you to really think that through. What would it

look like for you to go to a holiday party, a celebration, a birthday, a dinner out, and feel amazing while you're there and afterwards. What does that look like for you? Then I want you to ask the question, "How do I create that? How do I create that?"

Within my Fat Loss Fast Tracks I give them a specific structure for doing that but I'm going to leave this up to your imagination. What do you need to do to create that? This is a practice. I want to sort of reality check everybody here. I don't think it's a great idea to establish, "Oh, this is what it would look like. This is my gold standard" and then expect to nail it. That's like saying, "I want to make 80 percent of my free throws if I'm a basketball player. I'm currently at 20 percent" and then thinking that just because you made that decision you're now going to get 80 percent. No you're not. You have to practice.

Part of practice, this is the other part of the reality-check, part of practice means you bring your best effort. When I say, "Look, it's going to take time and practice. You're not going to nail it." That's not license to say, "Oh, well since I'm not going to nail it I might as well break all the promises and hey, just do a little bit." No. Part of practice is you brought your best effort, right? That's what I want you to think about. What would it look like for you to go to a holiday party, whatever, a family event, a dinner out, and feel great about your choices during and after? What would that take? Then you practice it on the next occasion that you can with your very best effort.

There are a couple of things that might be helpful for you to consider as you put together this ideal, this way of going through this event, this family thing, this dinner that would make you feel amazing.

When it comes to the holidays I want you to think about this, and again you'll get more out of this if you put it on paper. What are the moments you enjoy most during the holidays? What are the moments you enjoy the most and then how can you emphasize those? How can you really ramp those up? For me personally, it's laughing and storytelling with my family. I love that. It feels so good. I think, "Oh, we need to spend more time together." I love those. Those are the moments that bring me the most joy.

When you establish what do you enjoy most about these holidays, this family thing, whatever it is that you do, then how can you maximize that? How can you emphasize those moments the most? For me in my example I love storytelling and laughing with my family. Maybe this year one of the things I'll do is create a game of questions where everybody gets assigned a question or draws a random question so we can maximize those moments. I don't know, maybe I'm just thinking off the top of my head here. Maybe it's

like, "What's your favorite family memory?" Or, "What's your funniest grandpa story?" Whatever it is I think that would just be a fun thing to do to bring everybody together and for me to maximize the parts of the holidays that I enjoy the most. That's just what's true for me, but what's your favorite part? What options exist for you to emphasize or maximize those moments?

The other thing I want you to think about, and again don't just hear me say it, write it down. Spend some time with this. There is a difference between theory and practice and theory is just hearing what I say and understanding it. Practice is applying it, doing the work in your life, and that begins with answering these questions. What makes you feel not so great about the holidays? What makes you feel guilty? Sad? Shameful? For me one of the things is overeating. It puts me in a terrible mood and it fixates my mind on that thing so then I'm not as focused on the people I'm with but I'm like, "Seriously Elizabeth? Now you don't feel well. Why'd you do that? It wasn't worth it."

Know that for yourself. For you it might not be overeating. It might be something totally unrelated. Maybe it's when you fixate on something that your uncle said to you that was snarky and you decide ahead of time, "You know what? I'm not going to let that rob me of any joy so whatever is said, it's not mine to deal with. It's not my thing." I say now all the time because one of my Fat Loss Fast Track clients said this. "Not my circus, not my clowns." I do not have to attend every argument to which I am invited. If everybody starts talking about politics I don't have to engage. Not my circus, not my clowns, right? What is that for you and what can you do about it?

Another thing to consider. What is totally worth indulging in? Spiked cider because you only get it on this one particular time of year? I don't know. Your grandmother's apple pie? What is it for you that is totally worth it and what's not? What's not worth it? What are the things you just gravitate towards because they're there and you're just munching on them and snacking and then you're thinking, "Why? Why did I do that? I don't even really like that." No. Identify. Put on paper what's totally worth it and what's not. What are those things you eat because they're there but they're not really that amazing? Define these things.

