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Julie: Welcome to the Love Food podcast, hosted by dietitian and food behavior expert, Julie Duffy Dillon. This authentically engineered series is in the form of a love letter, welcoming you to reconnect with food. Now pour a cup of coffee or a margarita and let's begin.

Julie: Hi and welcome to episode 257 of the Love Food podcast. I'm Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey. I am so glad you are here. It's been quite a year, hasn't it? How has your relationship with food been affected by all of 2020 and this first half of 2021? How has your relationship been with food? Has it been harder? Has it been more complicated? Have there been different avenues that have actually opened up some clarity? I am excited to share with you a letter from someone who is exploring how the pandemic has affected their relationship with food and their body. And we get to hear from Jenna Doak who owns Body Positive Fitness in Toronto, Canada. And um, I'm of- I was talking to Jenna after we stopped recording, and I'm really excited to hear about this virtual online access to um, to fitness. Um, it's really hard, as you know, it's really hard to find ways to move one's body without diet culture BS. And so, I was really excited to learn about her services that she provides to anyone in the world. And I can't wait for you to hear what she has to say for this person who is struggling with the relationship with food, and body, and movement as the body has changed from the pandemic. And I realize that may have happened to you too. So before we get to this episode's letter and hear from Jenna, a quick word from our sponsor.

Julie (ad break): This episode of the Love Food podcast is brought to you by Ovo Folic. What is Ovo Folic? Well, I had that question too, but Ovo Folic is a new to me inositol supplement. If you have PCOS and you have listened to podcasts on PCOS that I've been interviewed on, or you have done my course, you know that I talk all the time about inositol supplementation. We know that people with PCOS probably have a defect or deficiency with certain inositols, and that's what leads to insulin resistance, issues with ovulation, and higher androgen levels. Adding an inositol supplement to your PCOS regimen is something that for many people, helps to improve ovulation, lower androgens, and lower insulin blood sugars, and even improve symptoms of anxiety. Recently I jumped on the phone with Dr. Pari, one of the founders of the small company called Elan Healthcare that makes Ovo Folic. She also sent me samples to try. I was so impressed with all that Elan Healthcare is doing. It's a small women owned and led company, not a big corporation. They love providing a personal touch. Dr. Pari responds to all customer emails herself. She also oversees every aspect of the manufacturing and the ingredients of Ovo Folic. So I know not all inositol ingredients are the same. I really like knowing there's a choice in good quality inositol supplements with the recommended 40:1 ratio. Ovo Folic has no taste or smell. I can totally vouch for that, because I tried it myself, and of course has these really high-quality ingredients. Ovo Folic comes in easy to carry single dose packets with, again, that 40 to 1 ratio so you can feel rest assured that you're getting the recommended amount for the maximum therapeutic effect. So, Ovo Folic has a special offer for Love Food listeners. Use the coupon

code foodpeace at checkout for 15% off. Go to Elanhealthcare.ca and click on their product, Ovo Folic. It's spelled O V O F O L I C, to learn more. Use code foodpeace, all one word, to get 15% off.

Julie: All right, enough of all that. Let's get to this episode's letter.

Julie (as letter writer): Dear Food, You and I have always had a tumultuous relationship. My parents would tell me that I would get too big from eating too much of you, while at the same time encouraging me to eat as much of you as possible on certain celebration days. My mother was convinced that eating certain types of you was a health risk and when I was a child, she restricted my intake of you heavily. I was never allowed to eat what I actually wanted, and it made you so special in my mind. Other kids were allowed sugary cereals, soda, ice cream, sweets, crisps - I was only allowed these very rarely and I was so intensely jealous of other kids' relationships with you, food. I used to sneak you into my room to eat you in private, where no-one would know. As soon as I left home, I tried all those types of you that had been forbidden and for a while, I loved you in all your forms. Then my weight started going up and up and I got new stretch marks and my stomach grew bigger than it had ever been. I went on my first diet since leaving home, this time of my own volition. It was the start of a continuous cycle: I'd eat you and enjoy you, get disgusted with the way my body looked and try a diet, only to eventually stop the diet and start the cycle all over again. I spent many years on that hamster wheel and eventually ended up wondering why I was so obsessed with you. Luckily, I discovered intuitive eating and finally started addressing my relationship with you a few years ago. We went through a joyous phase of exploration together where I bought six different flavours of Ben & Jerry's and found that I actually didn't want to eat them all at once. I put on weight, but I accepted it and loved myself just the way I was. Things have settled down now and I just eat whatever I want, whenever I want, which includes things like vegetables, because they are delicious, not because they are "healthy" and ice cream too, of course. I would definitely call myself an intuitive eater and I am proud of how far I have come. I am doing so well! So how come I'm fearing for my health? Before lockdown, my intuitive eating journey was leading to weight loss and I was happy about it, while also feeling somewhat guilty about feeling that way - I know it shouldn't matter what size I am, and yet it felt good that joyful movement and intuitive eating was also leading to some reduction in my size. Then my mental health faltered and lockdown happened, which meant very little movement and perhaps indulging a little more in you, food, than I otherwise would. Now I'm finding myself even bigger than ever and petrified that the aches and pains I'm experiencing are due to weight gain, that I have high blood pressure, diabetes, sleep apnea and any manner of other health issues. I'm not sleeping well due to all this anxiety, which is just making things worse. How can I stop worrying that you are killing me, food? Love, Perpetual Worrier

