

Balance365 Episode 44 Transcript

Annie: You feel completely out of control when it comes to candy and cookies, craving sweets even when you're not hungry. Maybe you found yourself wondering if you're addicted to sugar. Scour the internet for the term "sugar addiction" and you're likely to come up with an overwhelming amount of information, much of which seems to contradict each other. Our culture has a pretty extreme view of sugar and unfortunately, the diet and fitness industry is full of pseudoscience and fear-mongering headlines claiming sugar is addictive as cocaine but what's the truth? Is sugar really addicting?

We invited internationally recognized dietitian Marci Evans on today's podcast to discuss just that. Marci and her team help clinicians and clients alike develop smart, enduring strategies for overcoming eating disorders, disordered eating and the backlash of chronic dieting. Marci, in particular, has done extensive research on the tenants of food addiction after noting that the concept didn't square with her clinical experience and yet she felt it captured how so many people feel in relationship to food. On today's episode Marci, Lauren and I discuss what the past 5 years of research and experience have taught Marci about sugar addiction and steps you can take to feel more in control of your sweet tooth. Enjoy!

Marci! Welcome to the show. Thank you so much for joining us. I'm so happy to have you.

Marci: Oh, it is my absolute pleasure to be here, to come to chat with you ladies about a topic that is near and dear to my heart. It is just an absolute pleasure so thank you so much for inviting me to join you.

Annie: Yeah, we've been waiting for a while. I think we started emailing months ago and it just schedules just didn't work out until now.

Marci: Yeah, I know. You guys are very, very patient which I appreciate and I had to get through one more big talk before I could put anything else on my plate so

I'm glad, I'm really glad to be here and hopefully the wait will be worth it by the time we wrap up this I know what will be a really interesting conversation.

Annie: Yeah, I'm sure it will be. Lauren's here with us too, Lauren, how are you?

Lauren: Hi! I'm good. Excited to be here.

Annie: I was just going to say, I bet you're super stoked-

Lauren: Pumped.

Annie: Because here we are discussing one of the most talked about topics in our Facebook community, which if you aren't a member, it's Healthy Habits Happy Moms on Facebook. We have almost 40,000 women in our private Facebook community and something that comes up a lot is "Is sugar addicting?" And this is a highly debated topic on the Internet and especially in the fitness and nutrition community and as Marci has noted in her blog post, which we will share a link of the show notes to her website, if you just do a google search for "Is sugar addicting?" or "sugar addiction" you're likely to come up with a wide range of answers from "Yes, absolutely, it totally is addicting" to "No, that's just a load of crap" it can be really confusing to the mainstream listener, reader, consumer and Marci, this is why we have you on because you've done a lot of extensive research on this topic. So how did you get interested in the topic of food addiction or sugar addiction?

Marci: Well, I think you nailed it in a couple of different ways. The first is that many people have the experience of feeling really out of control of food and feeling really chaotic, so the term 'food addiction', which has gotten written about more and more just in popular media, feels like it's very resonant for a lot of people and it's sort of like "Oh gosh, food addiction. There's something about that feels true for me."

And so it's something that I have seen a lot of people come to me in my practice with, so it's something that is definitely coming up in my work in a day to day way, just like you ladies are describing, seeing this in your Facebook group and so I think that that's a piece of it and then the other piece of it you also alluded to is that there's been more research on the topic of food addiction and you know, it's definitely a double-edged sword that this research makes it into the mainstream media.

It's great that the research is being done, the problem is that the way that it often gets written about in the media is not totally accurate to the science and so you see a lot of compelling headlines that you know draw people in and you know get a lot of clicks and get a lot of post likes and are resonant to how people feel that it gets really pulled away from what the actual science says.

So I became interested because I learned about it several years ago in a training that I went to but then it was just so relevant in my day-to-day work with my clients that I was like, "I can't not look more into this. This is just like staring me in my face."

Annie: Yeah and I am, you're so right because I do think when I'm thinking about all of the headlines and the information that I have read it is very kind of fear mongering, you know, or polarizing or it's very extreme. We call that click bait, right? Like, you, they're just trying to get you to bite, right?

Marci: Total clickbait. And then they have these pictures of the brain that look very, you know, very smart and you know, "Wow, look how the brain is lighting up" in these comparisons to, like, drug pathways and so it becomes very tantalizing info that people can get really pulled into for sure.

Lauren: And I think it's become just "common knowledge" that sugar is addicting, like, if you ask just random people on the street "Have you heard sugar is addicting?" I'm willing to bet, you know, many, many of them will say "Yes."

Annie: Yeah, OK, so are we ready to just dive right in? Like, can we just, can we just go? Are we ready?

