

Elizabeth B.:

Hello everybody. Welcome back to the Primal Potential Podcast. I am Elizabeth Benton. I am really pumped that you are here hanging out with me in general, but certainly excited to talk with you about hunger.

We all experience hunger differently. It really is a spectrum. Some of you might feel like you're hungry all the time no matter what. Others of you might feel like you eat until you're satisfied or even sometimes full but then you're hungry again an hour later, and you're wondering, I can't possibly need to eat more. I was just stuffed an hour ago. How am I hungry again? Other people feel like, you're not hungry at all until you start eating, and then you're ravenous and struggle to turn that off or get ahead of that hunger.

I've done several episodes on hunger, and I will link to them over on the show notes for today's episode at primalpotential.com. I've decided to revisit it though because it's a crucial component of success and I know that many of you don't go back through all of the archives, and this is a common struggle so we're going to tackle it because that's what we do here. It is tough to consistently make good or even great food choices with quality or quantity if you're hungry all the time. The quality of our food matters, but even if we're choosing high quality foods, the quantity still matters and if you're not in control of your hunger it can be really hard to stay in control of how much you eat and/or what you eat.

I know a lot of people struggle with is this real hunger? Does my body need fuel or not? If not, what is this? Why do I feel this way if I don't really need to eat? I believe that if we understand hunger, and we understand where it comes from, and what the options are in terms of what it could mean, and we identify food strategies as well as mindset strategies to get in control of hunger, everything becomes more easy. If we're not hungry as often, and we can improve our response to an understanding of hunger, food choices are easier, progress is easier. I am all for anything we can do to make this journey called life easier for everybody.

A huge part, pun intended, of what was hard when I was over 350 pounds was being hungry all the time. I could stuff myself stupid to that point where I felt sick and then an hour later feel legitimately hungry. I didn't understand it then. I do now. Wish I had then. I really felt like my body was broken though at the time. How is it possible that everybody else can be satisfied for several hours but here I am after a huge meal feeling hungry just 30 minutes later?

I want everybody to make some progress here first in understanding what's going on, and second in feeling empowered about smarter ways we can respond to that sensation of hunger. That sensation of hunger is controlled by a hormone known as "ghrelin," G-H-R-E-L-I-N. We'll talk more in detail about ghrelin and how it works, which should get all of you science geeks excited. You are my people. But before that, I want to talk about blood

sugar, because hunger is also triggered by low blood sugar. This triggering happens whether your body needs fuel or not. This is what causes a lot of people to overeat.

Before we talk about the overeating part of it, one of the most essential functions of your body, right up there with keeping your heart pumping, is maintaining stable blood sugar. Your body is using blood to deliver nutrients, sugar as a source of energy to every part of your body. Do if the sugar in your blood gets too low your body doesn't function properly. You can have low energy or you can become sick. Similarly, if there is too much sugar in your blood, your blood sugar gets too high, that can become very toxic and dangerous for your body.

Your body works hard to keep it stable in spite of you and your wacky food choices that make that job really challenging at times. When you wake up in the morning and immediately have a blueberry muffin, hello blood sugar through the roof. Same thing if you've skipped a meal or two because your day was crazy and then you have a handful of chocolate. Or when you watch a Netflix binge session and eat a whole pint of ice cream. Blood sugar on a rocket ship, your body has to go into overdrive to control that. Your body comes to the rescue to save you when you are not making choices that really help it out.

In response to that blood sugar rocket ship blue berry muffin, handful of chocolate after skipping a couple of meals, or a pint of ice cream, your body deploys a boat load of insulin, because insulin is the usher required to pull that sugar out of the blood and take it away to be stored. The higher you send your blood sugar soaring, the more insulin that gets deployed to help a clear it out. Like if it's a bigger job because your blood sugar is higher, because you ate more, or you ate something that was primarily sugar, it's a bigger job so you need more resources, i.e. more insulin. Generally speaking, the higher the peak you create, the higher you send your blood sugars soaring either because of the volume you ate or the specific thing you ate because it was primarily sugar, like a Twinkie or a cupcake, oftentimes, the higher the peak the lower the valley.

