

Full Plate Podcast Transcript Episode #111: BONUS: Managing Acid Reflux Without Restricting Food

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Abbie

Hey, everyone welcome back to another episode of full plate. It's Abby I'm sitting here with the dogs. It's a very sunny day. Finally here in California. So yay for that today. We are talking about a topic that seems to be on everyone's plates so to speak. Lately I had a conversation with a client in a session just this morning about this topic. Came up last week in my group session. It's been coming up in my group discussion thread in my membership and it was submitted as a question from 1 of our amazing patrons. Thank you to everybody who is supporting the show on patreon by the way. Some details on how to do that in a second but the topic actually you already know the topic because you read the title of the episode. I always forget that when I'm recording these but I think I'm being so sneaky and you know covert you already know what we're talking about today. We're talking about acid reflux. Ah I can empathize with this topic and this experience so much. I have had acid reflux for a very long time. It definitely got a lot worse during my eating disorder and during my competitive running days I have struggled with digestive issues my whole life.

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Abbie

Ever since I was a little tiny little child I've had surgeries on my stomach. I've had this and that and autoimmune diseases that impact it. It's a struggle. So if you have struggled with your digestive system, if you've struggled with symptoms like acid reflux or otherwise by the way this episode is going to help you no matter what. What your digestive symptoms are, I think this is applicable to a lot of things out there. But I just want to start by sending you a lot of compassion on this topic because I never want you to feel dismissed or I'm gaslit or. Like feel like you're just not being heard by your providers or by me or by anyone who's talking about this. This is a really real experience, very real and it's very uncomfortable and very frustrating and can create a really really complicated relationship with food. Layered on top of the fact that most of us already have a difficult relationship with food because hello we live here. We're surrounded by diet culture right? to see we're swimming in so I just want to start this episode with a ton of compassion and just tell you that I hope that this conversation helps you navigate it in a way that feels. Kind gentle loving rather than restrictive punitive fear based right rule based anxiety driven. All the things. So I'm going to be talking about acid reflux with respect to a question that was submitted on Patreon.

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Abbie

And this is a bonus episode. So that means if you are listening to this episode and you aren't a member of the Patreon page the full plate Patreon page. This is just a free preview. You're getting and the full episode is going to be available on the full plate Patreon which is full plate. No wait. It's patreon.com/fullplate I will link that right in the show notes. It'll be right at the top of the show notes for this episode. So if you want to listen to the full thing if you want to hear my answer and hear me talk through all of the ways that acid reflux both. Impacts our

relationship with food and is impacted by our relationship with food. We can approach all the things you'll have to subscribe to Patreon which you can do for as low as \$3 a month and you get access to all the bonus content. All the things commenting on the newsletters. And you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you're making this podcast possible and that I'm giving you a little virtual hug as you listen so hugs all around. Thank you so much to those of you who are doing that you are really making this possible. I do this without sponsors and you help cover the costs. So it means a ton to me. So let me read the question and it comes from Erica and Erika wrote in and says how can I manage my acid reflux without restriction.

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Abbie

I've been told over and over that I should eliminate certain foods but just thinking about restricting is triggering me other than limiting my caffeine intake. I'm really trying not to cut out any specific foods because honestly I know that's what got me here to begin with. Supplements and some over-the-counter medications don't really seem to do much and I'm sure I can't be the only one in your community who is struggling with this as I heal my relationship with food. Do you have experience with this Abby, or have you had success with any remedies with your clients that don't involve restriction. Thanks so much for what you do Erica okay, an amazing question right? Can we all agree, an amazing question Erica I love you and appreciate you so much and I want to talk about so much in this episode. Everything from how restriction contributes to acid reflux which Erica kind of mentions in their question off the bat and we're going to talk about stomach acid production digestive system function sensitivity to certain foods. Gastric emptying and how that impacts it binge eating nutritional deficiencies all the things and then we're going to talk about remedies right? like Erica mentioned but really treatment approaches that are evidence based so with that.

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Abbie

I'm gonna get into my answer and again if you want to hear the full episode including my answer go to patreon.com/fullate and I hope I will see you there.