Julie: Thank you so much, letter writer, for this note. I am just so glad that you are doing the work. You are definitely in the messy, messy middle. And we are going to give Jenna Doak a call. She is a fitness expert behind Body Positive Fitness in Toronto. And I have a feeling she's going to have some insight for you. So, let's go ahead and give Jenna a call.

Jenna: Hello?

Julie: Hey Jenna, it's Julie Duffy Dillon. How are you?

Jenna: I'm great. How are you doing?

Julie: I am so glad to talk to you. It's nice to meet you. And did you get a chance to read through the letter I sent you?

Jenna: Yes, I did.

Julie: Fabulous. So, let's dive into it. Um, you know, this, this experience this person's going through is one that can be quite complicated but also is pretty consistent in the journey. But um, that was one thing that I gathered from it, but when you are reading through it, what was your impression about what this person is experiencing?

Jenna: My first impression was that it is very common. Um, this is a story that I hear quite a bit and I do think that a lot of people, their, their mindset and issues that they have around food and their bodies and exercise does stem from very early childhood. Um, what we are taught to think while our brains are still developing, it has a lot to us as adults and sometimes we don't realize it, and that was the first thing that came to mind was this person is an adult, but they are still going back to what they were taught at such a young age about food and how that still affects them.

Julie: I know people feel so frustrated with themselves, like they take it as a personal failure for just like not being able to quote, just get over it. You know, I hear that so often from folks and um, this is, it's complicated because like, the foundation was laid for this person, they weren't asked for, no one asked consent. You know, like, hey, we're going to teach you this way of eating that's going to really fuck with you.

Jenna: Exactly. And it is literally when your brain is developing. So, these things that are built into your brain, it's not something that comes when you have a fully developed brain where you can combat certain things, you know? So those things from childhood, they lay with us pretty sticky and long, and it does take a lot of work to, to relearn your thoughts around food and your body. Um, it's not just a simple switch, you know?

Julie: Yeah, it's definitely not a simple switch, and something that, I know not everyone connects with this, but I've, I've had the honor of like working with some people for many years, and sometimes people will say because of their relationship with food, um, or how they were taught to relate to food. Sometimes their first initial thought about food or body is what they were taught and then over time they learn what they want to say next. You know? Or like, and so it may not go away, and that doesn't mean it's like a failure in any way. Like there's still places to go next.

Jenna: Absolutely. Yeah. You can still, you can still combat it. And work on making changes in your thought process. And yeah, it might be constant work for the rest of your life. But I do think

it's important to note that with consistent change, it will get easier. Those thoughts will become further and further away.

Julie: Yeah. Because you expect them and be like, oh yeah, it's here again.

Jenna: Yeah. Yeah.

Julie: Yeah. I think I always like to make sure I note that because I appreciate that in the first probably 10 years working in this space, I thought it was just mindset, but then really appreciating the systems in place that are protecting diet culture. They haven't budged.

Jenna: No, that's going to take a lot of, lot of work.

Julie: Yeah, I mean we're on it, but like it's going to take a lot of work. Uh well, thank you for that. And so, reading through this letter for this letter writer or anyone in a similar space as this person is describing, what would you suggest are some first few steps forward?

