

Balance365 Episode 141 Transcript

ANNIE BREES (Intro)

Welcome to Balance365 Life Radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight, and wellness. I'm your host Annie Brees along with co-founder Jennifer Campbell. Together we have a team of personal trainers and nutritionists who coach thousands of women daily and are on a mission to help women feel happy, healthy, and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental and emotional well being with amazing guests. Enjoy.

ANNIE

Hello, my friends, this likely won't surprise anyone listening. Or maybe it will depending on how long you've been a listener. But the diet industry is a, brace yourself, \$72 billion industry with a 95% failure rate. We spend a lot of money on weight loss products with very little in return. But the financial repercussions are not what Jen and I consider to be the most damaging consequences of engaging with these diet companies. In today's podcast, we will cover the real cost of dieting. And then we end things on a high note showing that you can take the lessons you've learned from your experience and put them into something positive. But before you dive in, I want to share that Jen and I are hosting a free live workshop this month called Cut the Crap: How to Simplify Weight Loss and Get Out of Your Own Way. We're going to be discussing what works, what doesn't, why people fail, and what you can do to get real, lasting results in your life. You can find the link to register at balance365life.com/free-workshop. We love hanging out with you all on the lives. So we hope to see you there. Enjoy my friends.

ANNIE

Hi, Jen, how are you?

JEN CAMPBELL

Good. How are you?

ANNIE

Good. I like this topic. This is a fun topic that we've kind of talked about in a variety of places, but I don't think really on the podcast.

JEN

No, we talk about this with our members. We have a whole section about it in our program. And I think this is a really important topic.

ANNIE

So we're talking about the cost of dieting, the real cost of dieting.

JEN

Not just the financial.

ANNIE

Which is what we've covered, typically covered before. And I think that's probably what a lot of people think of initially when they think about like, what's the cost of dieting, they think about money. And what we're going to get into is it's so much more than money.

JEN

Yes. And we're also, we're not going to leave you depressed, we're going to leave you on a really positive note and helping you unpack what you've learned. So it doesn't have to be a total waste. We can take the lessons with us, there's always lessons in failure. Learning to find what those are is when you are really truly winning.

ANNIE

My ex husband would say, I don't know if I could say this on the podcast, he would say, "We won't leave you with a turd in your pocket." [Laughs]

JEN

[Laughs]

ANNIE

Have you heard that expression?

JEN

I haven't. But if there's any children listening, I'm sure they are hysterical right now.

ANNIE

Like, it's like, "What do I do with this now?" Like, no, we're not going to leave you feeling like that. Well give you some good takeaways. But let's cover the financial cost. Like, let's just get that out of the way. What do you got for me, Jen? What does it cost to diet?

JEN

So, the most recent data I could find says that Americans spend \$72 billion annually on dieting products. So this is just America. So think of the world here, a lot of money. And then other stats I found said that about 36% of Americans are dieting at any given time. So I did some math and once you take the amount of money Americans spend dieting and you break it down with the population of America, and the 36% of them are actively dieting at any given time. It comes out to about \$600 per year, but that's an average knowing some people spend less and some people spend way more. The other stat I found when I was researching this podcast was that 80% of people who are trying to lose weight, say they're just going at it alone and 20% of people are joining programs and spending money.

ANNIE

I would be really curious to break those numbers down between men and women. Because you know that a large percentage of women are dieting and how much of that 72 billion is spent by women?

JEN

Just by women. Yeah, so totally. So these are just really high level numbers. And I think if we could find data that got more granular, we'd see that women are the majority of dieters, and they are spending, a lot of them are spending far more than 600 a year. Also, I want to acknowledge that men dieting, or men getting stuck in restrictive dieting cycles, or men with body image issues is on the rise. So this is not unique to women.

ANNIE

No, but we just, we are women, and we work with women. [Laughs] So.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

We're not to exclude, this is not to exclude men. It's just, we're just speaking more in our area of expertise. Right?

JEN

Mm hmm. So that is the financial cost. We are spending a lot every single year on dieting products. And it's so awesome getting to an age, I'm in my 30s, that I'm starting to see the cyclical nature of the dieting industry. And I can say, I can see how products disappear for a certain amount of time. And then they pop back up. And it's not just my age, it's also that I'm paying attention, and I work in the industry that we work in, so I can see this stuff and roll my eyes and think, "Okay, another gimmick." It's like, it's just another influencer pushing it. It's just, yeah. Here it comes again.

ANNIE

It's like fashion trends.

JEN

Totally. It's like my jean jacket. It's in, then it's out.

ANNIE

Flared jeans are back in and I kind of want a pair.

JEN

Yeah, they're really cute. I remember when, like, skinny jeans were coming in style. And I was like, "What? Never."

ANNIE

Same.