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Abbie

Okay, so to kick us off with kind of responding to Erica's question and digging into all of this I want to start by talking about how restriction can impact acid reflux. And Erika talked about this in their question saying you know we're just thinking about restricting is triggering them that they know that you know restricting their intake of foods is probably something that got them here in the first place and I want to say yes and. Can't blame ourselves for any of this right? Diet culture prescribes restriction and tells us that it's going to, you know, lead to eternal health and happiness which we all have you know most of us who are listening to this now have recognized it is not the case and. I do want to validate the fact that restriction can lead to cause and worsen acid reflux. So when we're restricting our food intake a lot of systems in the body are impacted. And I think it's really common to think that and by the way it's really natural, not just common I don't think common covers it but it's natural and rational to think that food could be the culprit for anything that.

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Abbie

Acid reflux occurs kind of in that stomach area in your digestive system. It's really natural to think "oh it must be something I ate but what's really important to understand about that digestive system is that it interacts with every other system in your body. The nervous system, the endocrine system, the cardiovascular system all sorts. Systems in the body are implicated in all of our digestive Processes. So It's not food all the time that results in the symptoms that we're experiencing.. In fact I would urge you to start to think about experiences you're having digestively as unrelated to specific foods outside of you know, certain experiences, especially allergies all that stuff but really try to take a wider lens to the experience you're having in your digestive system when we are not eating enough or we're restricting certain types of foods this can lead to decreased stomach acid production. So I'm starting out by just kind of explaining the impact of restriction on stomach acid and therefore acid reflux. So. This paradoxically results in worsened acid Reflux symptoms when food is consumed because the reduced acid levels can be insufficient for the digestive system to properly digest food.

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Abbie

Stomach acid plays a really crucial role in breaking down our food and maintaining the acidic environment necessary for digestion. So when we have these reduced acid levels that result from restrictive eating and under eating it can result in incomplete digestion of food. Which can lead to fermentation and gas production and contribute to acid Reflux symptoms in those systems. So That's kind of point number one that I want to make clear that when we're not eating enough or we're restricting our food intake in some way we're not eating. All the foods right? Maybe we're restricting carbs shocker that we are negatively impacting our stomach environment the acidic environment of our stomach and that can worsen acid reflux. So This also happens if you go prolonged period of. Periods of time without eating So Let's say you are ostensibly eating enough overall. But you are going really long periods of time between your meals right? So Maybe you're not snacking or you're going several several hours without eating. Or this might happen to folks who tend to like eat breakfast a little later or skip it. Altogether studies have shown that irregular meal patterns including fasting can contribute to dysfunction in the digestive system.

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Abbie

And increased risk of acid Reflux episodes. So This means it's not just total food intake that impacts acid reflux. It's also the regularity and consistency of food intake right? So eating enough. And eating regularly and consistently and I'll dig into those as a way to mitigate symptoms in a little bit but I'm kind of going over what contributes to acid reflux from a restrictive standpoint. Okay, so chronic restriction of food intake can disrupt our digestive system. Overall. Including not just acid production but just digestive enzyme production and the hormones involved in digestion in even Gastric motility right? So this can lead to dysregulated gastrointestinal function and produce more. Yes, you guessed it, acid Reflux symptoms another way that restriction impacts acid Reflux is that we can become more sensitive to the foods that we restricted. So Let's use that carb example again. So Let's say

you've been restricting carbohydrates in certain ways with your disordered eating patterns or diets. You've been on.

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Abbie

What that's going to do is it's going to make you a little more sensitive to those foods when you do start eating them again or when you do eat them and by the way caveat. This does not mean continue to avoid them because that's only going to worsen the problem. It's really important to start to bring those foods back. It might mean that you want to do it gently and gradually but it also means that you're going to expect some digestive discomfort. I talk to my clients about this all the time. There's a lot of pain and discomfort in the process of reintroducing foods and it's important to have someone help you through that process and help you kind of differentiate between what's something that's like a true reaction to a food versus just a natural part of re-incorporating foods. So I just wanted to highlight this because I know a lot of us in healing our relationship with food are starting to eat foods that we haven't eaten in a long time and if our acid reflux symptoms flare up when we're doing that of course we might freak out and think oh my God see it is this food I can't eat this food but pump the brakes and remind yourself that we just have an increased sensitivity to restricted foods for a temporary period of time. Okay, the way to lessen that sensitivity is to more regularly include those foods. Okay, the other thing that's happening with restriction is delayed gastric emptying so it slows restrictive eating slows the rate.

