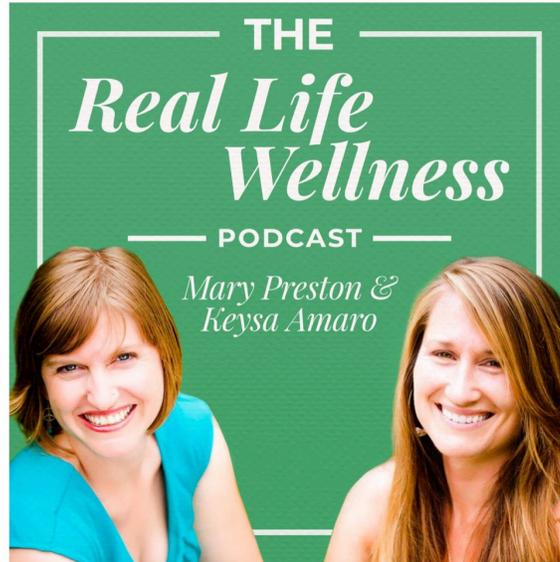# Episode 26: Villainizing Food

Episode Transcript

With your Hosts
Mary Preston & Keysa Amaro

Hi everybody, welcome to The Real Life Wellness Podcast where we talk about different ways to integrate healthier habits into your life, with your hosts Mary Preston and Keysa Amaro.

Welcome back friends! I'm Keysa Amaro, certified Health Coach, and I help ambitious moms get control of their food cravings by going beyond the nutrition to develop a healthy relationship with food and with themselves.

Hey there, and I'm Mary Preston, and I'm a licensed psychotherapist and a life coach and I work with Mental Health Professionals who are experiencing burnout.

Just a quick announcement that my 6 week program, focused on preventing burnout for mental health professionals, especially you mental health professionals in non-profits, government jobs, and those working in the school system is READY TO GO! This program is awesome. It's 7 weeks long, and it will help you get re-energized, feeling supported, on purpose, and loving your job again. If you know any helping professional who is on the edge of burnout, is exhausted, complains about their job all the time, and can't seem to let go of the work day, please pass it

on! As a small business my best advertisement is word of mouth, so if you find value in the work I do, please share! And of course, if you have questions about this course, any of our programs, the podcast, or anything about health and wellness, come join us in The Real Life Wellness Podcast with Mary and Keysa facebook group

Keysa: Alright. On to our topic of the day, which is...villainizing food
During this episode we will cover:
- What villainizing food really is
- Why we villainize food
- What happens when we villainize food
- What to do if you find yourself villainizing food

Mary: Definition of villain: the person or thing responsible for specified trouble, harm, or damage.

When we villainize food, we make certain foods responsible for causing us trouble, harm, or damage.

Often, in January, everyone is making resolutions. As one year closes, it is common to look back and think about the year before, and decide if there is anything you would do differently. I love January. I love the idea of creating new goals, and looking forward to a fresh new year. It is mentally an opportunity to start new things. Looking at surveys so far this year the top 3 resolutions are 1, to diet or eat healthier, 2, to exercise more, and 3, to lose weight.

This means a fresh, new round of people is looking up terms like "best diet" "fastest way to lose weight," "fastest way to lose fat," "apple cider vinegar diet" etc. And the google will supply you with plenty of answers. And I don't think there is anything wrong with folks taking their health seriously. January 1 is as good a time to do it as any other time. Here's the problem with most of the resolutions made in January. People are looking for quick, weight loss, extreme exercise that focuses on "problem areas" and there is not a focus on health in general.

Because of this you will find a lot of your friends sharing about their restrictive diets. Folks are going to start sharing about the evils of sugar, carbs, meat, fat, processed food, mcdonald's, and you are going to start seeing the trendy new "miracle foods" such as celery juice, pomegranate, kale, sweet potato, alternative milks and sugars. People will take on Whole 30 paleo challenges, ketogenic diets, they will try out vegetarianism, the mediterranean diet, the dash diet, and they will share about Veganuary.

And, like I said, there is nothing wrong with forming goals. What does happen is a short-sighted restriction of certain foods for the purpose of short-term weight loss. This is not, and has never been good for our bodies. It doesn't matter if you're cutting out meat, cutting out vegetables, or cutting out sugar. These swings of severe diets, followed by the fairly common "falling off of the wagon" is hard on our bodies, and our weight swings up and down and mentally we become

obsessed with what we are eating and we have the mindset that while on the diet we are eating "good" or "healthy" food and when we are off the diet we are eating "bad" or "unhealthy" food.

