



WHY & HOW TO DITCH THE "GOOD" VS "BAD" FOOD LABELS

WHAT YOU EAT DOES NOT MAKE YOU "GOOD" OR "BAD"

At that moment, that day, that week, and it doesn't define or reflect your character or value as a person. You're not "good" for eating a salad. It makes you a person who eats salad. On the flip side, having cake does not make you "bad"... think you get the point!

Clients often come to me thinking our first meeting is going to be a "confession session" where they discuss all the "bad" things they've been doing when it comes to food. Acting as the "food police" is not what my role as a Certified Nutrition Coach is.

Nutrition is not this black and white. Instead, I recommend that you embrace the grey - I like to call this the colourful area and get curious about your habits and choices as opposed to critical.

WHY IS LABELING FOODS AS "GOOD" VS "BAD" HARMFUL FOR MY HEALTH & HAPPINESS?

The moment you've labelled food as "bad", you begin to fear it. It takes up more of your mental space as you spend more time thinking about it. Labelling food as "bad" inherently puts it on a pedestal. When something is on a pedestal, a few things can happen:

A.) You may want it even more (since it feels off-limits).

B.) You may not be able to be fully present while eating it since guilt will sink in, which will reduce your ability to listen to your body's feedback... (i.e. Are you even enjoying it? Or maybe it is not that good? Or maybe you had a few bites and that felt satisfying.) Instead, the guilt may lead to a feeling of "Well, I already was 'bad' might as well just have more."

C.) It stops being a neutral food choice and starts having a moral implication. Meaning, when we eat the "bad" food, we tell ourselves that we are "bad" for making that decision.



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Here's an example:

One of my favourite foods is a chocolate chip brownie... preferably my own recipe with extra gooeyness and chocolate chips. It would likely be considered a "bad" food in a good versus bad labelling scenario since the recipe is filled with butter, chocolate, sugar, and especially when it is compared to a fresh salad.

Next, let's imagine I'm baking some brownies for my sister's birthday this weekend. I decided to be "good" all week, which results in a compensatory behaviour of "restricting" since I know I'm going to want brownies (in my mind... considered "bad") this weekend.

When the time comes to eat the brownie, I eat it. I enjoy it at that moment, but that enjoyment only lasts so long before the guilt settles in. I beat myself up for having the brownie and don't even get to truly enjoy it.

Then I figure, "F it, I was already bad. Might as well continue this behaviour for the rest of the weekend." I end up having even more brownies, which ultimately does not make me feel well.

This is called the restrict->binge->repent->repeat cycle.

As long as you continue to think of food in terms of good or bad, you will continue to harbour a diet mindset. And as long as you continue to harbour a diet mindset, you will continue to struggle with food.

What to do instead?

I know it can be easier said than done to drop these labels. For some of us, we've been labelling foods since childhood (often from hearing adults refer to foods as "bad" and "good"). It's a bit of an unlearning process. I know it can be easier said than done to drop these labels.



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Here are the steps I recommend when it comes to "unlearning" the tendency to label foods:

The first thing to do is to gain awareness. What foods do you label? Make a list of the foods and what you label them as (i.e bad, fattening, not approved, etc).

How does this make you feel?

Next, now that you know which foods are most triggering you when it comes to labels, continue to listen to your thoughts around those foods to increase your awareness.

Every time you catch yourself calling a food choice "bad" or "good", try and reframe the label to something else. For example, if you previously told yourself, "I can't control myself around brownies." Try empowering yourself and work on telling yourself, "I am in control of my choices."

Additionally, instead of attaching words of morality around food, empower yourself to make decisions based on what FEELS GOOD for your body at that moment by thinking of food as a part of your self-care (not self-control).



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Sometimes choices rooted in self-care are going to mean a nourishing bowl of plants, and other times it's going to be a bowl of your favourite ice cream. Even though intellectually, you know you feel more vibrant when you eat more nutritious foods – such as veggies and fruits – over less nutritious foods – such as chocolate, ice cream, and chips – if you associate nutritious foods as good/healthy food and less nutritious foods as bad/unhealthy food, you will continue to crave the less nutritious foods.

Depriving yourself of it until you have an emotional trigger and you fall into the "what the heck" mode. You then overeat the forbidden less nutritious foods, perhaps even to the point of bingeing, followed by guilt, shame, and hopelessness.

It is possible to shift your mindset away from labelling foods and out of a dieter's mindset. However, this must be done without considering the nutritional value of the foods, otherwise, you are still thinking in terms of good/bad, healthy/unhealthy which will keep you stuck in the diet food rule trap.

This is the very reason that I don't teach nutrition habits to my clients until just over halfway through my Food Freedom Program (around month 3).

If we start the process of learning how to nourish your body, yet you still have a diet mentality, all the nutrition conversation we have about foods that make you feel healthy and vibrant is heard by you as more diet rules (good/bad, healthy/unhealthy).

Practice makes progress.

With practice over time, dropping the labels will allow us to feel more in power when it comes to food and lessens the power that food has over us. We will get to decide what we want to eat and how much based on how it makes us feel and not because of moral motives. This serves as a reminder that you are in charge of your food choices and that the food doesn't control you.

I know this isn't easy work since it may feel easier to go back and follow rigid diet rules. The problem is – while it seems simpler to see things in black and white, it is not sustainable or balanced.

As a Type A personality myself, like most dieters, we learn the all or nothing. The last thing we want to hear is to find balance! We don't think balance is good enough.



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Trust me on this beautiful. The grey area between black and white (the colourful area I like to call it!) is THE place to live in a place of food freedom, and peace of mind.

One last thing I would like to add is that it can be really helpful to use affirmations in your daily practice, not just when your mental food police pop up. Throughout the day, a million times a day, repeat an affirmation to yourself until it feels true for you. Affirmations such as the brownie scenario example I gave above and like the ones below:

"The more I physically and mentally allow (insert whatever food is relevant to you), the less power it will have over me over time. I chose to heal from diet mentality over listening to the food police in my head."

"It's just food."

"All food is equal."

"What do I feel like eating right now?" not "What food should I eat right now?"

"The less I obsess about food, the more I make my food choices from feelings, and intuition will free me from the mental food police."

"I trust myself."

"My body knows what to eat to nourish itself."



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I would love to know what you choose to say to yourself! Please share it with me.

Sending so much love   and remember:

This will take practice - no doubt you've had years of being in food jail so be patient with yourself and you will get there.