Jenna: I think that the person who wrote this letter already has hit their first step because the fact that this person can recognize these thoughts and challenge them is a great place to be. Instead of having the thoughts that you need to go on a diet or you need to change your body and then just accepting that and doing it like we've done a million times over and over and over again, the fact that you're at this spot that you can already recognize that it's a problem that you could go back into that mindset of dieting is a huge first step. And I think it's also very important to recognize, like we just well, are still surviving a pandemic, and this is something nobody had planned for, and nobody knew how their mental health or their physical health was going to react or adapt to this situation. So, you can't blame yourself for gaining weight or not feeling so great after the year we've just had. So, I think recognizing those things are very good first step.

Julie: Yeah, that's so important. Oh my gosh! Yes. This year has been so trying, and um, exploring how to reject diet culture by itself without pandemic stuff is already so, so complicated and challenging and it's a process that you know, one has to be thinking about all the time, you know and it's a very active kind of process. But then throw, yeah, throw this like really unusual, unexpected yeah, you gotta go home. Um, and not know economically health wise, like all these things like, are we gonna be okay? That's a lot, yeah.

Jenna: And the stress- the stress that our- our brains go through like the mental stress we go through in a situation like this, it does affect us physically and we might not even realize how stressed our brains are. We have to understand that as humanity as a whole, regardless of what your situation was this past year and everybody's so different, our brains have not stopped working. Every day has been numbers and news and new information and trying to process everything. And these are things that people aren't so aware that's happening all the time because you're distracted by like, your real life and getting the kids ready and doing the dishes and figuring out dinner, but all this stuff is still going on in your brain 24/7 for the past what, year and a half almost? So we need to forgive ourselves, regardless of what has happened over the past year. Um, and we also need to realize that our body size and how much exercise we have or haven't done is literally the least important thing that has happened over the past year.

Julie: Yes. Yes. Oh my gosh, so much. Yeah. And this kind of urge to like, just go back to quote normal, um, it's just exas- that's like making that so much harder, so much more complicated and not letting us process all the things that we've been through and really just like, oh, we need to now just focus on our weight instead of, hey, this has been traumatic for all of us. Um, I often think about that too, how we've been conditioned to worry about our body size. Um, our relations- er, not relationship with food but like, how much we're eating, um, and how that's been like a condition of like, this is how you deal with stress. And I'm thinking about, I had a conversation over last like last, few months with a friend who was um, at first she came to me and was like, I am worried about myself because I'm not worried about my food intake anymore, and I'm worried that I'm letting myself go. And I was like, what do you mean? And she's like, well I've been working so hard on like stress relief, and I start working with a therapist, and taking medication, and now I'm not anxious about what I eat anymore, and I'm worried about it. Like, I didn't laugh, but I'm like laughing to you because I'm like, oh my gosh, like, no, it's because, like, the conditioning is, it's breaking apart, you know, and it's so sad to me that we're taught that that's like, a bad thing.

Jenna: Absolutely. And another thing I noted from this letter was we're taught that comfort and food should not go hand in hand, but they should, they should. And if you're, if food is a comfort thing for you, that is okay, it's okay. You know? We shouldn't beat ourselves up if that is something that we turn to, you know?

Julie: Yeah, it's a, it's a strength um, to me and um, you know, thinking about my friend, and then also this letter writer. Um, you know this concern like oh my gosh, am I killing myself? Because I'm not dieting, you know, or am I killing myself because I survived this year and I gained weight? Like what do you say about that part?

Jenna: Forgive yourself, first of all. Like, you couldn't expect anything different really from the human body, and to gain weight in a in a year that your everyday life has changed and has become a lot more still. Um, a big conversation I have with my clients is even if you are doing your fitness classes, say 3-4 times a week, you're doing virtual fitness. We have to remember that our everyday movements are gone. So the little things like walking to your car or walking to the subway and then changing, you know, changing subways or walking across your apartment building and putting on your shoes, and all of these things that we had in everyday life, walking to a restaurant at lunchtime, you know, all of these little things are have been taken from us, so our bodies are not moving as much as they used to. So, of course it would make sense if we weren't, if our calorie balance now was different, and our bodies got bigger. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Julie: Right, right.

Jenna: You can't expect that. How would anything remain the same in the year that we just had? So, we definitely can't judge or expect our bodies to remain the same. I think it's important to just realize that this has happened, and let it be, you know, it's okay, it's not going to hurt you, and hopefully life does get back to normal and our everyday movements that we used to have do come back to us.