Now, your body, though it is a brilliant machine, it can't compensate perfectly for the fact that you just overate or ate something that sent your blood sugar soaring. So your blood sugar crashes after that blueberry muffin, or a handful of chocolate, or a pint of ice cream, or a plate of pasta. Sometimes it goes too low. Now, not the kind of low that for the average non-diabetic is going to make you sick or get you in trouble, but low enough that your body is like, hey hey, hey, hey you, we got to fix this. Your body can't send you an email and say, dear sir or ma'am: please don't do that ever again. Eat less or eat better. Ideally, sir or ma'am, please do both. Now we're struggling to pick your blood sugar up off the floor.

That would be great, and who knows maybe Jeff Bezos is working on a

technology for that. But in the meantime, your body communicates that message to you in a different way, a more primal way, a way that feels like hunger and cravings. Blood sugar too low. What did you do? You don't need fuel. It's not like, oh, I have low blood sugar, I better get a brownie. No, no, no, no, no. Your body is just working to compensate and it can do that without you eating. If you just overate or ate something that sent your blood sugar on this roller coaster ride even though you feel hungry that is your body working through what you just did.

Now, if you're diabetic I'm not talking to you because I am not a medical doctor. I am talking about for the rest of us whose bodies can compensate for this. Yes, you might feel hunger. Yes, you might experience cravings. No you do not need to eat. The best way to avoid this hunger and cravings sensation caused by the blood sugar rollercoaster is to stop sending your blood sugar through the roof. You might be wondering, well how? This is what I teach and call the "Golden Rules of Carbs and Fat Loss." I go through those in detail in episode 195. 195 of the Primal Potential Podcast. If you haven't listened to that episode, or, or ready, or if you're not practicing them regularly now would be a good time to navigate back to episode 195.

A huge part of managing blood sugar isn't that part where we're like, oh my goodness, I'm hungry but I don't think I need to eat. That's not the biggest part of managing blood sugar, how do I respond right now. The biggest part is, okay, next time I don't need to start the day with the blueberry muffin. I'll have some bacon and eggs. Or I won't grab the candy bar after skipping a meal. I'll run out to Chipotle and get a burrito bowl with lots of veggies and some protein and guac. Now you know how I eat.

In the moment, if you feel the need to ease the sensation, I know I just ate, I know maybe I even overate but I'm starving, first you don't need to eat, but if you're going to to ease that sensation do not add fuel to the fire and go for more sugar, or a large portion of anything that is going to ... or even a small portion of anything ... What I mean is don't overeat and don't eat anything that's just going to continue this roller coaster ride of blood sugar. Have some veggies, a piece of cheese, if you are not sensitive to dairy, some chicken, anything, a protein bar, a protein bar that doesn't have tons of sugar, mind you like an EPIC Bar, which is a meat base bar. Also, don't fear riding it out. Don't fear just sitting there and being hungry. Your body can and will figure it out.

One of my favorite mantras is, because I had a lot of learning to do here, "Hunger is not an emergency." That doesn't mean don't listen to your body. It doesn't mean ignore the signals your body is sending. Ready? This is huge. This might be the most important thing I say on this episode; it doesn't mean don't listen to your body; it means listen to understand. Listen to understand. Yes, I feel hungry right now but why? What do I need to understand? Oh well, it's because I had a sugary latte on an empty stomach, or I had the blueberry muffin, or I just had some ice cream, or

I've been overeating for the past couple of days or drinking too much wine for the past couple of days. Listen to understand.

We want to respond intelligently as opposed to just reacting. Just reacting is I'm hungry I need to eat. Listening to understand means I feel hungry, but I know that maybe I wasn't really working with my body and my body is right now kind of trying to bring my blood sugar up and part of that process is triggering me with hunger and cravings, but hunger isn't an emergency, so I can just wait this out. I can wait this out and learn to do better next time.