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Abbie

At which food empties from your stomach into your small intestine right? That's gastric emptying so that means food remains in the stomach for a longer period of time which puts more pressure on your lower esophageal sphincter and it allows the stomach contents to reflux into the esophagus when this happens right? Okay so I'm going to repeat that so when we restrict our food intake and this happens all the time I went through this it was so rough I had really slow motility and gastric emptying right? So that impacts our bowel movements and everything. But that's when my acid reflux would get really bad because I was essentially like. Slowing the rate at which food was moving through my system and that was putting more pressure on my system. Overall when I did eat it increased acid reflux. So again, this is another way restriction can lead to acid reflux, another kind of final thing that I'll point out here and then we'll get into some steps to take right? That doesn't involve restricting what we eat. We've talked a lot on this podcast about how this kind of dichotomy exists between restrictive eating and like loss of control eating or for some people it'll be binge eating and.

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Abbie

It's like this seesaw right? The more you restrict the higher. The likelihood of a binge episode or an eating up or eating in a way that feels out of control or really uncomfortable like you eat way past comfortable fullness. And by the way this is a very natural way that your body is helping save your life helping you get food when you're restricting. So it's not something to demonize but 1 of the impacts of this is that when we restrict and then we experience loss of control eating that loss of control eating occurs after. Not having eaten enough right? So

then we're experiencing that same thing that we were talking about before which is a ton of pressure. in our stomach right? that gastric emptying effect that we talked about before but also these eating episodes that take us to discomfort can impact acid reflux symptoms negatively? Okay, so the answer isn't to try to quote unquote control the binge. It's to start eating more overall during the day so that you don't wind up in this pattern of restrict binge restrict binge restrict binge. Okay, so. With all of that hope you're still following me I know this is a lot but I really wanted to outline in order to air in order to answer Erica's question really well I wanted to explain why restrictive eating is so harmful to acid reflux and and can actually cause it because so many of

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Abbie

The interventions that wellness culture and diet culture offer to digestive symptoms including acid Reflux symptoms is to eliminate a food and eliminate this food to restrict your intake like intermittent fasting and I just want to highlight. How deeply damaging to our digestive system as a whole including acid production and gastric emptying and nutritional deficiencies and all of these things. So I Just think it's so important to know that restriction is not the answer. We can take another approach to our acid reflux. Right? That doesn't involve eliminating all these foods. That's not to say that you might not find it as you're healing your relationship with food. You might find that there are particular foods for you that do rev up those symptoms but what I want you to consider is that it might not be possible to truly identify that until you're eating enough regularly and have a more mentally and emotionally stable and happy relationship with food because until we're there. It is really hard to know whether those symptoms from foods are from being sensitive to those foods because you restricted them for so long whether it's as a result of just under eating for so long or stress around food which we didn't even highlight yet which is like the impact of our relationship with food on our digestive system.

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Abbie

Feeling super anxious or stressed out about eating and how that can cause acid reflux symptoms. So I just want to say you have body autonomy and I want you to do whatever feels good to you. But as you start to think about interventions for acid reflux I really caution you against going down that elimination. Pathway until you've really healed your relationship with food and can come at each specific food that might be triggering you with a neutral mindset right? A compassionate mindset rather than a fear-based one so when it comes to healing and things that can help and support us. Experiencing acid reflux is okay, eating enough. Overall I've kind of mentioned this several times already. But this is crucial: eating enough. This is central to everything. Every system in the body we need to be eating enough for things to be operating properly. Whether it's our digestive system, our hormones, you name it? Okay so healing from physical restriction is crucial then of course eating regularly throughout the day. So eating enough is 1 thing but then also making sure that you're eating consistently over the course of the day you're not waiting too long to eat your meals. You're allowing yourself to snack between meals. You're not fasting all of these things. The third component that is really important is to.