Marci: We can absolutely go for it.

Annie: Alright, Marci, is sugar addiction a thing?

Marci: So the state of the research tells us that sugar is not physiologically addicting. That's the bottom line so looking at what happens in our bodies when you eat sugar and is there a chemical response that pulls you in to have it more and more and more and that you become sort of this slave to sugar and that the only way to kind of stop yourself is that you have to go cold turkey and that is 100 percent not borne out in the research.

Annie: But people have to still keep listening to the rest of the show.

Marci: People are going to be like "Who is this chick? Get her off. Yeah, done."

Annie: Like, "Oh I got what, I got the answer I was looking for, it's not a thing" but you have you have some points of reference that I think are really important to follow this up. Like, to date there is no scientific evidence that sugar is addictive but that's not exactly, like, there's more to it than just that and I love that you say, you kind of touched on this earlier, that a person's sense or feeling of being out of control around sugar or any food in general is not the same thing as having an addiction.

Marci: Yes, that distinction to me is everything. That is like where I press pause and spend so much of my time, whether I'm teaching professionals or talking with individuals or nonprofessionals, is that there is the science part, right, that I love, that looks all about the brain wiring and what is happening in a person's body in, as they're eating sugar or not eating sugar, right, and we talked about that and kind of gave you the cold, hard truth, sugar is not addicting.

However, the other piece of it that is equally important is a person's experience and what happens inside of them when they eat sugar or when they deprive themselves of sugar, which is really kind of the key part that we'll be, I think, spending quite a bit of time on, that creates feelings that are really relevant, right?

So when people feel chaotic, when people feel out of control, when people feel completely preoccupied and obsessed, those things are very, very real. Those things are important. Those things we have to understand and it's your guys' job and it's my job to help my clients through those experiences and they're actually very common but those experiences aren't rooted in an addiction but they are very, very, very important and the feeling can feel like an addiction.

Lauren: Yeah, for sure.

Annie: So, Marci, are you talking about when we hear in, you know, magazine articles or blog posts, when we hear the response that like this when people eat sugar that their brain lights up like they're on some, a drug similar to like cocaine, is that what you're talking about?

Marci: Yeah. And I can speak to that if you want me to kind of tease that apart some, those headlines.

Annie: Yeah, let's just jump right into it. Let's go.

Marci: So, unfortunately that is a classic example of total misinterpretation of the scientific research and actually, what we see, when this was published, that sort of initial headline of look at these brain scans and look at this area of the pleasure centers of the brain and this is, you know, more powerful than when a person does cocaine, you know, these really, really, like you said, clickbait, fear mongering type of post was a misreading of the literature from a couple of cardiologists who wrote this post in response to the research, but when you look at the research and what the neurobiologists actually explain is that we have natural reward pathways in the brain. They are there. They are meant to be there. There's no getting rid of them. They are actually good and helpful things in keeping us alive that we do certain things as humans and we get a reward so that we do them again.

So we have natural rewards for things like eating, things like sex, things like holding a baby and feeling really good about it, listening to music, connecting with friends. We get these positive feelings and vibes and actually these neurotransmitters in our brain get produced so that we do those things again because from an evolutionary standpoint, these are the things that have kept us alive. These are the key things that have kept us thriving as a species.

And so what we've learned is that when a person abuses a non-necessary substance, say, like cocaine, cocaine actually comes and hijacks those completely normal, healthy reward pathways that are supposed to be there. So this idea that "Oh my gosh, you see this lighting up when we eat sugar. This is evidence that you're an addict. That is not at all what it is saying.

You're seeing normal responses in the brain. We can talk a little bit more about that in terms of what's normal and what might be problematic in showing these brain images but it's the drugs that come in and hijack the normal pathways that we get really, really concerned about but those pathways are there. They're meant to be there. They don't mean you're sick. They don't mean you're flawed or that you have some big problem.

Annie: Interesting. So it was just some misinterpretation of research that caused this whole, like, flood of "sugar is the equivalent to cocaine."

Marci: That's exactly right.

Lauren: And I think it's, it can be comforting to someone too who feels so out of control around food or sugar to be like, "Oh well, that explains it. I'm addicted, right?" But I think we'll see that that kind of takes your power away because you aren't addicted and there are things that you can do to not feel so out of control around those foods.

Marci: That's exactly right and even to add on a layer of complexity is that the notion that I am addicted encourages people to abstain from those foods, right? Well, if I am an addict, the only way to manage this is to totally take these things out of my life and here is where this is probably the most important thing I have to offer to each of you who are listening right now is that that abstaining or we might call it restriction of those foods actually leads to changes in your brain that have a stronger pleasure response that gets lit up and actually encourages you and compels you to have those foods even more.