JEN

And now it's all I have.

ANNIE

I know, like my thighs aren't aren't built for skinny jeans. And now look at me, it's like black leggings and skinny jeans, like, that's all I wear. [Laughs]

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

But now I think I want to try a pair of flares. Anyways, staying on topic. Let's talk about the cost to our body. So, that was the financial cost. But there is also a cost to our bodies physically.

JEN

There is a cost to our bodies. And if I really went into this, we would be here all day. And so I think I'm going to plan another podcast on this specifically, the cost to our bodies. So, yo-yo dieting, it actually changes our body composition over time, and not in the way most people want to see, right? So it actually increases our body fat percentage over time, even if our weight stays the same, right? So we hear about women yo-yo dieting, and they'll lose weight, put it back on, lose weight, put it back on. And I think the stat is about 80% of people actually end up weighing more than they did prior to doing their diets. So their weight is trending up. But even if your weight just ends up back where it was, you likely have a higher body fat percentage than you did before. And that's because crash dieting usually means losing a lot of weight in a shorter amount of time. And because our society, or many women, are so scale focused, they're missing the big picture. So they're just looking at their weight and their weight's going down. And they're very happy. And we love to tell ourselves that that is all body fat, but it's not. So when you're on a crash diet, and you know, some people go on these crazy restrictive diets. And I just read a study last week that showed that people on very restrictive diets, I think the calories they were on like 1100 calories a day. Your body uses four times more muscle than it does fat. Or breaks down four times more muscle than it is breaking down fat.

ANNIE

And as a woman who enjoys strength training and recognizes how hard it is to build that muscle, like no. No way. Like, do not touch my muscle. [Laughs]

JEN

Yeah. So when you're on a diet, you're not just losing fat, you're losing fat, you're losing muscle, you're losing bone density, like, you're losing water. And when you put the weight back on, which also happens usually happens quite rapidly. You aren't putting bone density back on, you're not putting muscle back on. You're putting fat back on. So in the weight loss period, we're losing all the things. And in the weight gain period, it's just fat coming back on. So you might

weigh the same, but you now have less muscle, you have lower bone density, and you have a higher body fat percentage.

ANNIE

When you consider the initial reason, like, everyone starts a diet, to lose weight, right? Or to lose body fat, and the ultimate outcome is, you're increasing your body composition, or increasing your body weight, like, it's moving you in the opposite direction you intended to go.

JEN

Yeah, and if you can zoom out and either look at yourself or look at, you know, even somebody, you know, that has been on multiple diets their whole life, they might have been doing this for decades, you'll see their body shape has probably changed over time where they become, they might even be the same weight, but they just have a higher body fat percentage, they probably become more like an apple shape, as they've maybe increased, you know, perhaps abdominal fat over time kind of thing.

ANNIE

Yeah. So another element isn't just weight gain. It's also there's a lot of health concerns that can go along with dieting. And I mean, because dieting is alone, and Traci Mann talks about this, too, dieting in and of itself is a stress. Right?

JEN

Yeah. So that's very stressful on your body to be on these crash diets, like, measurable. If a doctor was measuring what is happening physically with your body.

ANNIE

Yeah, yeah.

JEN

So, you know, like cortisol levels up, etc, etc. So dieting is associated with many health issues, including heart disease, diabetes, other health impacts as well.

ANNIE

Okay, so and I know, like you said, we could spend a lot of time on that. But we've got the financial cost, we've got the cost to our bodies, there's also a cost to our emotional wellness, which people probably have recognized as well. Right?

JEN

Yeah. And for me, this was the most painful cost, to me, is the years I spent with such poor mental health, because I was so consumed with trying to get smaller, and I was so preoccupied with thoughts of food and my weight. And I just spent years like that. So diet culture, by definition, when we say diet culture, by definition, it means a culture that values thinness over health. And so you can see that we absolutely live in a diet culture in that, the way we talk to people, or talk to ourselves, when we aren't reaching our weight loss goals, for example, right?

Like, we sacrifice everything include, you know, physically, our physical health as we just touched on, but our mental health can be so poor, but what we find in the health and fitness industry is that that's normalized, right? Like, it's normalized, to be preoccupied with thoughts of food or to be bingeing or that kind of thing. So -

ANNIE

And we call that discipline and motivation. And we clap for it. And we're like in awe of it. And we put it on a pedestal. And Jen and I are often here over here, like, "Is this health?"

JEN

No.

ANNIE

Like, this looks...Yeah, this looks more like obsession and anxiety and stress.

JEN

Yeah. So in a diet culture, your health doesn't really matter, the size of your body does. And that is extremely detrimental to women's emotional wellness, and men's. We're going to talk about women today. And we see this, it's the most obvious thing in the world, dieting is very stressful, causes us anxiety and the emotional toll of repeatedly failing diets that were designed for us to fail that are physiologically impossible to sustain. That toll is so great on women's emotional wellness.