Then also look at, where's the middle for you? Where's the middle between not feeling like you're missing out but also not overindulging and feeling like trash? Maybe it's, "I'm going to eat whatever looks good but in a normal amount. I don't need a plate piled sky-high or two plates or three plates just because it's November 20-whatever." I don't even know. Maybe that's what the middle is for you. Maybe it's one special drink instead of three that you

don't really pay attention to because you're doing other things like cooking or talking or whatever. Eating.

Maybe you pick one dessert that's really worth it instead of having four because they're there. Maybe you're going to decide ahead of time to have the bread with dinner or the potatoes but not both. I don't know what it is for you. You get to decide. One thing I do that's helpful for me is I take a bite of whatever it is and then I say, "Is this totally amazing and worth it?" If it's not I'm going to pass. It's not worth it. If it's just good or it's just okay I let it go.

Now, when I find that thing that's totally freaking amazing to keep myself from carrying it off into a room where I can eat it all by myself and not sharing. I ask myself, "Am I going to get more enjoyment from this if I keep going or am I going to get less enjoyment from this if I keep going?" Really think about that. Let's say that somebody loves me a lot and makes a homemade super-special red velvet cake. It's not going to happen, I can tell you that right now, but if it did then maybe as I'm sitting there with my very large piece and I'm three or four bites in, I ask, "Is eating more of this going to increase my enjoyment from this point or decrease it?"

There is a very real point at which if I keep going I'm going to enjoy it less. Either because I'm not paying as much attention as I was to that first bit or two, or because I get to the point where I'm like, "Dude, you totally overdid it." I don't want to diminish the joy of something that is worth it because I went too far. That's been so huge for me.

There are another couple of strategies I thought I'd share that have been helpful for me. Some might work for you. None might work of you, but you try them on and figure out what works for you. One thing is I take extra, extra good care of myself in the days leading up to the holidays. Because the last thing I want is to feel like I'm spilling over the top of my jeans when I get dressed on Thursday morning. I will eat well, I will eat more good, clean foods. I'll be really mindful of not overeating. Even the things I typically now overeat. Those are like, I typically overeat cauliflower and Brussels sprouts because I'm like, "It's cauliflower, it's Brussels sprouts, right?"

Then I feel meh. I won't do that. I'll be even more mindful of that in the days leading up to a holiday because I just want to take great care of myself so that I feel as strong and confident and I'm really prioritizing self-care more than even in the days leading up to it. I'll rest enough. I'll practice more gratitude. I'll slow down a little bit. I'm really going to look at every day and say, "What can I do to dial up my self-care?"

Another one, and this is hard but it's so important. Chill the hell out. Honestly. So many times we go into the holidays like, "Oh my Gosh, I have to do so many things." You don't have to do them. You're choosing to do them and at what point, we were having a conversation about this in my Fat Loss Fast Track veterans group. One of my clients was like, "Yeah, one of the things I have to do is iron the napkins." At what point is the stress and pressure that that puts on you going to outweigh what difference it makes in your holiday celebration? Just my two cents, nobody's going to notice if they haven't been ironed. Nobody's going to care if they do notice that they've been ironed. It's not going to be like, "Oh my Gosh, you made my day because you ironed the napkins."

Chill out. I get it, it can be stressful to spend time with family. Trust me, I get that. I promise you that's not lost on me. It can be stressful to feel like you have to get your home ready, but where is that line between this is going to add to the experience versus, "I'm being neurotic and this is actually going to detract from the experience for me and my family." Really find that rhythm for you.

There's so much to be grateful for. Even if you're alone on the holidays and I've been alone on plenty of holidays. There's still so much to be grateful for. Find it and if you're struggling to find it go serve somebody who has less than you do. Your attitude is everything.

Another thing that helps me a lot, get sweaty. Work out. I will be very mindful to bring my top-notch intensity to my work outs over the next several days and even on Thanksgiving morning. Not to compensate for what I might eat but because it's going to make me feel better. Because it's part of that impeccable self-care. It's part of how I feel strong and positive and I want to go into the holidays feeling my very best.