So when the researchers looked at this phenomenon they used rodent models and what they did is they had these rodents and they took the sugar away and restricted them and put them on a diet and it was those rodents that had an amplified response in their brain to sugar and it was those rodents who demonstrated this same chaotic "addictive" behavior, binge-like behavior but when they had the rodents where they didn't put them on a diet and they didn't restrict them, they had completely, what we would say, just totally normal responses to sugar and none of the addictive-like behavior and so the problem with the addiction model is not only that yes, totally takes your power away but in addition, it's going to create the exact scenario that you most fear and it's going to create the behavior and the changes in your brain chemistry that cause you to feel more out of control and cause you to feel more and more like an addict. So it's like this double bind, it's like a double whammy.

Annie: And Marci, does research support that for just any food, labeling any foods as bad or addicting or off limits or is this just sugar.

Marci: Right now, the research is looking specifically at sugar because the researchers, what they're trying to do is to get more and more specific and this is where that research on food is much more complicated than the research on say, alcohol or drug abuse because we as humans don't eat singular substances like table sugar, right?

For the most part, we eat things like ice cream and cupcakes or Doritos and so researchers have tried to get as specific as possible to understand is there a specific ingredient that folks are addicted to and this is again where the research right now really points to, you know, the flaws in the research is like, we don't even have a specific ingredient that we can look at and point to and say that is the addictive substance.

Annie: This is something that we talk about frequently in our community and our program Balance365 that this idea of the restriction leads to bingeing or more, it sets you up to be more likely to binge, because so often what we see in our community is that women want to stop the binge by going back to restriction. They're like, "Oh, I ate too much sugar, got to get rid of all the sugar now!"

Marci: Yeah, I have to fix it.

Annie: Yeah, instead of stopping at the restriction, sort of resetting or reframing your perspective on sugar. Instead of just saying "I'm all out. I can't have any." Try to have it in moderation might reduce your likelihood of binge.

Marci: Yes and I feel completely empathetic to anyone who identifies kind of with what you just described because I think that it's human nature that when you feel like you've swung to one side of the pendulum and part of this, you see, I'm a neuro science geek, part of this is just how we're wired to be as humans.

We want to put things into boxes and we tend to be very black and white thinkers so that when we move to one extreme it is very, I think, natural and compelling to hold yourself to the other extreme as a way to find a counterbalance but what happens is that you just sort of envision a pendulum, for most people, they end up swinging between one extreme to the other and it's not very natural for most people to say "Well, how do I respond to this chaos? I try to find a happy medium somewhere in the middle, right?"

If you just had a day or days or weeks of feeling out of control and you're bingeing and you're feeling awful. It is very natural to want to kind of pull over to that other side to detox, to restrict, to put up the food rules because when you're feeling that way it feels awful and you don't want to feel that way again and imagining dipping your toe into that middle ground can feel very, very foreign and very scary and for a lot of people, they're like, "That just doesn't even seem to

make sense. You see, I can't be trusted. I need to put up all the rules and all the walls and all the barriers."

Lauren: You know, it's interesting that you say that that's how humans are wired because we call ourselves, like, we work in the messy middle and it's so hard to get people to kind of reframe and kind of get it and like, we were talking about before the podcast, it takes people you know a few months sometimes of following us to kind of like indoctrinate themselves in that messy middle.

Marci: Totally. I love that you guys call it the messy middle because that's usually exactly what it is. It doesn't stay messy forever though. It does not stay messy forever but the process can be a bit messy. However, I do find that when I talk to my clients and I really, I'm sure you guys have seen this too, is that when you talk with them about their experience and their stories and what it's been like for them over the years, that their lived experience is this sort of swinging from being on a diet to them feeling out of control and then needing another diet and then feeling out of control and so their lived experience really points to and supports what we see in the literature and in the research and why so many of us as clinicians are advocating for that messy middle because their lived experience and the research shows us that restrict-binge cycle is not their fault, it is not a failing, it's not because they're screwed up and doing it wrong. It's because it's a set up and so those skills for navigating that middle ground can feel really tough at first but that's where the sweet spot is, like, that's where you find food peace, like, that where you find sustainable patterns of living.

Annie: That is what we share in our community often is that it's, like, a practice and it's a skill and it's just a matter of practicing that new skill over and over and over until that becomes your new normal because it's not, like, that, like you said that is not natural for me, it's not natural for a lot of women. We're so used to, like, being on the wagon or off the wagon, we're in, we're out, we're perfect, we're failing, we're right, wrong, black, white, like, so to live in this like gray areas, like, "Oh my gosh, what are the rules? What am I doing? Like, there's no boundaries, where are the boundaries?"

