

Balance365 Episode 56 Transcript

Annie: The philosophy of a cheat meal is based on the idea that for one meal or one day a week you can eat whatever you like and it seems to have become the standard in many mainstream diet plans. Fans of cheat meals boast that they boost your metabolism, provide a psychological break and help you stay on track with your goals but do they really? On today's episode of Balance 365 life radio Lauren and I dive into our thoughts and experiences on if cheat meals help or hurt your relationship with food and how you can actually enjoy the foods you love without relying on cheat meals. Enjoy! Lauren, it's me and you again. How are you?

Lauren: Hi. I feel like we should have so Mariah Carey in the background.

Annie: Oh yeah, we should have, maybe Vanessa can, our podcast editor can put some in the background since Jen's not here. Jen is not a Mariah Carey fan and Lauren and I are diehard Mariah Carey fans.

Lauren: Like old school Mariah.

Annie: Yeah, in fact on Saturday night there's a bar in my town that is an over 30 bar, which-

Lauren: Oh my god.

Annie: But the it's great because they play a lot of Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston and Janet Jackson and Paula Abdul.

Lauren: Do you have to show your ID to prove that you're over 30?

Annie: You don't but yeah, I just don't think many people under 30 it's really their thing.

Lauren: Want to go.

Annie: It's definitely an older crowd but the music is so good so it's fun just to go dancing there because it's like you're in middle school. It's like you're at those middle school, like school parties again.

Lauren: And like the skating party.

Annie: Yes, like Jay for roll away.

Lauren: It reminds me of that meme that says there needs to be a bar, like, for people who like to have 2 drinks then go to bed before 9 o'clock.

Annie: Yup, that's me. I had a couple glasses of wine at dinner then we went out dancing with my girlfriends and it was great.

Lauren: Like that sounds fun.

Annie: It was fun. It was, I mean, that's essentially what happens in my bathroom every morning, you know, a little dance party with Mariah Carey-

Lauren: But maybe without the wine with.

Annie: Yes or or maybe with a lot of coffee. Just replace the wine with coffee. Anyways, I'm happy you're here with me today because we're talking about cheat meals and I used to be a big cheat meal fan. Did you ever do a cheat meal? Did you ever do that like?

Lauren: Yes, I did lots of cheat meals. They were always like, Saturday it was like my cheat meal day.

Annie: Mine was Friday night and then it kind of wiggled its way into Saturday and kind of eventually came around Sunday which we will actually talk about later today but the cheat meal was kind of a standard in a lot of diets.

Lauren: Yep.

Annie: I don't know if you see this too in your area but it's kind of touted as like the go to philosophy for a lot of, especially in the gym setting, I feel, like a lot of people are doing, you know, that if it fits your macros or whatever and then they have their one designated cheat meal or cheat day. But the idea is that you can eat whatever you want in that timeframe, right?

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: And there's actually even some "experts" that make claims as to why a cheat meal can be a good thing for you and they can say everything from it boosts your metabolism, that it can give you a psychological break from dieting and they can also say that it helps you keep you on track with your plan, which we're just going to blow those right out of the water in the next few minutes. So are you ready? Do you want to just get right into it or do you have any cheat meal thoughts before we jump into it?

Lauren: Do you have any cheat meal thoughts? No, no, we can jump right in.

Annie: Okay, let's go. So claim number one: cheat meals boost your metabolism. Lauren, you're kind of the nutrition guru, you are, not kind of, you are the nutrition guru. Is that true? Do cheat meals boost your metabolism?

Lauren: No, I mean food boosts your metabolism in general and if you need a cheat meal to boost your metabolism, you are not eating enough right or being way too restrictive. Yeah and you know, to add to that whole eating breakfast, jumpstarts your metabolism, like, that's not true either so no, not and also one cheat meal can undo your results for the entire week and I think, I know you've probably experienced this too, right, where you you put in all this hard work throughout the entire week and so your cheat meal you all the things and I think we underestimate how much, how many calories we can eat during a cheat meal or a cheat day and it really, it kind of "undoes" everything you just worked to do, right and if you instead just kind of make smaller, more manageable changes throughout the entire week you don't need a cheat meal and you probably or could get better results anyway.

Annie: Yeah, the first time I was, that concept of essentially a cheat meal having the, could be an opportunity to essentially negate all the work you did throughout the week I was in a doctor's office and I was talking to my primary care doctor, this was before I was a personal trainer.

I was in the fitness industry, this is was long before this but I was expressing to her that I was trying to make some changes to my diet but that I wasn't losing weight and she asked, like, well, you know, what are you doing and I said well you know Monday through Friday I do really well, I, you know, pack my lunches,

eat breakfast, I eat dinner, my snacks are this and that, like all the gold standard, sort of balanced diet stuff, right, it was heavy on the restriction side, of course.