Another one, this might seem silly but I promise you it's not. Dress well. Find something you feel comfortable and confident in. Stand tall. Own it. It doesn't matter if you hoped to be smaller the next time you saw your family or took pictures. I get it. Don't let that consume you because you can't do anything about it. Be grateful for where you are and what you have and the power you have to make the most of the given day, focus on something about you that's beautiful. Just do it. Put a little more energy and attention into how you look and what you wear than maybe you normally would so that you can feel as strong and confident and positive as possible.

Another huge one is to slow down and think. Especially in moments of temptation. If you're struggling, if you're doing that internal debate of, "Oh, screw it. Whatever. I'll just be better tomorrow. I'll fast tomorrow. I'll work

out like crazy." Don't react. Give yourself a minute. Give yourself an hour. Just chill for a minute. Slow down. One of the things that came up in a yoga class the other day was the instructor was talking about how they were reviewing the tapes from a competition that they recently competed in. What they found in every competitor was when they started to lose their balance they fought it and they would wiggle more and then they would fall out. What they were teaching us in the class is when you feel unstable don't react, stop. Pause. Collect yourself. Gather yourself. Center yourself. Then move. Then adjust.

So often we just got to do, we got to do, and so we have these moments of temptation. We have these internal debates of, "Oh, I know I said I wasn't going to drink but that's the third time so-and-so has offered me. Whatever." No, don't react yet. Just pause. Give yourself a minute. Literally. Check the clock. Give yourself five minutes. Give yourself ten minutes. Just slow down before you react. Give yourself a minute to gather or to let the urge pass altogether.

As another way of emphasizing this pause look at the clock and don't eat for three hours, whatever time it is. The reason I say that is because so many times in the holidays we can just constantly eat. We're preparing food in the morning and then appetizers are set out and then there's the meal and then there's leftovers and we're cleaning up and then there's dessert. We just keep eating non-stop. Then we don't really enjoy the things we're eating because we feel so gross. Just look at the clock and be like, "I'm not going to eat anything for the next three hours."

Make sure that you find yourself hungry at some point in the day, right, as opposed to just feeling awful all day long. That's something that's just really helpful for me. Then check in with yourself throughout the day. Pay attention to you in addition to paying attention to all of your responsibilities.

In case it's helpful for you, and it might not be, I thought I'd share how I plan to spend my Thanksgiving. This is the first Thanksgiving I've spent with my family in quite some time and there are pros and cons to that. Family time is not easy for me as it's not easy for a lot of people. There are things I love about it and things I don't love so much. If you're doing all the cooking, which I'm not, or if you have little ones, which I don't. If you'll be alone all day and I'm not, then my day can't and won't be your day. Even if you happen to be going to your aunt's house an hour and a half away your day still won't be my day, and that's great. I know that.

Develop a strategy that works for you. Don't hear mine and then say, "Oh, well that doesn't work for me." It's not supposed to work for you. I know it

doesn't. It shouldn't. I want you to spend a few minutes figuring out what you can do instead of passing over that opportunity by focusing on what you can't do.

I'll get up at my normal time, 4:30 in the morning. That's hugely important for me. It's something I do everyday, especially on days that are a little bit different or outside of my normal, because those are the days when I find for me that it's most important to establish some element of normalcy. It helps me hedge against this feeling that it's like some unicorn of a day and therefore I should make unicorn food choices. Nope. This day actually isn't all that different. What remains the same is how I care for myself and what makes me feel proud and productive. Part of that is getting up at 4:30 in the morning to enjoy my coffee and work, so I will. That's what I do everyday.

I'll go to the 7:00 a.m. yoga class. Not my normal class. From about 6:30 a.m. to about 9-ish with transit time and what-not, I will be in hot yoga. I will get a good sweat on. Then I'll come home and shower and I'll cook my contribution and there's recipe up on my blog at primalpotential.com for this, is going to be a parsnip and cauliflower dish. Maybe something else, I don't know, but definitely the parsnips and cauliflower.