Marci: Like, right, "Just give me the guidebook. Tell me exactly how to do it, I can follow it."

Annie: Yes, which in the in the fitness industry, that is so common, I mean, which I think was which is why our program is such a breath of fresh air, of course, I

think that, but it's, you know, we're like trying to help you navigate that for yourself versus just telling you what to do so you can hopefully go on to create "boundaries and rules" that work for you and I mean, if that's what you need, that we don't have to impose our values or morals or rules on to them.

Marci: Yeah, that's awesome and I think that finding that middle space that is something, I mean, it sounds like what you're really describing is something that's really internally guided rather than something that's externally imposed and that can feel really, really scary but the amazing thing is is that as you go through the process of really kind of tuning in and really listening and really kind of taking a break from all of that external noise is that you can find patterns and habits and boundaries that are truly sustainable, you know, I wouldn't say I have a rule of eating every you know 3 to 4 hours, it's not like I have to follow this rule but I know that when I eat every 3 to 4 hours I feel much, much better and so that's how I eat most of the time but it's not a rule that's been sort of handed down to me that you have to follow it and that's kind of the difference.

Annie: Absolutely.

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: OK so to circle back then as it pertains to sugar and this sense of feeling out of control when it comes to sugar consumption, how do you break that cycle of, like, you're either all in and you're eating all the sugar or you're not eating any sugar at all for 30 days or, you know, whatever it is, do you have some guidelines that you use with your clients or that you would recommend in general for how to stop that mindset, or reframe that mindset or stop that cycle?

Marci: I do. I do and what I want to say before I dive and sort of offer some tips is to say this process is a process and we've already been talking about that, be really patient with yourself and I would also say if you can have in your mind the idea of approaching your experience with a lot of curiosity and just kind of wonder and, "Oh, isn't that interesting?" in trying to find kind of that neutral detective voice that will help you learn along the way because it's going to be bumpy, you know, I love your messy middle, like, it's going to be bumpy.

It's not as if I'm going to give you a formula and then you're going to take the formula and you're like "Boom, got it. No more problems with food, right?" But allow yourself to kind of take some of these ideas, try them on, experiment with

them and use them to give you more data and more information but the number one place that I encourage people to start is to do a self-inventory and to take some time with the self inventory, like, do it over several days or a week or so.

And ask yourself, what are the things that leave me vulnerable to "overdoing it with food right" so it could be a zillion things, like sky's the limit, so you could think about "Well, it's maybe related to my food environment or maybe related to how stressed out I am or my mood or how much my kids are bugging me or how much, you know, my job is completely overwhelming me or the time of day or the amount of food that's available to me or how well I've nourished myself that day, how over-hungry, you know, how much maybe I've been following a diet that actually doesn't meet my nutritional needs. I'm constantly undercutting in an attempt to lose weight but then go over-hungry and that's when I find myself really having a hard time with food."

So trying to be as extensive as you possibly can in creating this inventory of what I call your vulnerability factors and then you can start to have a little bit more of a nuanced conversation in your own mind around "I have a hard time with sugar when, you know, I'm really, really tired, I'm sleep deprived, I haven't eaten enough and I've got high levels of stress," right?

So you're starting to really get to know yourself rather than saying "Oh, I just don't have any will power" or "I'm an addict therefore I have to get rid of this," you're really inventorying to get a sense of "Oh these are the things that leave me really, really vulnerable to having a tough time" and the other thing that I would add in is, that's really important and can take a little bit of time to get to know, is "What are my thoughts and beliefs that I tell myself about my relationship to food in my relationship to sugar, specifically? What is the dialogue in my brain? What thoughts do I tell myself? What do I believe and where did those beliefs come from? Are those beliefs that I learned when I was little from my own mom? Are those beliefs that I was taught from going on a zillion diets? Are those beliefs, you know, that I learned from, you know, my girlfriend down the street?"

So really be very, very critical and I would say, like, literally journal this out, try to do it like on a piece of paper or if you have an online journal and really get out of your own head "What do I tell myself and what do I believe about sugar and where did those beliefs come from?" So starting with those two inventories is a really, really important place to begin.

Annie: I really, really like both of those suggestions. "What you talked about, that vulnerability Journal is kind of similar, in our program we call it, like, triggers, you know, like, what are you doing, where are you at, what are you feeling, what are you thinking, what did you just do, who are you with?"

Because all of those things can really impact our behavior and especially when it comes to food and fitness and I know you know we're just coming off of Halloween season so I know a lot of people have been having candy in the house, you know, it could just be as. I mean not as simple as. but that could be an element into how much sugar you're consuming, like, is it just a matter of convenience, like, it's staring you in the face all day, right?