ANNIE

Especially after, you know, years or decades of feeling, you become hopeless. Despair, that, like, that this is possible, you feel like it's a personal failure as to why you can't do it. And then also, in addition to emotional costs, there's also social cost, too, right?

JEN

So, understanding that social cost, I'm talking about connection, something that is absolutely a necessity for humans to be healthy is to have connections in their life, social connections. So the cost to our social health, it's important to talk about and I would say not being able to be present in situations of connection because you're thinking about food. You're worried about food, you're worried about the food being served, you're worried about how much you're eating, you're trying to keep yourself from going off the rails. So you're just, you're sort of just not there.

ANNIE

Yeah. I was gonna say, Jen, you said present. And that could, that really could look like two ways, like, like you said, you're just not there. Because you're so focused on the breadbasket or saying yes or no to the treat that's been offered to you. But it could just mean that you're just opting out, you're not showing up.

JEN

You're just not there. [Laughs]

ANNIE

You're literally like, I cannot go to this party, because I cannot go off my diet.

JEN

Yes, can't be at this party, can't go to this holiday celebration, have to avoid the social situations because I have to stay on my diet.

ANNIE

Mm hmm. Which just makes my heart so sad.

JEN

Yeah. And the other one I want to touch on is an experience I had, that I know is not unique to me, but might not be as common, and I'm not sure what category we'd put it under, I think maybe it's the financial wellness to people, but...Not only my time, but the money we spend, that women spend on dieting or weight loss products, but what we miss out on in our lives, because we're spending so much time on the size of our bodies, and thinking about food and our weight. And I did, actually a talk to a women's studies university class a couple years ago, where I talked about how my first year of university, I was so consumed with what I had going on for myself with dieting, severe disordered eating, that I almost failed at university that year. And when I look back on it, with hindsight being 2020, the most important thing to me was thinness that year, not my studies, not what I was learning. And I was not eating enough to even be able to focus on that career trajectory that I had planned. And I remember actually having a moment in one of my classes where I thought about some pizza that I had frozen in the freezer, at home. And as soon as I thought about it, I just couldn't stop thinking about it. And I was so hungry. And I was, I used to fast back then, which we'll get into next. I got up and left class and drove home to eat that pizza, oh, to just demolish it. So I look back and think of what I missed out on. There was just several years there where that was my life. And I couldn't, it just was very extreme, and I couldn't focus on anything else. So that's also a cost to many women, and what they actually miss out on whether that's career wise, or just doing meaningful work, what they find meaningful work because of this focus.

ANNIE

Yeah, that definitely lands with me, I've said this before, that I couldn't show up in this business, if I was consumed with my appearance, my body, my body size, my weight. It takes your focus off of doing what I would qualify as really amazing, much bigger, more important work.

JEN

Right. And not to say that working in the health and wellness industry is pointless. It's like, it's an amazing career. But there are studies that show many people who end up in health, wellness, nutrition, exercise careers, had potentially had their own disordered eating or disordered exercising issues that drew them to that career. Because in that way, it's like, it gives you an excuse to talk about it, think about it, obsess over it all day long. I'm not just talking personal trainers, I'm talking like dietitians, movement therapists, etc. Right? So just thinking about, is

that the career you wanted to pursue? Or did your obsession with food have you pursue that career? So what else could you be doing? And some might be you know, like, "I find my career quite fulfilling and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else." But it's interesting to think where I would be had this obsession not brought me here. And I don't think a lot of people in this industry are fulfilled after healing their relationship with food. And I've seen a lot of people come and go over the years I've been here and move on, to pursue maybe what actually fulfills them which is amazing.

ANNIE

Mm hmm. I remember having a conversation with, we're friends with Heather, colleague in the industry and I remember her saying like, "Now that I'm not obsessed with food, I just don't have an interest in talking about it." Like, she like doesn't want to coach a lot of people in nutrition anymore. She does here and there, but it's just not this thing to her because it's no longer the focus for her.

JEN

That's awesome.

ANNIE

Yeah.

JEN

So freeing, though, so now she can go do the work that she loves.

ANNIE

That she really does enjoy. Yeah. And lastly, this is always, always a gut punch. But there is a cost to our family. And our kids, right?

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Do you want to go over that?