I would imagine that many of you are probably thinking, how do I know when I should eat then? How do I know if it's true hunger or just a blood sugar imbalance? Part of it is a little bit of common sense. I really think that more often than not we look for complex answers when simple ones would do. One of the best things we can do for ourselves is make decisions based on common sense. When did you eat last? If you had a big meal a couple of hours ago, you're all right. Asking yourself, does my body really need fuel right now, since I've been sitting at my desk for the last 90 minutes since I ate? No, probably not. The other thing is if you have body weight to lose you're not in danger of starving and hunger is not a threat or something dangerous or something to fear. You can sit and wait it out.

If you can hear my voice, you never really need to eat. This, oh my god starvation mode ... Please you're fine. It's okay. It's okay. We over react to hunger a lot of times because doing so gives us what we want, which is a snack. Do you know what I mean? Starvation mode is not something that you need to fear because you had this moment of hunger after overeating or a few days of making choices that really created blood sugar imbalance or just one choice that created blood sugar imbalance.

If your goal is to be less hungry in general, you want to make sure that you're making good food choices that minimize hunger. Choices that have the least impact on your blood sugar. That will go an incredibly long way towards helping you control or minimize the sensation of hunger or the immediacy of the return of hunger. Fats, dietary fats have the least impact on blood sugar and therefore some of the best foods to help us control hunger. Fats like avocado, macadamia nuts, full-fat dairy, like I said if you can handle dairy, fattier cuts of meat, or fish like salmon, or chicken thighs versus chicken breasts.

Protein is also a great option. The one caveat, and I've done full episodes on this, is about over consuming proteins. Sometimes we fall into this trap of like if we're choosing a healthy food like chicken or steak; we can eat as much of it as we want. That's not true with anything, but it's especially not true of protein because there is not a storage form of protein in the body, and excess protein can be broken down to generate glucose or sugar so we just want to not overdo it there.

Getting back to the hormone side of things, we talked about the blood sugar side. The hormone ghrelin plays a big role in whether or not we feel hungry. The number one thing that influences our hormones is the food we eat. So if you are somebody who feels like you're always hungry or you're not in control of your hunger responses, a big part of the problem is the foods you are choosing because of the way they influence our hormones. That is good news, because that means we're not like a victim of our hormones and, oh, it's just my hormones. No. The number one way we influence our hormones is what we eat.

I want to talk about some specific things that can help you manage ghrelin and reduce hunger, because everything gets easy if you're not as hungry as often. Ghrelin is a hormone secreted by your stomach. It is responsible for making you feel hungry or not. When we understand what triggers this stimulation of ghrelin, then we can moderate those factors. The other thing that ghrelin does is that it encourages your body to store fat in your abdominal region especially. When we control ghrelin through our food choices than we also control hunger and help to minimize fat storage in the midsection.

I want to go through a few strategies. I've talked about them before but it's been a while. We'll just kind of overview some ways that you can take better control of the hormone ghrelin so that you store less abdominal fat and so that you feel less of this immediate return of hunger after eating, or just this hunger that you just can't really satisfy. I will say this before I review these things, you don't have to do all of them. I would encourage you as I go through these to say which of these am I kind of struggling with the most or which of these is the furthest from I'm mastering it, and really work on the one thing that will have the biggest impact for you.

One of the best things we can do to help control ghrelin is not crash diet. When we severely restrict how much we're eating, like by going on a low-calorie diet, that increases ghrelin production. That is going to increase hunger and it's going to increase abdominal fat storage because your body is like, yo, what's going on here. Eat more. In case you don't, I'm going to store every little bit I can right there around your midsection just to make sure we're okay. So don't do that.

The second thing; eat more non-starchy vegetables. Your starchy vegetables are like potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash. Non-starchy vegetables are things like, my favorite brussels sprouts, or broccoli, cabbage, veggies that are high in water and fiber, lower in starch. One of the things that that these guys do, and that's why one of my favorite things that all my clients get crazy about is my breakfast salad bowl that's cabbage, and eggs, and bacon, and whatever, because it's a high volume meal. The great thing about these veggies, the broccoli, the brussels sprouts, the cabbage, they stretch out your stomach a little bit. When you

fill your belly with these things that are not sugar and starch, but they take up more space, these fibrous veggies, the stretching out, the pressure against the stomach walls helps to lower your ghrelin levels so you experience less hunger and you have less abdominal fat storage.