Marci: Totally. Exactly, exactly, you have huge amounts of it surrounding you and I love that you guys use the language of skill building because that is the exact language that I also use with my clients, where I say "Learning to eat in a peaceful balanced way is like building a skill" and the cool thing about viewing it as a skill is that a skill is something that can be developed but if you are someone, and you are very good company if you are, who has spent a lot of your life in a dieting mindset, it's going to take some time to rebuild that skill of balanced, peaceful, non-chaotic eating and so I am really a proponent of saying "Let's take just little baby steps here."

Now, I do know that there are some practitioners and other people who said, you know, the best thing I did was just surround myself with tons of sugar and tell myself I have total permission to eat this food and to really listen to my body and that it was rough in the beginning but then I really got to a place where I really believed it wasn't going to go anywhere and then I stopped bingeing on it, however if that works for you, go for it, don't let me stand in your way.

My experience is that for most people what ends up happening is they end up just feeling really out of control for a stretch of time and it feels like more proof, "See, I can't be trusted, you see, I was out of control" and so it just feels like more evidence kind of building up and so that tends to not be the approach I go with most of my clients, that with most of my clients we're like slow and steady, we are, you know, I always use the bike analogy.

We're starting off on a balance bike and we've got, you know, a bike that's maybe a little bit bigger, a little bit, you know, a little bit more like an adult bike and then

we move into something that's more advanced and then we're really going on the unicycle but we don't just hop on the unicycle right in the beginning, right?

We're going to start we're just taking these little baby steps and the point is to begin to have more regular access to the foods that you have trouble with but to do it within the framework of really honoring the things that make you particularly vulnerable. So one of your biggest triggers or one of your biggest vulnerabilities is, maybe, what do you guys see actually? What do you notice? I should ask you, in your Facebook group and you know your audience, what would you say is one of their biggest vulnerabilities?

Lauren: I would say skipping meals or not eating enough throughout the day. A lot of people find themselves then bingeing or overeating on sugar and snacks at night or in the evenings after they put their kids to bed.

Marci: Totally, so that's perfect. So I would say if you have a day where maybe you haven't adequately nourished yourself when you skip some meals and it's evening time, I would say that's not going to be the most helpful time for you to practice eating something like Halloween candy in a way that's going to feel not totally chaotic, right?

It's like, well, that's not really a fair experiment because we knew that was probably a set up from the beginning and so I kind of take that inventory and say "Let's try to eliminate as many of those vulnerabilities as possible. And start having little exposures where you're giving yourself permission to have these foods, low vulnerability, low trigger, challenging those old thoughts and beliefs and developing those coping skills to help you manage the craziness that is life and all the stress that life brings and then it's repeating those things over and over again.

So I had a client, I mean, I've done this was so many clients, she had a lot of trouble, one of her hardest foods was Nutella and she's like "Marci, I'm telling you, every single time I bring Nutella into my house it's gone in a couple days, like, I just can't handle this Nutella."

And so the way we ended up going about it was we ended up deciding to integrate it at the very start of her day and so when she would come see me, we did this so slow, like we literally did this over months and I would keep it in my

office and I know, some of you might be thinking "Why don't I have my own dietician" I bet you could be really, really creative.

She would come to my office, she would bring a balanced meal and she would do some Nutella with the rest of her meal and then we would note, "What are the thoughts that you are having? What kind of tools and skills can you use to kind of help you through your day because you have a busy day, what's your food plan, like, making sure you have enough food to get you through your day."

And we sort of charted through all her vulnerabilities and then we did that again and again and then we sort of upped the ante where she took some of the Nutella and she repeated that on her own and so then we just stepped it, stepped it up and as she was developing more skillfulness and more ability, then, I mean, again it wasn't for a couple months, then she brought the Nutella into her home but we started it with just the tiniest of baby steps.

Lauren: I love that.

Annie: This is a, yeah, I do too and this just feels like, my background is fitness, but it's like a lot of times people just need a win, you know, and they kind of just build their confidence slowly and slowly and slowly and over time it's like, you know, that quote "Little by little you travel far." It helps to build that self efficacy so that they can believe like "Oh my gosh, maybe I can do this," but to go from 0 to 100 can be really overwhelming like, "Oh my gosh, no I can't ever have Nutella in my home and not eat the whole jar" like that's just, that doesn't seem even doable but I bet you know now she's like "Oh yeah, maybe I can."

Marci: Exactly.

Annie: or "I am."

