

BARE Podcast Isabel Foxen Duke

Susan: Alright. Welcome to the amazing Isabel Foxen Duke. Isabel, thank you for being here on the BARE podcast.

Isabel: Thank you so much. It's such an honor. I've certainly heard of you from even some of, you know, my own clients who've done work with you, as well, and so, yes. I'm super-excited to connect with you.

Susan: So, I love - I was just telling Isabel before we started the recording that like - she has this three-part video series that's amazing you guys should go check out that's free on her website. I totally devoured that. Her blogs and writing style are amazing, and I really resonate with her messaging. She is for sure a BARE ambassador. We are simpatico in our messages, and she's - one thing that I love about you, Isabel, is there are, like, pictures of you on your website with cake and donuts and we definitely have that same attitude that, like, food - stop being weird around food. Food is not the enemy. A lot of this stuff is in your mind. And one of the - I mean, so many brilliant points you make. One of the ones I wanted to jump off with was your take on the difference between binge eating and emotional eating.

Isabel: Yes. So, this is a huge thing because I think most women who identify as either emotional eaters or binge eaters or compulsive eaters or whatever the case may be, right -

Susan: Yeah.

Isabel: I think both of our clientele or people who are reading stuff so often identify themselves as, like, "overeaters" in some capacity, right? And there's a lot of confusion, I think, between specifically emotional eating and binge eating and how these things get defined, right? Like, I think most people almost - they use these terms kind of, you know, simultaneously.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: They use them in exchange with one another. They think, like, binge eating is just when I eat emotionally too much, you know?

Susan: Right.

Isabel: Or whatever it is, and there's sort of this really fuzzy definitions of these words. And that actually can be very unhelpful and unproductive for some reasons that I'm about to explain. So, my - I really, really try to help my clients separate these two concepts in their own mind -

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: - and sort of really help them understand, you know, emotional eating, pretty straightforward. It's just, you know, I was lonely, I was sad, I was happy, I was whatever. I was experiencing a feeling and I was, you know, kind of eating for pleasure, right, eating for, like, non-physical hunger reasons -

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: - which sometimes is gonna happen -

Susan: Right.

Isabel: - and, like, that's okay, you know. We don't need to freak out about emotional eating or create rules around it. It's - you know, can be wonderful to be conscious of those things, and there's various, you know, just reasons to be conscious of it that have nothing to do with weight or anything like that. But ultimately, you know, emotional eating is this really, you know, simple thing that I think we all kind of understand as just eating over feelings. You know, I was sad and I just wanted the - you know, something sweet to soothe me. And, you know, sometimes that might happen and it is what it is, right?

Susan: Right.

Isabel: Binge eating though on the other hand is something that I think most dieters or most women who have - you know, are trying to lose weight or who have weight loss goals have experienced at one point or another, right? The majority of people who have dieted have done this other thing that is what I would call binge eating or - the term I actually prefer these days is "reactionary eating."

Susan: Mmm.

Isabel: So, reactionary eating means *Oh my gosh, I shouldn't eat the thing. I'm sitting on my hands trying not to eat the thing. I'm staring at the bread basket. Don't eat it, don't eat it, don't eat it.* And then, like all of the sudden, it's like *I just can't hold myself back any longer!* and I just dive into the bread basket and it's like a free-for-all. And I'm like, *Oh my gosh, I fell off the wagon. I might as well just eat the whole bread basket and order three more and then I'm gonna go home and I'm gonna eat like a pint of peanut butter because - and tomorrow's Day One. Tomorrow, I'll never eat bread again.* Right? It's eating that by definition exists in relationship to some kind of diet, to some kind of intelligent self-control, right?

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: It's eating that's rationalized by dieting or it's eating that is literally just rebelling physically against a restriction that may not be physically appropriate or right for you, but you're just trying to hang on to it because of that sort of desperation to be thinner.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: Right? So, there's all sorts of reasons - you know, there's different ways that this reactionary eating plays out, but fundamentally, this reactionary eating, which is what I associate with binge eating. I mean, my worst binges - and I was a below-bottom binge eater in my day.