Because that's, you know, what I knew then but I said, you know, then on the weekends, then we'll eat out and she was like "Well, tell me about your eating out" and I was like, "Well, we'll go to the, you know, the restaurant down the corner or this or that" and she was like, "I hear that you're trying to make some changes and you have some really good intentions," she's like, "I want you to know that one of those meals can negate any caloric deficit you've tried to acquire during the week" and I was mad.

I was mad when I heard that because I was like "No, I work so hard during the week to get this result and then I essentially just blow it all in one Chinese buffet, like, is that what you're telling me?" She was like, "Well, look, it's not personal but yes, it's possible."

Lauren: Yeah, that's really like, exactly what I used to do. I know a friend of mine, do you guys have On The Border?

Annie: Yeah we ate at On The Border when you were here.

Lauren: Oh, well we would go to On The Border, there's one like by my house and we would eat the chips and salsa first, right, then I would get these tacos, these amazing tacos with the rice and then we would get this like cake dessert thing which had like the cake with the gooey chocolate center and ice cream and it was like, I probably, yeah, I would definitely overdo it because I was so hungry and so excited to actually eat good food, you know, because when you're restricting yourself so heavily throughout the week you want food that tastes good, like, you want taste.

Annie: And I know we've said this a million and one times on this podcast before but I'm going to say it again, restriction sets you up to binge.

Lauren: Yes.

Annie: And so it's no surprise that if you're restricting, restricting, restricting, you know, like, white knuckling it through the week and then you get to that cheat meal on Friday or Saturday or Sunday or whatever it is or cheat day, it's no wonder you're like "Game on! Let's go, I'm going to get all the things! You know, I'm going to start at breakfast and I'm going to go all the way to dinner, you know

or I'm going to have this, like, 3 course meal if you're just doing one meal, like, I'm going to I'm going to expand that meal into an appetizer and then a main course and then a dessert and then a side dish and some heavy caloric drinks or some alcohol or whatever." That's normal, that's exactly what we would expect from someone that is white knuckling it through the week, like.

Lauren: Right and when you only have one day or one meal to get in all your favorite foods, like, I'm going to fit as much as I possibly can fit in my stomach right now, like, and I still go out to eat, like, I still eat chips and salsa and tacos and sometimes order dessert but I just eat less, like, I don't eat as many chips and salsa because I'm not starving, like, I'll eat, you know, I'll take half of my meal home because I don't need it all and if we do order a dessert, like, the whole family shares that, I have a few bites and like that's it, so not saying you can't go out to eat but it's just a different kind of experience.

Annie: Absolutely. I think that's what we call moderation here at Balance365.

Lauren: Oh, OK. Is that the term?

Annie: Is that a new concept to you, Lauren? Jokes, jokes. OK, claim number 2: cheat meals provide a psychological break. Is that true?

Lauren: No, I don't, not in the long run. So it can feel like a break when you're in it, right, but then you have to go back to restricting. I remember I always used to like, plan, like you said, I would play my whole day.

Annie: Yes, right.

Lauren: Plan what I'm going to eat for each meal, the whole cheat day but then you have to go back to it and we had Marci Evans on the podcast a few weeks ago and we talked all about sugar addiction, right or whether sugar addiction is a real thing, so if you haven't listened to that, definitely go listen that was a really good and if you remember, she talked about the sugar addicted rats that "prove" that sugar addiction is a real thing, right, when you read the click baity articles and whatever.

But what we, what the study actually showed was the rats that had that addiction-like behavior were the ones that were, they had to fast before hand, right, they restricted their food before hand and then they gave them that access to the sugar and they gave them sometimes a lot of sugar, sometimes they would

take it away and give it back and the rats that did not have that restrictive behavior before hand they just ate it like regular food, right, they didn't exhibit that same addicted like behavior.

Annie: Yeah so what she was suggesting and what other research has backed is that it's not necessarily the food, it's the way in which the food is presented or the context around the food.

Lauren: Right.

Annie: So yeah, when you're saying, no, I can't have this until Friday, like, yeah, come Friday you are salivating for it?

Lauren: Like, yeah and I think we talk about this in probably almost every single podcast but like the Pink Polar Bear effect, when you tell yourself you can't have something, you want it more and actually something that was really interesting, I think it was another Tracy Mann study who we're going to have on the podcast soon too shows that when you restrict your food you are more likely to notice food around you and that's by design, right. So when we were at real risk for starving we were more likely to notice when food was around us and that was helpful to us back then, but now with food everywhere it's not so helpful but when you restrict your food or tell yourself you can't have that food, you notice food more around you I mean, which is super interesting.