The other thing; making sure that you've got a little bit of protein and some healthy fats with most or all of your meals. This slows the overall rate of digestion, that slows the overall rate at which food passes through your stomach, and when you have food in your stomach ghrelin levels stay lower. Now, things like processed foods and carbs and starches, they digest much more quickly and so hunger returns much more quickly. We want to slow down the digestive process and we do that in part with protein and fat.

The other thing is avoid fructose. Yes, fructose is in fruit, but in more quantities and higher amounts fructose is in basically all processed foods, soft drinks, fruit juice. That's what we're really concerned with here. Fructose raises ghrelin levels, so that makes you feel more hunger more often, and it also suppresses other hormones that triggers satiety or feeling full. We don't want that. Don't panic about it, oh my gosh, does this mean I can't have an apple? No. I'm not being condescending in saying that, but I know when people hear fructose they think fruit. When I say fructose I want you to first think processed foods and drinks. Fruit does have fructose but processed foods has far more.

Now, from a non-food standpoint, I want you to be really aware of stress. Stress increases ghrelin because your body has to work harder when you are under stress than when you're not. Making sure you're getting enough sleep, meditation, working out, all of these things help manage stress and that actually has an impact on your hunger.

Last thing from a food standpoint, I'm kind of jumping around here, is make sure you're consuming enough omega-3 fatty acids. You can either take a supplement. Just make sure that it's not some generic omega-3 that is rather rich in EPA and DHA. I did an entire episode on omega-3 so I'm not going to go into that here. If you want to know more about it go to primalpotential.com, search omega-3. You'll find that episode will be good. EPA and DHA, whether we're talking about in supplement form or salmon, sardines, anchovies, mackerel, when we do not get enough of those omega-3s, specifically EPA and DHA, that increases ghrelin production and we have more hunger and more abdominal fat storage.

Keep in mind too, I know I listed off a bunch of things, it is about improvement. It is not about, oh, okay she just laid out the rules now I need to follow all of them. No. What represents an improvement for you? That's where the magic is. If you're that morning blueberry muffin eater, have half the blueberry muffin and a couple of eggs. Is it perfect? No, and who cares. It doesn't have to be. Do what represents an improvement for

you. If you're that pint of ice cream person, have half of it, and then cope with the hunger later instead of piling it on and keep eating.

Practice what represents an improvement for you because you are not at the mercy of your hunger. You are in control. You are in control of the choices you make to control hunger before you eat, but you're also in control of your response to hunger when it arises. Take control. Take control and do what represents an improvement for you.

Link up on primalpotential.com to the episodes I've done on hunger. I've tackled hunger from a lot of different angles. So if that's something that you're struggling with definitely check out those episodes. Then I want to end with the announcement I shared at the beginning of our last episode, which is I launched a new podcast. Nothing changing about this podcast. The Primal Potential Podcast will remain as it is, airing on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The new podcast is called, "The Daily Motivations Podcast." It is currently up on iTunes and Stitcher. It is awaiting approval on Spotify. I have not yet submitted it iHeartRadio and a few others, but I will soon.

The great thing about this podcast, it's not about weight loss or food or nutrition, it's pure motivation, and all of the episodes are less than five minutes. So enough every day to help you refocus on creating a life that you want and taking action. That podcast, The Daily Motivations Podcast, will be five days a week, Monday through Friday, short episodes, less than five minutes. I would love for you to check it out. I will link to it in the show notes page for this episode. I would love for you to check it out. If you enjoy it, if you enjoy it, I would love it if you would subscribe and leave a rating and review. That is one thing you could do that would really help me be able to keep doing what I'm doing.

Thanks for tuning in today. I love you guys. I would say stay hungry but the opposite is true. Take control of your hunger. You are in control. Love you guys.