Susan: (Laughs)

Isabel: Like, I was, like, calling in sick from work because I was so full from what I ate the day before. I was like, you know, really, like, just sitting - lying in the fetal position in my bed, like, crying because I had just eaten so much.

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: You know, and - you know, that kind of eating, you know, typically speaking, is much more often a reaction to, you know, dieting, right? A reaction to, you know, feeling like *I failed. I fell off the wagon. I couldn't hang on any longer.* You know, sometimes I think about binge eating like in reaction to dieting, if you think of dieting as like pulling a bow and arrow as far back as you possibly can. Like, hang on tight, trying not to break my diet, trying not to break my diet, don't eat it, don't eat it, don't eat it. Right? And then, it's like the second you let go of the bow, the bow flies in the other direction, right?

Susan: Totally.

Isabel: And this is where people get into concepts like, *Oh, I must be addicted to sugar because the second I eat sugar I can't stop!* And it's like, well, you know, if you're pulling that bow back trying not to eat sugar, trying not to eat sugar, trying not to eat sugar, villainizing sugar, thinking, *Oh my God, the second I eat sugar it's the worst thing in the world.* Yeah, that bows gonna fly in the opposite direction pretty fast - the second you let go - which, quite frankly, for most of us is an inevitability, right? Most people are not able to maintain rigid, strict diets. I mean, and this is very, very highly evidenced by all sorts of research, right?

Susan: Right. Right.

Isabel: So, yeah. So, this is - you know, this is such a critical distinction for people because so many women, they get confused. They're like, *Oh my gosh, well, you know, I was sad and then I binged,* and it's like, *Well, maybe you were sad and you broke your diet which turned into a binge because you were so mad at yourself for having fallen off the wagon* and, you know, *Diet starts tomorrow and I better get it in now while* - you know, because I screwed up today so, you know, screw it or those kinds of things.

Susan: Twelve more hours!

Isabel: Right!

Susan: Twelve more hours!

Isabel: Right! Exactly! But fundamentally, you know, that falling-off-the-wagon eating, right, that like, oh my God, trying not to eat, trying not to eat, like, trying not to eat and then like, *I failed*, right? And so, the failure becomes this ravenous, you know, kind of like just session of *I'm gonna eat it all!* right?

Susan: Right.

Isabel: That's fundamentally very different than, you know, *I'm just like feeling kind of blue and, you know, kind of bored at my work and, you know, I think I'm gonna, like, go into the corporate kitchen and like have a spoonful of something.* Those are two very different things, right? And again, I think emotional eating sometimes for many women quickly turns into a binge because they judge themselves and they beat themselves up for, you know, eating emotionally or eating something that was off their plan or just breaking whatever rule they had in their head.

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: But, you know, when you kind of let go of, you know, the restrictions - again, not just emotionally but - excuse me, not just physically but also emotionally; like, really be like, *You know what? Like, if I really want the ice cream, like, it's okay to have the ice cream, like, whether it's -* for whatever reason, you know, even if it's just for pleasure, right?

Susan: Right.

Isabel: I don't think most people are super, like, physically hungry for ice cream. Like, I don't - that's not like a physical need that we have.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: But we have emotional needs around food sometimes and, like, that's okay, right? Like, it's also great to be - you know, practice awareness around these things and become more, you know, conscious of how I'm feeling and how I - you know, food plays into that. But if I have this giant rule that says, "Oh my gosh, emotional eating is bad," in reality all I'm doing is setting myself up for the binge when I inevitably fail at not eating emotionally, right, because everyone - food is emotional, right? Everyone's gonna have moments where they're eating just for pleasure -

Susan: Yeah, I -

Isabel: - and that's really okay.

Susan: I'm with you. I totally don't understand that. When I'm talking about food, I talk about power food and pleasure food and, like, there *has* to be room in your life for food that has no other function than just to be pleasurable.

Isabel: Yeah! Totally.