Annie: I think if you are trying to get pregnant, have been pregnant, the thing that comes to mind is like, when we started trying to conceive with my children, you know, it was like all I saw was pregnant-

Lauren: Everyone-

Annie: Everyone was pregnant right, like, the farmer's market was just full of pregnant women.

Lauren: Or you ever get a new car and then you've never seen that car before and now you see it everywhere and like everyone has your car.

Annie: Yes, the power of suggestion, right?

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: OK claim number 3, this is kind of what I was hinting at earlier is that meals make it easier to stay on track, which-

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: Tell me about that, Lauren.

Lauren: Well, so your cheat meal on Friday night leads you to your cheat day on Saturday which leads you to your cheat day on Sunday. Normally I could cut it back off for Monday morning but trying to just do one cheat meal over the weekend and then stop is really difficult and I think most of our listeners who have been through this can completely understand where we're coming with this.

Annie: And I think it's really common, you know, if you first start implementing the philosophy of cheat meals to be like "OK, cheat meal one and done" and then, you know, a few months later it's like a cheat meal Friday night goes into breakfast Saturday and then after a year of cheat mealing it you're like "Oh, look, my whole weekend is now a cheat meal, which is essentially my experience."

Lauren: Right and then it's like what are you working so hard Monday through Thursday for, right? You're just torturing yourself for no reason.

Annie: Right and the other thing that's kind of actually thinking about it in those terms, we've talked a lot about Weight Watchers, I've been a member multiple, multiple times but that's essentially what I was doing around weigh ins was I would kind of white knuckle it, restrict, restrict, restrict pre-weigh in and I would go weigh in so I could weigh in light and reach my goal for the week and then after the weigh in it was game on, like, finally, just give me the foods that I was saying I couldn't have before I weighed in and which leads us right into why or how rather cheat days can create the perfect storm for yo yo dieting, weight loss, weight gain, weight loss, weight gain, weight loss, weight gain is essentially what we're saying, Lauren and I are saying is that you spend, you know, 3, 4, 5 days dieting, dieting, dieting, dieting, restricting, restricting, restricting and then the other 2, 3, 4 days game on, all in, I'm just going to eat whatever I want, you get a case of the screw its and that's like, "Let's go, right?"

Lauren: Yeah for sure and then, we're kind of talking about this as week and weekend but there's also like the seasonal thing, right, like we just got over, we just got done the holidays, right that's a big thing too, like, you diet, diet, diet up to

the holidays and then you go crazy until, you know, sometimes the beginning of January, sometimes it's until the spring, right and then you just repeat that again.

So this can be like shorter, like weekly or it can be even shorter than that, like, sometimes you'll see people trying to eat as little as possible throughout the day and then they go crazy at night, right? They can't stop eating at night, like, after their kids go to bed or when they get home for work or whatever, so it could be a short of a time frame as that, it could be a week, it could be months. But yeah, it's kind of all the same, even though it's different.

Annie: Yeah and I just want to say, I want to reiterate that the restrictive diet that's paired with the cheat days or cheat meals is what makes it necessary, "feel necessary" to eat all those foods because your hunger, you're hungry, you're thinking about all the foods you said you couldn't eat and your quantities have likely been repressed before that and so you want to eat a high volume of foods and then you combine that with what we're talking about with the lab rats earlier, like, you know, you get this addiction-like response because you've been restricting these foods, it's not because the foods themselves are addictive. it's the manner in which you present the foods to yourself.

Lauren: Right, it's like we always talk about it's the diets, like, it feeds itself, right, like you go on a diet and going on the diet causes you to overeat which causes you, you know, shame and guilt and all these feelings which make you want to diet again, it just goes in a circle it over and over and over.

Annie: Yes, so how do you enjoy treats without cheat days?

Lauren: Well, you want to start not at the cheat day part ,you want to start at the diet part.

Annie: Yes, so many people are-

Lauren: So make your diet not so restrictive and you, like, you just said you don't have that strong desire and strong need to overeat all the things.

Annie: Right. It's not, the answer isn't eat everything in sight all the time and it's not, also on the flip side, to eat only healthy or "good" foods and never eat treats again, the answer is daily consistent moderation.

Lauren: Well, there is that word again, moderation.

Annie: It just keeps coming up. It's so weird. And that's finding a balance between the food you love and a way of eating that helps you live your life and show up in your life as your best self. So instead of cutting out sweets and treats or pizza or tacos or whatever it is or waiting until the weekend, you plan to enjoy a reasonable amount of treats or pizza or tacos throughout the week and you know and you might have some variations of that, so obviously you are not going to probably choose to eat a cheat meal for the whole, or what you would traditionally eat at a cheap meal, you know, I'm thinking of someone who is currently listening and they're like imposing the cheat meal philosophy.