After that I will pack up my car with the food I'm bringing but also a game or two that I'm going to bring to make the most out of the family time, because that's the part that I enjoy the most. Especially because I was away from my family for over 15 years. I'll also bring my kettle bell and my jump rope. I'm not determined to get a workout in in the middle of the day. If it's raining or if we're busy no sweat, right? Literally. But I'd also love to take a 10 minute window to escape. It tends to get warm in there and sometimes I get a little overstimulated or I just need a few minutes to like, "Whoo, okay. Getting grilled by my grandmother." Like, "All right. I need to go outside." The other part of it is I tend to get tired when I'm just sitting around. I don't normally do that so that'll help me get some fresh air and wake up a little bit and I'm pretty sure I could probably talk my sister into doing it with me.

After I pack up my care I'll head down to my aunt's. I don't know, it'll probably take me about 90 minutes, a little less to get there, and I'll probably have Bulletproof coffee along the way. I haven't been drinking much Bulletproof coffee lately, but it's not a heavy meal. It'll hold me over until our late lunch and it's portable. I'll help in the kitchen during the day but I'll make a choice ahead of time, I've already made the choice, to not pick at the food while I prep because that is part of what doesn't make me feel good. I want to be able to enjoy my meal and eat what everybody else is eating so I don't want to set myself up to munch all day. I wouldn't do that on a normal day so I'm not going to do that on Thursday.

I'll also pass on the appetizers. If I go to a restaurant I don't usually get an appetizer. When I'm having dinner at home I don't make myself an appetizer and quite frankly, they won't be worth it. Right? It's going to be like cheese, crackers, normal stuff. Meh, not worth it. My dinner will be primarily meat and vegetables like normal. Rolls to me, or bread, not worth it. I've been there, I've done it. It's not anything new or novel. Same thing with potatoes. I like them, they taste good, but they don't make me feel good so they don't taste good enough to be worth how they make me feel.

As far as dessert is concerned if there was homemade fudge or homemade red velvet cake I'd probably do it, but I'm pretty sure there's not going to be so I probably won't have anything. Even if I did have it I would have a few bites and then ask myself, "Is going on from here, having more of this, going to make me feel better or going to make me feel worse about this choice and this indulgence?" If I can, like I said, I'll get outside. Kettle bell, jump rope, go for a walk. I don't know. I will skip the alcohol because it's just not worth it for me. It's not really my thing. If there was some amazing bottle of red wine I would do it but at family Thanksgiving I am certain that in my family there's not going to be.

That's how my day is going to go. I'll get home at a normal time. I'll make sure to leave so that I'm not tired when I'm driving home and I'll go to bed, and I'll be happy. I'll look for opportunities to make positivity louder. Yes, I can assure you, especially in my family, especially in my life and things that have happened in my life in the last couple of years, somebody's going to say something that I could choose to be offended by but I'm not going to go there, because I know nobody in my family is trying to hurt me and even if they are it can only hurt me if I decide to fixate on that thing they said or did. I'm just not going to do that.

I encourage you to take the same approach. Be grateful. If you're alone find a way to serve somebody who has less than you have and take great care of yourself. I'm going to take a second and try not to cry here and just tell you that I am immensely grateful for every single one of you. I've thought a lot in the past couple weeks about what I am grateful going into the Thanksgiving holiday and at the top of my list it is the fact that I am able to share some of my stories and struggles and experiences with you and I couldn't do that if you weren't here on this journey with me, so from the bottom of my heart I am so grateful that you are in this with me, that we have this bond together.

I will tell you this, today and everyday I am here for you. I care about where you're at. I care about what you're struggling with. I want to help in every way that I can. You are not just a number. You are not just a statistic of a

listener. I really care about every single one of you and want to do everything in my power to support and encourage you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for being a part of my story and I hope you have a really wonderful day.