Keysa: It seems like every week there is a new news article or scientific study that tells us not to eat a certain food in order to be healthy. Then the very next week that same food is praised for its healing properties. If you stay on top of these article and news stories, this can cause you to view certain foods as good or bad for you. This flip flop of information can cause confusion and can lead to villainizing or demonizing foods.

Take butter for instance. I rarely ate butter when I was younger because it was full of fat! And heart clogging saturated fat at that. The fat in the butter would surely make me fat. So, I stayed away from it and thought of it as a "bad" food or a food that would make me fat.

Fast forward to the present, and butter is making a comeback. We are finding that dietary fat doesn't make you fat, and that dietary saturated fat doesn't clog arteries. Now, butter is a "good" food and healthy for you to eat.

When we refer to villainizing food, we are looking at the idea that certain foods are either "good" or "bad". And when we say a food is bad, it becomes villainized. Just like in a movie or story, the bad character is the villain and wreaks havoc among people. When food is thought of as "bad" and becomes the villain, it makes it seem that it is causing humans their problems. We are helpless against the villain until someone comes along to save us.

Food can be villainized for making us fat, causing weight gain, causing cravings, causing digestive problems, causing inflammation, causing disease, or causing environmental issues.

Why do we villainize food?
When you are on a diet there is food to eat, and food not to eat because it will make you fat, put on weight, or if you eat it it will mean you failed your diet.

Diet programs often villainize food because it is a part of their tactic and marketing strategy. This is what is causing your weight gain, this is what is causing your digestive issues, this is what is causing world destruction. Just don't eat these foods and you will lose weight, solve all your problems, cure world hunger.

Diet companies use these fear tactics or villainizing tactics to get you to buy into their diet plan. When something is the villain, we need to get rid of it in order to make things right, to bring peace. When we villainize food, we get rid of it and it will bring on weight loss and happiness.

Mary: Yes! Isn't it much more exciting for an ad to show us how easy it will be to lose weight by cutting out the "bad" foods? Their promise is to make it easy. The promise is that by following their magic formula you will lose weight, finally get that sweet car and gorgeous partner, make friends, and get that raise at work. Wow, that's great! All you have to do is never eat sugar

again! Or only eat grapefruit! Or cut out all red meat. Or cut out GMOs. Or eat organic. Or restrict your calories to 1200 or less. Or stay under 23 points a day.

Keysa: We are here to offer you another way of looking at food...we believe and would like to introduce you to the idea that food is just food...it doesn't have intentions, it's not vindictive, passive aggressive, or manipulative. It's not here to sabotage you or make you fat. It's purpose is not to tempt you or make you fail your diet. Food is just food. It sits on the shelf in its package and that's all it does. It doesn't have a conscious and can not do anything to hurt you or ruin your diet.

So, why does it seem that the ice cream is calling your name, and that if you don't eat it, your life will end? Simply put; your thoughts. Your thoughts about the ice cream make you desire the ice cream. It's not the ice cream that is causing your cravings, but your thoughts about the ice cream that are causing your cravings. It's our thoughts about food that make it "good" or "bad".

Example:
I used to eat fat free strawberry yogurt ALL THE TIME! I would have it for breakfast, for lunch, or even as a snack. It was fat free so it was a "good" food. I felt good eating it and I thought that I was making a "healthy" decision and doing good for my body and waistline by choosing fat free yogurt versus full fat yogurt. This yogurt didn't do anything, it didn't say anything. It was just sitting on the shelf at the grocery store. I was under the assumption that things that were fat free were healthy and good for you. You wanted to eat as little fat as possible, so this fat free yogurt was the ticket to not gaining weight and even losing weight. It was my thought about the food that made it "good". Yes, marketing and media had a hand in swaying my mind and "educating" me about what I should be eating or not eating to be healthy and lose weight. But the food itself was not inherently good.

Fast forward to 2012 when I was deep into my Paleo days and dairy was considered a "do not eat" food or a "bad" food. It was the cause of acne, digestive issues, and mucus in the body. Our bodies are only able to process lactose until a certain age, and we are the only animals that drink another animals milk. And on top of the no dairy, the Paleo template encourages eating fat and not taking fat out of foods like the fat free strawberry yogurt I had once survived on. This now made the once "good" yogurt "bad". Oh, and the sugar! All the added sugar to the strawberry yogurt was "bad" as well. So, how did the once "good" yogurt become so "bad"? Did it commit a food crime? Did it start running with other "bad" food, and now it can't be trusted? No. The fat free strawberry yogurt is still the same yogurt sitting innocently on the grocery store shelf. It's just that my knowledge and thoughts about it had changed. It was now a "bad" food for its lack of fat, added sugar, and dairy-ness. Nothing about the yogurt had changed, except maybe the look of the label, but my thoughts had. I took diary out of my diet and went a long time without eating it.