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Abbie

To address the mental and emotional relationship with food so reducing stress around the eating experience and this might not just be stress about food and what you're eating but it might be the how. So for me I love to eat with some Netflix show on. That is so soothing and calming to my nervous system and personally I digest my food better when I'm in that state watching some Netflix, relax on the couch, that's my happy place. So think about how you like to eat. Where do you like to eat with whom do you like to eat what is a really low stress environment for you to eat and enjoy your food so that you can support your digestive system and then of course working through any guilt and shame you feel about certain foods. So that you can differentiate between digestive symptoms that are coming from stress about what you ate versus the food itself. The next thing that can really help and be healing for acid reflux is to take a look at your relationship with movement and exercise. So think about how your acid reflux symptoms might be happening around or a result of the way that you're approaching exercise. So for example, high intensity exercise, especially when.

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Abbie

It's Done. You know regularly chronically it can exacerbate acid Reflux symptoms. So It might be like the jarring and bouncing around type movements of intense activities. It can increase abdominal pressure and promote Reflux and all of these things. But it's also stressful for the body right? When our body's under stress, which it is when we exercise whether we like it or not you know it doesn't mean that it can't be stress relieving but it is a stressor to the body to be you know active. That can be stressful for the digestive system too. So just think about how you're approaching movement. Are you having adequate rest or are you doing a lot of high intensity exercise? Do you want to take a more gentle approach to movement and see how that kind of can play a role in your symptoms? Body position during movement can impact this too so just thinking about how certain positions might be like in yoga or whatever it is could contribute to your yeah acid Reflux So just playing around with body position intensity of exercise. And trying to reduce the amount of stress around exercise for you so stress and anxiety are known triggers for acid Reflux So while managing stress through movement can be a positive thing. It's not a positive thing if the movement.

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Abbie

And the relationship you have with movement itself is stressful, so think about gentle joyful movement. Movement that isn't punitive or compensatory or about quote unquote burning off food movement that's self-compassionate is going to help your acid reflux symptoms. And finally when it comes to evidence based interventions for acid reflux that have nothing to do with food one of those things is to avoid tight clothing. Okay. This is so important because for a lot of us when we're healing our relationship with food. Our body's changing too and there can be a reluctance to size up in clothing and I have some episodes coming up on this really diving into the emotional aspect of all of this because I want to acknowledge how hard I know it is. And you deserve to wear clothing that fits and if you're wearing clothing that is super tight especially around your abdomen area. This can absolutely exacerbate reflux so focus on comfortable clothing especially when you're eating. Okay. And know that that is an

act of self-compassion and it will be really healing to your digestive symptoms. Another evidence based intervention elevating your pillow if this tends to happen for you at night over the counter meds I know Erica mentioned this in their question.

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Abbie

They can be really helpful and you can speak to your doctor too about other medications like Ppis and also just if you do talk to your doctor about your acid reflux make sure you're highlighting your history with disordered eating and that you don't want to take any dietary approaches for some people. It can be helpful to not eat right a big meal right before bed. I do want to add though that increasingly with my clients I see this as something that's not that impactful, especially if it's helping them eat enough. Overall, play around with this to make sure you're getting enough. You know if you want to eat your last big meal of the day like an hour or so before bed and make sure that's what you're doing great. They wouldn't worry about a snack before bed or something like that you know so just experiment with that larger meal and maybe you don't have it right before you go to bed. But I don't want you to worry too much about this because it is about your overall intake that's going to help your acid reflux in the long run anyways and we don't want to have you feeling like there are more rules around eating and when you're allowed to eat that are reminiscent of diet culture. So I hope this was helpful. I just. Want to reiterate how much love and compassion and empathy I have for this topic because digestive symptoms suck for lack of a better word. acid reflux is so frustrating and it can be so painful and it can really be disembodiment and make you distrust your.

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Abbie

You're eating behaviors and the food you want and the food that feels good so there are so many layers to this I just am hopeful that addressing the kinds of the ways that restriction impacts this will ultimately give you a new way of thinking about. Interventions and remedies for what you're experiencing and you're not alone so many people go through this and it is so much more common with disordered eating patterns than is talked about regularly or enough in my opinion. So you're not alone. I'm here for you if you have more questions on this and you're a Patreon member which you must be if you're hearing all the way to the end feel free to comment on the episode post and we can talk more about it and I can do a follow-up episode if it would be helpful but just sending you lots of love I hope. You got something out of this and I really appreciate you. I deeply appreciate your support. Thank you so much for being here and I will see you very soon.