JEN

I have personal - yes, I have personal experience with this. And I've shared it on previous podcasts. The day I realized that my dieting behaviors were impacting my kids was the day I was out, like, no more. And so I guess I'll just share it real quick that I had this horrifying moment where I found food hidden under my son's bed. And I thought, "Oh, my gosh, he's hiding food because he's ashamed that he's eating it. He's afraid to ask me for it. Because he knows I'll say no, but he wants it. And he's trying to fight natural urges." Because of my dieting behaviors, and how restrictive I was with my kids, and I was like, done, I'm out. I'm not doing this to my kids. So here's what some studies show. So, studies show that children pick up their parents' eating behaviors. By the age of 7, 25% of girls have already started to engage in dieting

behaviors. About 46% of 9 to 11 year old children report that they are sometimes or very often on a diet, and 82% of them report that their families are sometimes or very often on a diet. And the National Eating Disorders Association reports that 35% of normal dieters progress to pathological dieting, and that 20 to 25% of those individuals develop eating disorders. And eating disorders are very serious. And I think the status, I think this is correct, but that they've tripled since the 70s. And I also want everyone to know that the resources for treating eating disorders are very, very poor, very poor, even though we live in a culture that basically promotes them, or is very conducive to a child or teenager, woman, or man developing an eating disorder. And there's very little help out there. As far as psychiatric issues, anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric issue. The mortality rate is 10%. Once you develop anorexia, so within 10 years, I think it is. And so it's very scary to have a child going through that, right? I remember reading a blog post several years ago, it was posted on our local provincial eating disorder association website, of a woman who was sitting by her daughter's bedside for like, it was over a month, it was an insane amount of time, and they were waiting for a spot for her daughter to get in inpatient treatment for her eating disorder. And she just sat there for days and days just giving her daughter sips of this like nutrition, vitamin drink, just making her drink, making her drink, making her drink because her daughter wouldn't eat and just waiting because they were on a waitlist to get treatment, right? So this is a big problem. It's a big problem where I live and I think if you know anyone who's experienced an eating disorder or their child has, unless you have the money to pay for it out of pocket, the treatment options are pretty dismal. So it's just a terrible kind of, a terrible thing. And there's real cost to families out there with diet culture, right? Of us valuing fitness. And I'm not saying - sorry, and I want to backpedal to say, like, diet culture isn't the only reason people develop eating disorders. There's lots of different reasons including genetic, that it is something genetic, but this is definitely a factor.

JEN

Just circling back to your poor treatment options. The other issue here, and and we could have a whole 'nother podcast on this, too, is that you and I both know being inside this industry, there's a crap ton of nutrition coaches, quote unquote, or health coaches that will happily coach someone with an eating disorder and work outside their scope of practice, not have the morals or the ethics or the values to refer out to appropriate professional care, which we have done in Balance365. And we will continue to do, like, if we suspect that someone needs professional help, that we're not touching it, like, that's out of our scope, right? Like, you know, we want to help women, and when you're coaching people on the internet, you know, it can kind of be gray. And you know, but when in doubt, we're referring out to professional help for eating disorder treatment, because that's not, again, it's not in our scope. It's not in alignment.

JEN

Yeah. And if you're listening, and you do work in this industry with us, you're going to have people come to you that have a raging eating disorder. And we want to think that we maybe, I think we all have an idea of what an eating disorder looks like, right? But I found this study, too, when I was researching for this podcast, it was a study of adolescents, and adolescents who were getting eating disorder treatment at an eating disorder clinic. And this study found that 17% of those with anorexia were overweight or obese, according to their body mass index. And

this was a study done in 2016. So it's quite recent. So, anorexia doesn't look like a certain thing. It is a cluster of symptoms.

ANNIE

Mm hmm. I was never diagnosed with an eating disorder. But I can connect to that statistic in some way. Because when I was dieting, and had some really, really messed up behaviors with food, and a very poor relationship with my body and food, you wouldn't have known it looking at me that I was like obsessed -

JEN

Yeah, you didn't look like a poster child for -

ANNIE

Yeah.

JEN

- having an eating disorder.

ANNIE

Yeah. Because I was, because I was overweight, and I was maybe even gaining weight at the time, but I was obsessed with food and fitness.

JEN

Yeah. And so there's another study in 2013, it was quite a large study, a population based survey, conducted in multiple countries, found that 25% of individuals who had lived with binge eating disorder in the last 12 months, had a body mass index within the normal range. So there's a lot of people, you know, out there, struggling with eating disorders or disordered eating. And we don't know it by looking at them. Right? I read another study, just within the last year. I don't have it on me, but it was, it looked at teenagers that were on a waitlist for bariatric surgery, for weight loss surgery. And 80% of them had symptoms of disordered eating or eating disorders or full fledged clinical eating disorders. So like, we're trying to treat, you know, like, and so I'm not against, obviously, weight loss surgery, we've got women in Balance365 who've had weight loss surgery and has changed their lives. It's not about the surgery, it's about not treating the underlying issues that led...Do you know what I mean? Like the body size is just a symptom.

ANNIE

Mm hmm. Absolutely. Okay, so that got intense. [Laughs]

JEN

Yes.