As we are talking today, I have since eased my "bad" label on fat free strawberry yogurt. It's the equivalent of parole. Do I eat yogurt...not fat free strawberry yogurt. But I will incorporate plain greek yogurt into some of my recipes. I no longer look for a yogurt substitute for a recipe. I do

however not eat it very often as it does cause excess mucus that gets a bit annoying when I eat it on a regular basis. (and that goes for most dairy in general for me). The difference now is that I don't see yogurt as a bad thing…it's just a thing. It's a food that I choose not to eat because I know how I feel if I were to eat fat free strawberry yogurt. And to be honest, I don't really like the texture of fat free yogurt. And didn't really realize that, or let myself be okay with that until recently. So, when I pass the yogurt section in the grocery store, it doesn't really have an effect on me. I don't think of it as "good" or "bad". I just know that I choose not to eat it because of how it will make me feel, and I choose to eat foods that feel good in my body and give me a healthy biological response. And this goes back to what I think about this food. It is just food to me. I know how it feels when I eat it, and I don't want it.

Mary: I have a similar experience, as do so many of the people listening. When I was in high school butter was bad, because fat was bad. Then in college, I just ate low calorie, because it wasn't the type of food I was eating, it was how much I was eating. Over time, I learned that protein was best and would fill you up, so I would eat high protein, low calorie (think 2 plain eggs in the morning with a bit of cheese, then a half of a peanut butter sandwich for lunch.) I did my first of many paleo challenges and learned that out go corn, sugar, beans, processed foods, dairy, and refined carbohydrates. I did intermittent fasting and learned that I'm only supposed to eat at certain times. I learned about the ketogenic diet and learned that I need to keep my carbohydrates under a certain number. Then I followed the intuitive diet and learned that I was supposed to eat cake if I felt like it. So what is the right way to do things?

Over all of this time, I think what I learned from my paleo days is to find out how food affects me. Not to listen to the mainstream advice or what is good for other people, but to find out what my body likes and what it doesn't. Like Keysa, I learned that dairy was a bad food on the paleo diet. And I cut it out of my food intake for years (unless I was "off the wagon" and ate a ton of it). Recently with eating intuitively, I learned that the effects of dairy are not as severe as I thought they were going to be. I do get mucousy though. So, is dairy "bad" because it creates mucous in my throat? Not really. It's just a food (cheese for me, I don't even really like milk or yogurt). It's a block of fermented milk. It is never bad. It just exists in the grocery store until I decide I will buy it. Then it just exists in my cart, then in my fridge. It doesn't do anything. It just sits there. Every once in a while, I put some in my chili or stew and it goes into my stomach. Then my body creates mucous. Then when I do yoga in the morning, my breathing is different. Is it the cheese's fault? Did it do it on purpose? Is it bad? No. It is simply a collection of molecules that my body uses in a certain way. I can choose to put it in my mouth or not. But, cheese has not, and has never done, anything wrong.

Keysa: What happens when we villainize food?
When we villainize food we become the victim to the food. The food has the power over us and we are helpless to its evil powers. We blame the food when we eat it. We tell ourselves that it was too tempting, that it was just there and I couldn't resist it.

Mary: Yup, I blamed bread for years. Bread and cookies and beer were making me fat. It was absolutely their fault.

Keysa: This doesn't have to be the case.

When we villainize food this creates fear towards the food. If that food is bad, then we shouldn't eat it. We become fearful of eating the food, even just a little bit. We think that death will be knocking on our door, or that we will gain 10 lbs overnight if we eat a "bad" food or a "forbidden" food.

Mary: I like to think about it this way:
I was brought up Catholic. In the catholic church there was very much "good" vs "bad" ways of existing. There was very clear cut behaviors that were sins. There were very clear cut behaviors that were right and good.
So many of the sinful things were things that felt good or were just every day pleasures for other people. Sex. Cursing. Not going to church. Wearing pretty clothes that made me look good. Meat on Fridays. Loving who you loved. Women in the workplace or on the altar. Making money.