Susan: And you brought up and used the word "wagon" over and over and over again, and I've been working out with this personal trainer for probably six years. And I've slowly pulled him along to the light side of the work that we do. He's awesome. But he was talking about some clients - he was frustrated with some clients who kept canceling. And he said, "Do you know who never cancels? Do you know which client of yours never falls 'off the wagon'? That would be me. And do you know why? Because there is no fucking wagon" (laughs).

Isabel: Exactly.

Susan: It's like, *Oh my God*.

Isabel: Exactly. And I'm -

Susan: But we have to talk about that, this concept that there's a wagon you're either on or off of.

Isabel: Yeah! Well, it's like, you know, if you didn't do - you know, I used to go to a trainer where I'd have, like, homework in between, and if I didn't do my homework I wanted to cancel my session because I felt like such a failure and I was so ashamed to go to my trainer and actually have to say to him, "Oh my God, I didn't do my homework."

Susan: Right.

Isabel: But it's like there's this creation of shame about, like, *Did I succeed? Did I do it the right way? Did I fail?* It's the success/failure model around food that is fully unproductive, right? I mean, it's like every moment is a moment that I have the pleasure and the opportunity to take care of myself and do what feels right for me, physically, emotionally, or otherwise. There's no failure to be had, right? Like, there's no - you know, there's no plan to fall off of, right? And again, these plans can look all different ways, right. I think we can make a "wagon" out of *anything*.

Susan: Yes!

Isabel: We can make Atkins and Weight Watchers a wagon, but we can also make a wagon be "Don't eat emotionally" or "Don't eat too much" or "Don't eat when you're

not hungry.” You know, any of these can be - any kind of concept of failure around food -

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: - that we have in our head, anything that we make not okay - *Oh, that's the thing I can't do. That's the thing that's not okay* - that becomes this inevitable wagon that we can fall off of, right? And the truth of the matter is - and when we fall off the wagon, it's usually not pretty. Right? Like, that's when we're talking about the binge eating. That's when we're - it's when that we're pulling that bow back trying not to fall off the wagon, that's when the bow - inevitably, the second we “slip” - ends up flying in the other direction. Right? So, you know, this concept of - did you know that if you weren't pulling that bow back, if you weren't trying to, like, maintain some rule or trying to, like, hang on to some, like, specific thing that I have to do in order to feel good about myself and feel like I'm succeeding at food. You know, if I wasn't hanging on to some rule and just some idea of what “correct eating” looks like, there would be no wagon to fall off of, right?

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: Like, you can't fall off of a wagon if there is no wagon, right? If everything is truly okay and it's really just about, you know, what do I want right now? What do I need right now? What feels good to me right now? Anything that I choose authentically that feels right to me is fine. Right?

Susan: Yeah. And I so agree with you and I - and it just - it burns my ass because I think that part of the reason that women have such a hard time with this is because we're taught from such a young age that approval has to come externally. So, you know, stick with the plan; like, the trainer knows more than I do, the dietician knows more than I do, you know, frickin' Cosmo knows more than I do, and women are taught that their bodies are dangerous and we should distrust them from such a young age, and so it's like this work is bringing women back to themselves and trusting - we talk about intuitive eating - using your intuition to guide your *whole* life and to make choices and to trust that those choices are what is right for you. So, if your friend is Paleo or your friend is intermittent fasting or if your friend is keto or your friend is Weight Watchers and doing all those things that you can confidently say, like, “Yeah, I'm not doing that.”

Isabel: Yeah.

Susan: “I'm doing this.”

Isabel: Yeah. Totally.

Susan: The Me Plan.

Isabel: Totally. And I always say, you know, like, intuitive - I'm such an advocate of intuitive eating and it's, you know, hugely influenced my, you know, my career and my life personally. But I always say, you know, like, intuitive eating isn't just, like, hunger and fullness even. Like, it is - the way I define it is intuition, like actual intuition; like, intuition eating, right? Like, actually thinking about, like, what feels right to me. Like, you cannot fail at that, you know?

Susan: Right!

Isabel: You know, you cannot fail at that.