You might have a little bit of a pendulum swing where while you're, as Lauren said, trying to stop this process in the restriction, you might feel that your cheat meal carries on for a week or a couple weeks and you eat all the foods but eventually, in our experience, as Lauren said and we've shared this on the podcast before, you're probably going to find that if you continue to cheat meal type foods, whatever that looks like to you, over the long haul you're probably not going to feel very good.

Like you just aren't and again, we just shared this on our last podcast that we recorded that the diet industry wants you to believe that if you are left to your own devices you will sit on the couch, eat all the foods all the time and do nothing, right, that's what they want us to believe but we would offer that if left to your own devices, our bodies naturally crave a variety of foods, balance, moderation, movement, variety and so one way to implement moderation is to allow yourselves to eat those cheat meal foods throughout the week, not just on the weekends or not just when you have those designated, like, "I'm allowed to eat this" moment.

Lauren: Right and it's not, you don't need to confine yourself to just "diet foods" right, like, eat foods that you enjoy and eat enough of them to sustain you and you won't feel that crazy desire to eat all the things that taste good and are super hyper palatable and it's just, it's exactly that going from one side of the pendulum to the other to in the middle.

Annie: Yeah, because part of finding balance whether it's with food or exercise or anything, anything in life when you're trying to find balance, part of finding balance is experimenting what feels like too much and what feels like too little. I mean, even, you know, like, thinking about, like, you're learning to drive a car, which is another analogy we've used before.

You know, when I watch my kids drive a car when they turn, you know, a car, they're not driving my car, just to be clear, you know, whether to drive like a go cart or a video game, when they turn, they crank the wheel hard and when they stop they push the brake hard and when they press the gas pedal, they push the gas hard and they have to just learn that, like, that was too much, this is too little. I got to find that balance in between what's just enough for me. It's like Goldilocks, right?

Lauren: Yeah and we see this all the time in our Balance365 community and the Healthy Habits Happy Moms community. Someone will be like, well I tried this for a day and I ate all the things that didn't work and now I don't feel good, right, like, you are not, you have to realize you are not going to get this right on the 1st try, like, it takes trial and error. But going through that process is worth it in the end, like it's not going to take forever, it will take some time to figure out but then you have it and you know and you know what's too much and you know what works for you.

Annie: Yeah, so if you're someone that's listening, I'm thinking of myself when I was 20, you know, 2 or 23 and I was doing cheat meals on a Friday night. I guarantee if I let go of that restriction during the week, cheat meals on the weekend sort of thing I would have had a period where my pendulum swung in the opposite direction and I would have been pizza, tacos, chips like a steady diet of just those three foods, like no vegetables, no fruit, very little, you know, protein.

And I would have I would have eventually have come out of it and in fact, I did, that's essentially what I did is, like, let go of that process was I had to move through some of this, like, "OK, I'm going to experiment what feels like too much food and then I'm going to let my pendulum kind of settle somewhere in the middle which is now I'm able to enjoy pizza and tacos and chips, you know, as little or as much as I see fit and I'm completely neutral about it."

Lauren: Yeah and we're not saying, you know, you're never going to eat another vegetable again, like, once I kind of find, once you, say, sort of start settling back in the middle, that's when it's really helpful to kind of adopt these other healthy habits that we teach in Balance365 like adding your vegetables and making sure you're going enough protein but doing it from the mindset, from a balanced mindset instead of a diet mindset, it makes all the difference.

Annie: Yeah and I think too, you know, just to wrap up, remembering that this is a process, right, like we were just saying that it's going to be a practice, it's going to be an evolution. And you might have some missteps but we encourage our Balance365 members to look at this as like an experiment and it's just kind of information that you're gathering about yourself so you can, you know, that saying when you know better, you can do better and you can make different choices based off of your needs the more information you have about yourself.

But, all in all, we would we would largely encourage moderation over cheat meals, for all the reasons we just listed previously but we think that really promotes a healthy relationship with food and that way you get to eat your pizza and your Cheetos, next to your kale.

Lauren: That was a different podcast.

Annie: I know but it still applies, it still applies, you can have it all and kale.

Lauren: Yes.

Annie: OK, good, we crushed that, Lauren.

Lauren: Yeah we did.

Annie: Yeah and if you need, if we say so ourselves, if you need help, if you're currently like cheat mealing it up and you're like, "OK, yeah, I hear what they're saying, this isn't working for me anymore, I don't want to continue this" and you want support and you're not already in our Facebook group please join us. It is a free private Facebook group. We are Healthy Habits Happy Moms on Facebook we have 40,000 plus, and growing daily, women in our group that would encourage you, love to encourage you and cheer and clap for you and support you as you find out what balance and moderation looks like in your diet.

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: Alright, thanks, Lauren.

Lauren: Alright. Bye.

Annie: Bye