ANNIE

There's a large -

JEN

End this on a high note. [Laughs]

ANNIE

To summarize, the cost of dieting is high. And it's not just the financial cost. It's also the cost to our bodies, physically, our emotional well being, our social well being, our kids and our family, the well being of those individuals. But if you're sitting here thinking like, "Crap, I've wasted a lot of money and time and cost, it's cost me a lot of memories, and happiness, dieting," it might not be all for nothing. There is some takeaways that you and I have talked about, that we actually can learn from diets and how we can use that information to make better choices.

JEN

Yes, so your journey can have a purpose, right? And I feel, I think Annie and I both feel very strongly, obviously, that we started this company and sharing this information with others and helping other women get out of it. But also, this feels so purposeful for being as far as whether I had started this company or not, the way I'm raising my children is radically different than had I not escaped this culture. And so I do feel my experience with diet culture has allowed me to be very, I guess woke, quote unquote, woke around diet culture, so I can help my children navigate body image, food, diet culture. But one thing we do in Balance365, in one of the first sections called diet deprogramming, we have a worksheet where we ask you to list out your diets in order, all the diets you've done, and we have a couple pages for this. But there's a lot of women who post and say, "I'm on page five, I had to get extra paper," because they've just done so many diets. So you list out your diets, and you say how they impacted you physically, emotionally, and socially. And then we ask if you learned anything from that diet, good or bad, right? So we've come up with this saying this year, Katherine, who works with us, it's her saying, and now it's company wide, I think it's even community wide. "Take the cherry and spit out the seed." So, what can you take from these experiences? And were there good lessons for you in these diets? Right? Did you learn something positive? And so, which, it could just be you learned what doesn't work for you. [Laughs] Which I think a lot of people do.

ANNIE

Yeah.

JEN

Because on the flip side of the spectrum, what we see on one side, we have dieters, and then what Annie and I see on the other side is the the anti-dieters that are so extreme that they're stuck in rebellion mode with food, because any thoughts of changing their nutrition habits to be, like, becoming healthier, losing a little weight, sends them in a tailspin, right? Like, they're just stuck in rebellious mode. And they have resistance or a block to even making any changes because, it triggers thoughts of dieting and diet culture. And so I would say those women aren't free either there. It's just the flip side of a coin. So, we could go through a couple diets here that Annie and I have done. And we can talk about what we've each learned from them, the positives, and the negatives.

ANNIE

All right, let's go. [Laughs]

JEN

Okay. So the first thing I have learned from my total experience of dieting is that extreme restriction doesn't work. Restriction, period, doesn't work. And most people can see this in the way people raise kids, right? So this is just an analogy to help people connect to the idea. So, we understand that parents who are very restrictive with their kids get the behaviors they want out of their kids in the moment. But that child isn't on a good trajectory of life.

ANNIE

Mm hmm.

JEN

Right? So we all grew up with somebody whose parents were very, very strict, or maybe that was your own parents. And we know it just doesn't work.

ANNIE

Yeah. Those are, we've talked about this before, that those are the - me, in some regards. Not that my parents were strict, but those are the kids that go to college and are like, "Yes! Freedom!" And they're like partying up, and they're like staying out late and skipping class. And, yeah.

JEN

Yeah. So the same can be said for restrictive dieters. So, each new diet will get you the behavior you want to see in yourself short term, and it might even, it's even getting your weight loss results short term. But for the long term, it doesn't have you on a good trajectory for your life. Right?

ANNIE

Yeah.

JEN

So, and then Annie, you have a really great saying for people who ask us about restriction. And this can work for some people and not for others. And that's fine. But you say there's a difference between restriction and restraint.

ANNIE

Yes. So restriction to me feels like I don't have a choice. I'm not in control. I'm not in the driver's seat. I don't have autonomy. Restraint feels like, no, I do have a choice. And I'm choosing, you know, Option A or Option B. So it's, like I see it, I acknowledge that that choice is on the table, I can do that thing if I want to. And then I get to choose what suits me the best. And I can show

restraint. But restriction feels like an external or outside force controlling me versus I am in charge.

JEN

You're in control. Exactly. So one of the most extreme diets I've ever done is fasting. [Laughs] And fasting is very big right now. So I actually read last night that fasting and low carb or keto are the two biggest dieting trends out there right now. So I'm at an age where this would be my second cycle of seeing this diet take off. [Laughs]

ANNIE

Now trending.