Marci: Yeah, "I am." Yeah it's really cool because I no longer work with this client because she's doing so well and she doesn't need me anymore and that's always my goal and absolutely, she has all of the things in her house but it took us really breaking it down and it's exactly like you said, it was her having a little win to be like "Oh, maybe it's not the sugar, maybe it's all of the beliefs that I have about sugar and the ways I've approached it before and their reaction to all of the deprivation."

Like, I just cannot overstate the implication of having dieted and having that restriction mindset really sets us up to go to the other side of things. Like, it's really interesting when you look at the brain scan literature when they look at folks who have a history of dieting and restriction and they show them images of what scientists call like, you know, palatable foods or we could say, like, high sugar foods or high fat foods, we might think it was "naughty foods" or "bad foods" is that their brain regions of pleasure light up even higher when you compare to people who don't sort of hit that profile of long dieting history and so it takes time that gradual permission for that hyper response to get dialled down but it's the only way for it to dial down.

So if you keep going back to dieting and keep going back to restriction it's going to keep that elevated response, but if you can end this gradual way, practice it and your body and your brain get used to "Oh, this food isn't going anywhere. I have this food in my life. It's not as if one time a year I get to eat X, Y and Z. Then that hyper response calms down and we can see kind of like the charge around food sort of settles down and it becomes more neutral.

Annie: And that just, I mean, that to me sounds like freedom and such peace to be able to live, you know, or just be wherever you are and know that like you don't have to hold yourself back or you're just going to be a maniac on, you know, a pizza buffet or an ice cream sundae, that you can just coexist with the foods you love and enjoy them in moderation.

Lauren: Yeah, another thing I really loved about your example is about going through your vulnerabilities, like that client within the Nutella probably had to build some other habits to kind of reduce those vulnerabilities, is that right?

Marci: Right, you're spot on, totally. Yes, she had to kind of identify what other tools that I need in my tool box that help me to manage when I'm feeling really overwhelmed with work and when I'm feeling overtaxed or when I have my inner critic and my inner critic is really, really loud so we had to do a ton of work on helping her to notice how is she speaking to herself and what are the consequences and what's the likeliest outcome when you continue to speak to yourself in that mean, critical way and I would say that's a huge, huge cornerstone of the piece, huge cornerstone of the work that I do with my clients is cultivating a couple of skills and so these are some of the broad, brushstrokes skills that I will mention for you and mention for your listeners is developing the ability to be self aware but with kindness.

As well as this skill of being able to be compassionate with yourself and you guys probably see this all the time, people have a really hard time being compassionate with themselves because they feel like if I'm compassionate I'm just myself slack, right, and I'm never going to make that forward progress.

It is the opposite, the more critical and nasty you are to yourself the less likely you are to achieve your goals and make positive change. If you can talk to yourself like you would to your child or talk to yourself like you would to someone you love and care about, your best friend, those are the same things that help you to remain neutral and curious and that enhances your ability to make sustainable changes and so I spend so much time helping my clients notice and shift the way that they interact and talk with themselves and really working on the inner dialogue.

Annie: We have a saying in our community that gets dropped frequently and I absolutely love it, it's "we take great care of things we love and your body is no exception" but I think you are so right, Marci, that when women think about being kind to themselves and speaking nicely to themselves or coming from a place of love, they're worried that they're going to get complacent or that they're going to just, like, I won't have a desire to go workout if I'm, like, too nice to myself or I won't have a desire to eat vegetables if I don't beat myself up and shame myself into eating this salad with no dressing or whatever it is. And that's just not been our experience.

Marci: Yeah it's not, it doesn't surprise me that that's not been your experience because it's fundamentally untrue. So one of the things the biggest lies of diet culture is that our nature as human beings is to lay on a couch and do nothing but eat ice cream and that we are constantly having to fight against that nature.

That is not true, actually our bodies and systems create vibrancy, they crave balance, they crave things that allow us to feel well and we know that if we are polarized to any extreme we aren't going to feel well. And so our bodies are constantly trying to move us towards homeostasis so we can flip that narrative, we have to live that narrative from "If left to my own devices, I'm going to be a total just slob on the couch" and say "You know what, actually, left to my own devices, I want to feel really good and I know that if what allows me to feel really good is to be in a pretty balanced space."

If you can imagine eating only gummy bears and bagels for the rest your life, you can imagine that probably wouldn't feel well, right? If you can imagine eating only spinach and chicken breast for the rest your life, like, that also doesn't sound so great and so being able to trust that our inner nature and our core souls, actually creates movement, creates balance, creates health, creates vibrancy, all of those things, that you can begin to relax a little bit and be like "I don't have to ride myself so hard, you know, I trust that my inner core craves healthy themes but all the dieting that we do that stamps out that inner flame and when we move away from diets we find that we have it naturally and intuitively inside of us."