Susan: And sometimes it's mint chocolate chip!

Isabel: There ya go.

Susan: Or movie popcorn (laughs).

Isabel: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You know? Sometimes, it's a cupcake just for the fun of having a cupcake or whatever. You know, so that's - I think that's a *big* thing for anyone who's listening who's familiar with intuitive eating or attempting intuitive eating or, you know, kind of playing around with, you know, trusting our bodies.

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: You know, it's not just - even just trusting our bodies, which we are of course always told, you know, by the outside world to distrust as women.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: But it's all about just trusting, like, ourselves and our emotional needs, too.

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: Like, it's all okay. Like, whatever feels right in here authentically to me is okay, you know. And that, I think, is what women also have a really, really hard time trusting, you know, is just being willing to authentically be themselves in the face of that not looking like what *Glamour* magazine told me to eat on their fitness page or whatever.

Susan: Right. It's fascinating to me because I - you know, there's always a new plan, a new fad, and it's interesting because what you were saying before about, like, we can make a plan about anything. Like, we can make a wagon out of anything. And I have noticed that there is a rise in labelling in terms of, like, *Well, I'm* - like you said before - *a sugar addict, I'm a food addict*, or with intermittent fasting, you know, there just - it's interesting to me how disordered thinking and eating hides in every single plan because that's what humans will do to it.

Isabel: Yeah.

Susan: And so, what do you think - what is your opinion on the label of being a sugar addict or a food addict?

Isabel: I mean, it is a really complicated question because I think that people just really - they just - I think people want to label themselves addicts.

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: I think it helps people give them like a sense of control, right? I mean, so, you're talking to somebody who for many years identified that way -

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: - because it helped me feel like, *Okay, this is all I have to do. I just never eat sugar again and I just like buckle down and pray to God to just never eat sugar again, and that's gonna be the answer to what I consider to be my biggest problem in my life, which is that I can't make myself thin enough.* I mean, really, when you really boil it down, I mean, I think that for a long time it was "I have a binge eating disorder, I have a binge eating problem, this is my holy grail, this is like my Everest to overcome - "

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: " - and if I just never eat that sugar again, like, I'll, like, overcome this mountain," right? And it just - it fed me this, like, false hope ultimately to just buy that, right?

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: It seemed like the simple solution to something that actually is so much more complicated than that - you know? - that actually was so much more about me being uncomfortable with myself, me being unwilling to accept my natural size that I can - that is - you know, my natural size today, the size that I naturally hold is not the size that *Glamour* magazine told me that I should have, you know?

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: And like, just all these other issues around how I approach life. You know, like, disordered eating, right, in the grand umbrella is substantively more complicated than that.

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: And you know, I could kind of go on a tangent about, you know, sort of a lot of the faulty science behind the concept of sugar addiction, what does that mean, how are we using that term, is it appropriate to use with food - and there plenty of people who will talk about that on the internet - but for me, you know, I - like, it just - it always ended up - every attempt at abstinence ended up in a bigger and worse - more worse binge -

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: - eventually, right? So, it was like every attempt at *I'm just gonna buckle down even harder and I'll never eat sugar again*, it really ended up for me just being - pulling that bow back farther and farther and farther, just don't touch the sugar, don't touch the sugar, and every time I touched the sugar it was like a self-fulfilling prophecy, I would just fly in the other direction, right?

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: And it was like the more I attempted abstinence around sugar, the worse the binges were when they came around, which was inevitable. Maybe it was a week, maybe it was a day, maybe it was a year. But it was inevitable that, like, one day I was gonna eat sugar. Like, it's very, very hard to not eat sugar for your entire life.

Susan: (Laughs)

Isabel: Like, this is just not realistic for most humans -

Susan: No.