JEN

Yeah, so I was fasting. I was fasting before it was cool. No, it was actually cool when I was doing it, too. So some of my friends were doing it. So I used to fast all morning and I also used to fast two days a month. And that's why I left class and went and ate a whole pizza [laughs] I was talking about earlier. And it was awful. Like, it really, it was really awful. And so we don't have to get into all the detrimental effects on my life. Because I'm sure everyone can imagine. But I'll tell you what I learned. So here is taking the cherry and spitting out the seed. I learned that I'm actually not hungry first thing in the morning, I also learned that I can exercise moderately without eating first. So if I wake up and I'm not hungry, I can go and do some moderate exercise and eat afterwards when I'm feeling hungry. However, I also learned that if I'm exercising intensely or for a longer period, I do need to eat. Because I'll feel awful, my performance will be awful, if I don't eat, so if I'm just going to get up and go for a walk, or short hike, or if I'm gonna, like, just lift weights moderately, I won't eat beforehand. But if I'm going to get up and go for a run, or if I'm going to go for a longer hike, or if I'm going to do a CrossFit style workout, like a more intense workout, I get faint, I might not feel hungry when I wake up, but during my workout, I'll start to feel like faint, so I do have to eat something. So that's what I learned from fasting. And, you know, just take that lesson. Release the rest.

ANNIE

Good takeaways.

JEN

Yeah. Another very restrictive diet bandwagon I've been on is the clean eating bandwagon. I had a subscription to the magazine, etc, bought all the books. Yeah. So, tons of rules in that culture, cleaning culture, tons of talk of chemicals. It's very low fat, it's very, very low calorie. It's where I developed probably most of my food fears. And I had a lot of anxiety around what I was eating, I remember having like, being so hungry and being in a mall, and, like, walking by the food court, and I just had, I had to get something to eat, like, I was gonna pass out type hunger. So I went and got some chicken fingers. And I remember sitting, I got some chicken fingers, and I sat down, and I was just filled with fear of what I was eating, like what's in this chicken? What's in the breading? And so I was very torn. Right? I'm starving, yet I feel like I'm feeding myself poison. So then I remember picking off all the breading of the chicken and just eating the

chicken. Very difficult time of my life. [Laughs] Annie's face. If everyone could see it, she's mortified.

ANNIE

Well, no, because I'm just thinking about like, not only were you picking off all the breading, but you're like probably picking off all the joy, like, happiness that comes with chicken fingers.

JEN

Yes, so what did I learn from clean eating? So, here's what I learned. I learned how to cook vegetables many different ways. And I learned how to make some very delicious salads. I just, today, add other things to my vegetables and salads. I don't just eat the vegetables anymore. And that I would say is something I learned during my clean eating days. And actually, I see women we're coaching, they sometimes struggle with that, that they don't have a family history of a lot of vegetable based dishes, which I didn't, I definitely grew up in a meat and potatoes type situation. So that can just be a skill barrier between a person and eating healthier right? Or eating a diet higher in fruits and vegetables as they just don't know how to prepare them. And I would attribute my years in the clean eating culture or cult, if we want to call it that, with being able to cook a lot of different vegetable dishes and make some really killer salads.

ANNIE

I tried Whole 30 a few times, which I would kind of classify under the clean eating-ish category too. And it didn't work for me because I couldn't even make it past like day three without eating something that wasn't on, you know, on the approved foods list or whatever. But I will say that, for the most part, I did notice my takeaway was I feel better with increased vegetables and a substantial amount of protein in my diet.

JEN

Yeah, so just taking what you learned and leaving the rest.

ANNIE

What about keto or low carb?

JEN

I have such mixed feelings because I really became so messed up during my keto, low carb days, that it's hard for me to like, acknowledge that I learned anything good. [Laughs] But I did. So, clean eating had me so afraid of and anything, any fat, that when I found keto, it actually felt like a release, like and a relief, right? Like I was just like -

ANNIE

Permission.

JEN

Permission to eat fat. Yes. And of course, it's initially a relief until you are like, "Oh, I can't have carbs anymore."

BOTH

[Laugh]

JEN

So, and that's how diets work, right? Like, often people ping pong around to these different diets, because the next diet addresses the deficit they had in their former diet, but then it has its own rules. And you do fine until you hit those rules. And well, so anyways, keto was great until it wasn't, until I couldn't eat carbs. And then that's when I learned carbs are very bad. And I developed a horrific relationship with carbs. Like, including with fruits and vegetables, because keto and low carb means, with keto, like you can barely eat a blueberry right? Like, it's so restrictive. And so I even was like micromanaging fruits and vegetables, which was super painful for me. I had little kids at the time even, and I was doing that. And I would even go as far to say is there's times when I had my kids on a low carb diet, just because I was so like, carbs are bad. Carbs are bad. Carbs are bad. Which is, which is actually horrific for kids. Because they need even more carbs for their developing bodies and brains than adults do. And like, yeah, of course, my son was hiding food under his bed. Right? It all makes sense. All makes sense. So what did I learn? I learned that fat is okay. I can have fat in my diet.