All of these things were on the "bad" list. And it made me want all of them so much. When I think about Adam and Eve, and Eve noticed the "forbidden" fruit, of course she wanted it. It was an item full of pleasure, full of the most delicious flavors, a delightful experience and it was off-limits. Of course she ate it. I would have.

And this is how I felt every time I ate bread. Like it was the most delightful, most sinful, most off-limit food. And so if I was going to eat bread or cookies, I would gather as much as I could and stuff in all of the sugar and carbs I could, because I knew that tomorrow I was going to swear off of it again.

So many of these things, now that they are just available to me, are no big deal. Bread is available. Sex is available. I can work, I could become a preacher. I can swear all day every day. And sometimes I will go for it, and sometimes I won't. And it doesn't make a difference either way.

When we villainize food, we mentally create a fear of it, and we, at the same time, create a desire for it. It is "off limits." It is sinful. It is delightful. And it is a tortuous cycle that we create.

Keysa: Villainizing food can lead to restricting food in a negative way. We may restrict the food because we heard that this food was unhealthy or that it will cause weight gain. When we restrict foods based on other people's opinions or commands, this will often lead to cravings and overeating. It is one thing to choose to not eat a food because it will make you sick or it causes an unwanted result, but when we are blindly following a diet, that is based on weight loss or health, we tend to not really know why we are not eating a certain type of food or why that food is bad for us. And especially if we really like this food, this will cause cravings and overeating without doing the thought work behind it.

Mary: So, ask yourself, how are you thinking about food? If you are eating a certain way, why are you doing so?

Keysa: If you notice that you villainize food, what can you do to deconstruct this habit, and help develop a healthy relationship with food? Well, we have some tips for you to help you de-villainize food.

5 Tips for De-villainizing Food
1. **Be aware of how you view different foods:** Do you have a do not eat list? If so, why are those foods on that list? Is it because they will cause you weight gain? Is it becuase the diet you are currently on is telling you not to eat them? Or maybe it is because the food causes a negative reaction in your body. Be aware of why you think certain foods are bad.
2. **Write it Down**: Write down all of the food that is bad for you, or that you don't eat. Next to each food write the reason you think this food is bad for you. Look at your responses; do they come from facts, are there biological reasons you don't eat the food, such as it causes eczema or inflammation in my joints, or is it because it will make you fat, spike your blood sugar, or increase your cholesterol?
3. **Accept your current view on food:** listen, society has been telling you about food since the day you were born. You've been inundated for years about the evils of certain foods and the miraculous properties of others. It's okay. We all have. You cannot change thoughts that you are not aware of. So, finding those thoughts is important, and accepting that those are the current reasons for eating and not eating certain foods is super important.
4. **Create new thoughts:** for every one of those food thoughts that you are having that you believe are bringing you negative results, it is worthwhile to think about alternative thoughts about them. For example, I used to believe that I was addicted to bread. Let's take a look at that thought. If I am addicted to bread, then when bread is around, I will have no choice but to eat it. I will be a fiend. I will desire it so much that it will pull me towards it and I will have no choice. Therefore, I must get rid of all bread in the house. I must not walk through the bread aisle. I must stay away from it at parties.
   What if bread was just cooked flour, sugar, and salt? What if it is my choice to eat it or not? I could think: bread doesn't do anything. Bread isn't that exciting. I could choose to think about other things instead, like how much I love chili. Or I could think about what I want to sew next. I could find other thoughts that are more useful.
5. **Practice new thoughts:** it is important to practice these new thoughts. If you are keen on practicing new, healthy thoughts about food, then you will have to say them over and over again, because the media will continue to tell you their message of good and bad and feed you the miracle cure for everything. YOu want to be prepared when that happens, so that you are in control of your own brain and your own thoughts.

Alrighty friends, that's all we have got for you today. Thanks for being awesome as always and listening in.

Tune into our next episode where we talk about why it's not your diet's fault, because, like food, diets don't DO anything.

If you'd like to know more about us, and if you have any questions or comments, head on over to our dedicated facebook group!   You can also contact Mary at her website at www.maryalycepreston.com or Keysa at her website at www.keysaamaro.com!

Keysa: If you know someone who you think would benefit from the information shared on our podcast, please share this episode with them! We want to extend our message to, and support as many people as possible, and we need your help to get our message out. We would greatly appreciate your help in reaching out to people who could benefit from our podcast.

Mary: And if you enjoy the show, we would love it if you would leave us an honest review on iTunes. Simply go to iTunes and search for the podcast page. Hit the tab for ratings and reviews, and click on Write a Review. That's it! Super helpful!