Isabel: - and when that day would come that I would fail or slip up or, in my mind, "relapse," it was like all hell was breaking loose.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: And now that, you know, I have full allowance around sugar I have full allowance around all foods. I have full allowance around whatever behaviors, you know, feel authentic and good to me.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: You know, I don't have those rebellious experiences with food anymore. Like, it's all good. Like, I can eat a cupcake - I can eat half a cupcake and forget about it. I mean, like literally. Like, it's just a non-issue. I don't walk past a bakery thinking, *Oh my God, oh my God, walk faster, it's gonna trigger me*. You know, like I just eat the cookie or I don't eat the cookie. It's just - it's a non-issue because I don't give a shit - excuse my language - you know? Like, I'm like, *If I'm gonna eat a cookie, that's fine*, and as a result, like, I don't have these rebellious binges and, you know, it is

really hard with the food addiction conversation because what ends up happening is every time someone restricts sugar or tries to abstain from sugar and then they binge, it reinforces the narrative of “I’m addicted to sugar” -

Susan: Right.

Isabel: - because “The second I ate sugar I binged.”

Susan: Right.

Isabel: It’s like, that’s not necessarily right - just try this on for size - if this is a cycle that you’re experiencing where you abstain and then binge and it’s like a nightmare and then abstain and then binge and it’s a nightmare. You know, notice that the cycle may actually be starting - right? The diet/binge cycle doesn’t start with - you know, it starts with dieting, right?

Susan: Right.

Isabel: It starts with restriction. That’s why it’s called the diet/binge cycle. Dieting restriction for most people will lead to wild binges, and the more tightly - again, the more tightly you pull that bow back, the farther it’s gonna fly in the other direction. So, it is really complicated, and I’m sensitive about how I talk about it because, you know, I know that there are so many people who are committed to this label. Like, they just want it to be true. They want it to be that simple -

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: - that their life will just be healed by never eating sugar again. But I think, you know, the - from a statistical standpoint, just from like a scientific standpoint, the abstinence model doesn’t really hold up. It doesn’t work for most people in the long-term. You know, it has about the same success rates as just diet success rates, which is about 95 percent failure, you know, give or take depending on the study that you’re looking at.

Susan: Right.

Isabel: So, you know, I’m not sure that there’s a lot of evidence to support an abstinence model. I know that. I’ve done a ton of actual research in - you know, in the journals and - yeah, I just - I can’t support an abstinence model that isn’t actually validated by science, and certainly who’s not validated by personal experience either.

Susan: Yeah. I mean, it’s just sort of - it is - I am full agreement with you. I have had students in my programs and clients come back to me and stumble upon some information and diagnose themselves as an addict.

Isabel: Right.

Susan: And that's why this doesn't work.

Isabel: Right.

Susan: And what's interesting is that humans - I mean, people are drawn to diets because it, again, is like, *If I just follow this plan, I'll be okay*, instead of doing the heavy lifting that is much messier and as you say much more complicated on the internal landscape. It's like, noooo, actually, like, you know -

Isabel: Yeah.

Susan: You're called to come back to yourself and you're gonna have to keep coming back to yourself. You know, if you want to end the struggle, you gotta drop the rope.

Isabel: Right. Yeah, totally! I love that phrase. I love that, I love that.

Susan: I do too. I do too. Well, Isabel, I'm going to put in the show notes how people can check out your amazing blog and your free video series. Is there anything else you want people to know about how - the best way to connect with you?

Isabel: You know? The video series is absolutely like - that's where 80 percent of people find me, and you know, if you're interested in any of these topics that I'm talking about, the video training series is like the most solid free - totally free resource that I offer. So, that's at stopfightingfood.com, right?

Susan: Mm hm.

Isabel: Like, I used to fight with food and like you said, drop the rope, right? My program's called stopfightingfood.com and you can check out the video series there, or also, you know, at IsabelFoxenDuke.com. You know, people really dig my blogs and they read really easily and I think, you know, signing up - I don't use social media that much - I'm just gonna warn people - so if you're interested in hangin' with me and learning about what I do, definitely sign up for my e-mail list or my coaching e-mails so you can get new blogs. That's where I - that's really where I shine.

Susan: Nice. Well, you do shine. And thank you for putting your voice out there.

Isabel: Thank *you*! Thanks for having me.

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