ANNIE

Yeah, fat makes a lot of food tastes good.

JEN

It does.

ANNIE

Keeps you full.

JEN

Yes. And we do have a whole podcast around my exit from keto. If anyone's on keto or low carb and is struggling with how to transition away from it. We have a whole podcast of how I transitioned away from it. And you can, we'll leave it in the show notes. So you can go listen to that. And then the next diet, and I call this my last diet, and it was me leaving low carb and keto dieting into macro counting. And I'm not talking about the occasional tracking people do or checking nutritional labels to see what's in their food, what macros or micronutrients are in their food. I'm talking about using macro counting as a very restrictive diet, in that you are religious with counting every morsel of food that passes your lips. You are riddled with anxiety. And you need to know exactly what you're getting you think but you think you can calculate this, but exactly the number of calories you're having a day, like 2,083 with, you know, 116 grams of protein, like, and your whole life revolves around that. So that was also very hard for me. I had little kids. So what did I learn from it? I learned that I can eat carbs. So again, macro counting was a relief for me initially, because it got me away from keto and allowed me to eat carbs again, and also showed me a very skewed version. Even when I thought I was eating a normal amount of carbs for a human being, I was still eating very low carb, because after a time of

being on keto or low carb, your perception of a serving of carbs just becomes very skewed, right? Like you think one piece of bread is so many carbs.

ANNIE

1000 grams. [Laughs]

JEN

And it's not. Yes. [Laughs] So that's how it was a relief for me until I ran into my next wall of like, I can't go out to a restaurant because I can't bring my scale with me. How am I supposed to calculate the macros in this homemade soup I just made, or the spaghetti sauce, or the stir fry? And I have a one, three, and five year old at my knees trying to get food and I'm in my head trying to do math and it was, actually became a very, it was a prison for me, it truly became a prison. So all I can do is take what I learned from it and move on. And I learned how to eat in a more flexible way. And I learned what a serving of carbs was. And I also learned that a high fat breakfast zaps my energy. And that you know, when you're keto, everything is high fat. And so yeah, now I just start my day off better. Yeah.

ANNIE

Interesting.

JEN

So basically, with every diet I've done, I've found a lesson. And I think a lot of women will find this that, wow, there was lessons here. There were things that were helpful. It became very unhelpful when I took it to an extreme, when I started obsessing over it, when I started ignoring my hunger signals because that rule was more important to me than my actual internal cues. And I was just talking to a woman this week who was talking about her fasting days. And we're talking about the lessons she learned. And so she learned that she doesn't need to eat at night. She's not hungry at night. So great, right? Like, so take that lesson and apply it to your life. It doesn't have to be a rule, you don't have to feel guilty when you do decide to eat at night. Right? And that's what all those diet rules do. Right? They keep us in a prison, and we can't just go enjoy our lives.

ANNIE

Yeah, absolutely. Macro counting for me was actually a really great opportunity to, like you said, get a ballpark idea of what a serving of peanut butter, a serving of chicken is, started paying attention to, that's probably how I really learned to accurately read nutrition labels, which is helpful. And now that's a skill that I can revisit from time to time as needed. When things are maybe out of whack, or I've gotten away from, you know, making sure I like to check in every once in a while that my protein is in the ballpark-ish. But now, but now I know, like, I do better when I'm ballparks, not exact. And choices, not restriction.

JEN

Yeah, and I think you and I were talking, before we started recording, about your point counting days and how you learned, the good lesson was that you can be flexible, but the bad lesson

was sort of the disordered eating habits that developed, like saving all your points, so you can binge all weekend.

ANNIE

Yeah, I would, it was really great because I felt like I had permission to eat any food I wanted. I just needed to track it, right? weigh And then the next like, two three days was a free for all.

JEN

Yeah. And it's so disordered, and everybody's doing it.

ANNIE

Yeah. And when I zoom out, I'm like, I was taking like three steps forward, two steps back, three steps, instead of just taking one sustainable step at a time. Like, yeah, going hard, going hard, going hard. And then, let it slide, it's like going hard, going hard, going hard, let it slide.

JEN

Yeah, and it's really about, like, how we have all these urges, right? Like we develop these very unhealthy relationships with food in our bodies. And our physiology is fighting against that. And we think it's us, we think it's unique to us. And we're special little failures. But millions upon millions of people have obsessions of food, and they think about food, like all day long, what their next meal is going to be, etc, etc. And so why I think all of these diets become so popular is that you're looking for a way to release the pressure of that, whatever restriction you have. Because what your body's actually fighting you with is that it just wants to eat, and eat and eat. And if you can find a diet that allows you to do that, that says, "Hey, with just this one rule, you can eat and eat and eat," you gravitate towards that. So that's why I gravitated to keto, because it was like, you just cut out carbs. That's all you need to do. And I was like, "Yes. Permission to binge." Fasting is another one. And it's actually why I think it's so popular right now. I talked to a woman a few days ago who said, I love intermittent fasting, because when my window to eating is open, I can just eat whatever I want in that window. And I'm like, "Girl, you're bingeing and restricting. That's what you're doing." And so and it's like, just think, think about what you're doing. And then think about your child doing it. Like, just think about your daughter getting up in the morning. She's 11 years old, and not eating until a certain time. And when that time comes, she can eat whatever she wants, until the time window closes. You'd go, "Hmm, this is not the kind of eating behavior I would consider healthy for a child." It's actually just like, not healthy for human beings. Period.