Annie: Absolutely. Lauren shares with our community often, like, people that say that, you know, they say what you just said, like "If I listen to my body, I would just eat ice cream all day, every day" and Lauren is like "Have you tried that? Like, have you actually tried that? Like I think you think you would feel good but I don't think you would feel good if you just did that all day every day" and people are like "Actually, you're probably right, like, no, that wouldn't leave me feeling good" and that this idea that, you know, like you said, if left to my own devices, like, I might actually take good care of myself, especially if I think about it in terms of how I take care of my children, how I take care of my spouse or my partner or what I would say to a girlfriend if she missed a workout or if she overate, you know, some ice cream. I wouldn't beat her up. I wouldn't berate her. I wouldn't say "You're lazy, like, get your act together." I would be like "Hey, that's OK. Like, now we know too much ice cream leaves us feeling yucky, like, let's not do it again."

Marci: Exactly and if you just can notice that what your body is communicating to you and also trust, and this is where so many people skip a step, because we're not taught to do this in our culture is that our heads override with a rule, right, too much ice cream and our head says "Tomorrow: rule, no ice cream" but if you can say "OK, I'm going to take a pause from my busy brain and say "If I were to let my body choose what the next step might be," you will notice that your body has all this wisdom to re-regulate you but that head jumps in way too soon and creates this big rule because you're in a place where you're feeling awful and you're feeling really scared and you're feeling really anxious, right and so but it's that practice of noticing, "OK, my head is so loud but if I were to just ask, what would my body say?" and I did actually a hilarious experiment like the ice cream one you guys just gave.

I had a client, this is one of my favorite stories, we're working on moving away from this dieting mindset and she said "Marci, my hardest food is gummy bears." She's like, "I'm obsessive with gummy bears, I love gummy bears. So you're telling me (because we were working on unconditional permission, one of the intuitive eating principles, unconditional permission to eat whatever food she wanted)" she said, "Now you're telling me that I am allowed to have gummy bears for lunch" and I said "Totally, if what you want is just gummy bears for lunch you can totally have gummy bears but I want you to make sure of 2 things, one: you get yourself enough gummy bear so you've gotten enough to eat for lunch and I also am going to ask that you have to pay attention to the taste of the gummy bears and how they feel in your body and how you feel afterwards."

She's like "OK, I'm totally going to do it." And I think she was, like, looking to like prove me wrong, to be like "I'm just out of control with gummy bears, I can't be trusted. You don't know what you're talking about." And she came back and I said "Did you do the gummy bears for lunch?" and she's like "I totally did" and I said "How did it go? What did you notice? What did you learn?" and she said, "Well, I thought that I was just going to be super excited and super happy to eat gummy bears for lunch, like I really felt like I was getting away with something but what I learned is that if I only eat gummy bears at lunch I actually feel sick and I kind of feel shaky" and so I kind of responded, you know, in a very neutral way to say "You know, that's really interesting."

I said, "So if you were to redo that to where you wanted to have gummy bears at lunch time, you wanted to pair it with other things so that you could feel energized and that you could feel, you know, not distracted at work and you're not shaky and your stomach doesn't feel upset, what would you choose?" and she listed out what she had in mind with gummy bears sort of on the side and it was this, like, completely, you know, nutritious, totally balanced meal and I was like "OK, you know, maybe you want to try that" and it was about her experimentation and learning "Oh, I don't have to have this hard core rule, you know, like, "Don't eat gummy bears" it was like, "Oh, it turns out that if I really listen I don't want to just eat gummy bears for lunch, like, I feel kind of awful when I do that."

Annie: And it was inside of her, like, that she knew that, it was almost innate, like this is, "I did this, I didn't like how I felt, I'm going to try this" and what an amazing moment. That's an awesome story.

Marci: And it was really cool because, like, you know, we were working on "you have to truly give yourself permission, that has to be there, it can't be conditional, you have to really say 'I am allowed to have these foods' and I'm going to practice and I'm going to notice" and she did that and what she noticed was "I'm allowed to have gummy bears for lunch but do I actually want to" and when you're not rebelling against something and you have permission, then you have the autonomy to actually make a choice.

Annie: Yeah, I've shared this analogy so many times but when I was in 8th grade of my parents made this boy off limits for dating and his name was Alex and all I wanted to do, I wasn't even really interested in Alex I don't think, but when they said I couldn't date him I was like, "I need to date Alex."

Marci: You were, like, on an Alex binge.