ANNIE

Right. Not even just not eating, experiencing hunger, acknowledging that you're hungry and then actively choosing to ignore it. Like that's, I mean, that's a whole other ballgame, right? Where we celebrate like, "Oh, I felt hungry and then I didn't eat," you know?

JEN

Mm hmm. Absolutely.

ANNIE

Anyways, but but I know, and I know you know this, but had someone taught us all the skills that we teach in Balance365... [Laughs]

JEN

Yeah, and if we could just get our kids going on the right foot with balanced nutrition, healthy relationship with food. They would never need to seek out these diets, right? And eating skills period, right? So listening to your internal cues is an eating skill. And we were actually all born with it. And that's why, you know, babies will nurse till they've had enough, they'll nurse again when they're hungry, they'll stop when they've had enough, and kids will naturally follow their internal cues until adults come along and disrupt the internal cues for them by starting to control their diets or, just on another note, so we don't ignore this, but food scarcity as far as poverty and not being able to access food, that can really mess up your internal cues as well. So it's just that those are eating skills. And a lot of people don't have baseline eating skills and balanced nutrition knowledge before they're trying to chase after these diets. And then these diets become their life and their belief system. And the whole way they approach nutrition, and they take all these kind of non factual elements of the diet and call them fact, like, which is what I used to do. Anything I read about clean eating, about how bad certain foods were, that became my belief system. Even though it wasn't based in science.

ANNIE

The lack of knowledge and skills makes you super susceptible to falling for diets.

JEN

Absolutely. So we just got to do better with our kids. We have to do better for this next generation so that they can learn to call out diet culture when they see it.

ANNIE

Mm hmm. Yeah. So how do we avoid the cost of dieting?

JEN

Well, if you're listening, you can't, you've already paid it. You've paid it. That's what I want to say, "Hey, you've paid it. Move on." But we can avoid the cost of dieting by not doing it.

ANNIE

Yeah.

JEN

So just stop.

ANNIE

Yeah. And even if you've stepped away, you might feel tempted to go back, which we see all the time. That's that boyfriend -

JEN

When I left keto, when I made the decision to stop doing that. I thought I was leaving dieting for macro counting. You know, like, even I find, I mean, I got a message about this on Instagram yesterday, somebody messaged me and told me my diet soda was very unhealthy. And so a lot of people don't think they're dieting, but they've just bought into all these, like, clean eating rules. So it's just a different form of restrictive dieting. Right? Like, but it's not based in nutritional science.

ANNIE

Yeah. But we'd be happy to share that with you inside of Balance365. [Laughs] Yeah, so. Okay, so no more diets, we're done dieting, right? We've covered the cost, in all the ways that you can pay for it. You can take what you've learned from your past experiences, apply that to your newfound skills, building better habits, making it work for you and move on.

JEN

And move on and release. And I know there's a lot of people listening who are dieters, and there's a lot of people listening who don't diet anymore. And I want you to know, if you're stuck in a really angry place. That's very normal, right? Like, I was very angry for a long time that I had bought into all this diet crap, what I had done to myself, what I had done to my kids. But I mean, you have to move on from that stage, too, it is a stage I think it's like a stage of grief when you're grieving all those years. But you've got to move on from that, too, because it's just another prison. And I think going through this exercise that Annie and I just did of going through each and every diet and and acknowledging what you learned, can be just a real amazing process of letting go. Just let it go. Take the lessons for your journey. And find purpose in it as Annie and I have. So I am raising my kids completely different and so can everybody listening

ANNIE

And care for yourself completely different as well.

JEN

Absolutely.

ANNIE

Yeah. Right on. Okay, good reflection podcast.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Trip down memory lane. [Laughs] Of all those diets. All right. Well, I'm sure I will talk to you soon, Jen. Thank you.

JEN

Yeah, thanks, Annie. Bye.

ANNIE BREES (OUTRO)

Hey, everyone, if your mind has been blown while listening to this podcast, just wait until you work with us. Let us help you level up your health and wellness habits and your life inside Balance365 coaching. Head over to balance365.co to enroll in next month's coaching round. See you on the inside.