Annie: I was like, "Well, now, watch me, now I'm going to make this happen" but yeah, but it's kind of the same principle kind of applies to food when you make all foods permissible then a lot of them lose their appeal. Like do I really even want this now that I can have it?

Marci: Yeah. Yeah and sometimes our head really wants something, especially when we've been really conditioned to say "Ooh, that's off limits, you can't have that" So sometimes our head will be like "Ooh, I really want this thing" and then we say "Well, OK, I can have it. I can have gummy bears for lunch but what will that experience actually be like and is that what I want to choose for myself right now?"

Lauren: Yeah, I think that dieting, like the biggest flaw even over, you know, reducing your caloric intake in half, basically, which is a big flaw, is just that you can't trust your body, like it teaches you you cannot, you cannot be trusted. I think that's like the root of everything, right?

Marci: Oh my gosh, I couldn't agree more. I feel like so much of the cleanup that I'm doing with my clients in terms of the diet culture is beginning to help my clients see this notion that you can't be trusted, that idea was planted in your brain by the dieting industry and then they put you on a diet that would guarantee an outcome to where you feel out of control, that then looks like evidence that you can't be trusted and then they give you another diet to follow. It is a complete construct of the dieting industry. It is not rooted in reality and our jobs are helping

to move you away from that dieting mindset and towards a place of that inner self trust.

Annie: Amen. That's, and you already said this, Marci, but that's, we joke that our business model might not be the most sustainable because we want to put the diet industry out of business and give women all the tools they need, give back women all the tools that they already had and so they aren't forever reliant on us, like you said, like hopefully your clients learn to eat well and that supports their lifestyle and their goals and they don't forever need you, right? But that's not the diet industry's motive.

Marci: Oh no and it's not how it sustains itself, right? I mean, if the average listener was to list out the number of diets that they've been on it would be evidence of "Oh yeah, this is based on repeat customers" but if I do my job really well, right, I'm going to work with people for a period of time and then my hope is that they aren't going to return and maybe maybe they do, maybe life circumstances hit them up, you know, things happen but my goal is for my clients not have to be repeat customers. That's the intention, right, is to get my clients to a place where there is so much internal self-trust built that they know how to navigate how to take care of themselves which is very, very different business model.

Annie: Absolutely.

Lauren: Yeah and I was just going to mention that there was actually an interview done with a Weight Watchers C.E.O. or former C.E.O. that said part of their business model that they would use to get investors is that they had so much repeat business, so many repeat clients and it's like well, that kind of proves that your diet doesn't work, you know?

Marci: Exactly and it's not intended to work.

Lauren: Right.

Marci: Right.

Annie: OK, Marci, I want to thank you so much for your time. This was a wonderful, wonderful interview with you and I think it's going to provide a lot of valuable and much-needed information to our community about sugar, is it addicting, is it not and as we clearly stated, it's not, but that feeling of feeling out

of control around sugar is something that a lot of women are familiar with and I think you gave some really, really great suggestions on how to begin regaining a sense of safeness or control around those foods.

Marci: I sure hope so. It's been so great to be here and I know you mentioned that you guys are going to link to a blog post that I wrote that really kind of delves into some of the science and some of the trouble with the food addiction model and that might be interesting for some of your readers to see and if it's, or listeners, I should say, the readers of this blog post and also for folks who might be interested to dive into some of the research, there might be some science-minded folks I can also provide some citations to connect to what the state of the science is and you know, we kind of hit on this in the beginning and I'm sure you guys talk about this, there is so many problems with food and nutrition related research between how it's conducted, how it's disseminated and how it is portrayed in the media so the last thing that I would offer up to anyone who is listening is to take food headlines very, very lightly and if they are extreme, if they are black and white, if they are really, you know, kind of imposing a really extreme rule to take that very, very, very lightly, that there's a lot of problems with reading and interpreting and sharing nutrition-related research in media and that is another way in which you can feel so pulled and sort of feel more out of control and like you don't know where to go and you don't know who to trust and you get pulled into another diet and that is why I'm just loving the messaging that you ladies are putting out into the world that is about cultivating greater self-trust because there's going to be another headline out there and there's going to be another podcast that I'm going to have to do about that headline.

That is going to be my career probably until the end of time. So, do not take every headline so seriously and to really keep doing that work of developing that sense of self trust because it's in there, it's inside of you if you believe in it and I hope that this has been not only interesting but also given some concrete steps and tools to help you on your path in your journey in developing healthy relationship to food and body and yourself.

Annie: I am certain that it has been and I'm so excited for our listeners to experience it too.

Marci: Awesome, thanks.

Annie: Thank you, Marci.

Lauren: Thank you, Marci.

Marci: Bye.

Lauren: Bye.