Julie: Yeah, I think it's really easy to blame food for causing diabetes or sleep issues, blood pressure. Um, it's really easy to like connect it in a causal way, when like we've been saying like this has been a really fucked up year and a half, right? And so that's a really important variable. So if you're listening and you're like, well yeah, I gained weight and I have high blood pressure, like, that doesn't mean that the weight gain caused it. Not that simple.

Jenna: No, like, stress causes- stress causes those things, not the weight gain. It's the stress,

Julie: Dieting causes those things.

Jenna: Dieting- The actual dieting causes stress. So, you have to like, if you want to make some changes, that's okay. I'm always promoting making lifestyle changes that will support you to be healthier and happier and more active and more mobile. But let's focus on those things and not the weight at all. If you start getting out for walks more often now and you're visiting friends and you're going to the beach, you're swimming, you're doing this, you're doing that, you can focus on having a more active lifestyle again without the focus being what you're having for dinner and has your pants size changed?

Julie: Yeah, yeah. That kind of putting the blame on food intake. I always think about Evelyn Tribole when I first heard her speak. Um and if- if listening to that name doesn't ring a bell, she's one of the co authors of *Intuitive Eating*, and she mentioned like, we live in this world that people think food either kills us or cures us and sometimes rejecting diets, it kind of puts us in that binary and we, Jenna and I are challenging you to like avoid the binary in that way. You know, like this is something that is like, so many other um, areas to go and rejecting diets. What if that actually is something that's going to promote the life you want to live? And um, where's the compassion and all this process? You know, like that's like, from hearing what you're saying too, like that's the biggest part that I'm taking away is like, we really need to be kind of ourselves right now. Like especially now. So, I appreciate that.

Jenna: Yeah, I think that's the biggest takeaway is like, don't blame yourself, forgive yourself and, and work with yourself in a gentle way.

Julie:

Jenna: Yeah. And you can focus on your health. It's not, don't focus on your health, but it doesn't need to be about how big you are or how small you are, how much you weigh.

Julie: Right, yeah. Yeah. Such such important parts. Jenna, I wanted to ask you if you wanted to add anything to the food peace syllabus, and if you're new to the Love Food podcast, the food peace syllabus is a collection of resources like programs, books, anything under the sun that we have found that helps along the food peace journey, and Jenna, what would you like to end to it?

Jenna: Yeah, at Body Positive Fitness, we run 100 virtual fitness classes each month. We have everything under the sun from Zumba to Yoga, weight training, bodyweight training. We have a run club, core classes. We've got so many different activities that you can do online. A lot of

people have found comfort in moving in their own homes, and it's great that now we can make that available to everybody worldwide.

Julie: I love that so much. Thank you for sharing that resource with listeners. Like, this is something that um, I guess I don't, I hate to say like a benefit of the pandemic, but like one of the things that has helped so many people I've talked to, um, who are experiencing um, constant like systemic oppression, like you know, discrimination everywhere they go, having more resources online has been this amazing, amazing resource. And uh, there's something really cool about connecting with the body in motion, however it feels good to you, and whatever is accessible to you. And so, I love that you all have this now for anyone. Like that is so fucking fantastic, so.

Jenna: For anyone. And it, it has been really cool and it really has opened up the doors to, to show how many people need and want one, a community and a safe environment to work out at a- in a way that will work perfect for them. We make sure that everybody is super accommodated in all of our classes. It's, it's a lot more like a small group personal training session, because it is so- it is so tailored to the people in the room, in the zoom room. Um, and it's been so rewarding just to be able to open up those doors to so many people around the world.

Julie: Love it. Love it so much. Well, if someone wants to learn more about this or learn more about you, Jenna, where can they go?

Jenna: We are all over the internet. Our website is bodypositivefitness.ca. And then on Instagram [@bodypositivefitness_](https://www.instagram.com/bodypositivefitness_). Um, Facebook, Body Positive Fitness. Everywhere. Body Positive Fitness.

Julie: Love it. Love it. Awesome. Well, I put everything in the show notes so a listener can just click away and connect with you and thank you so much for your time. You're- and your compassion. You know, this letter writer, I hope they're taking away like, compassion is our first step for you and anyone listening who needs it too, however you can add it in. It's really going to be an important part of your, of your journey. So thank you so much Jenna.

Jenna: Thank you so much for having me.

Julie: So there you have it letter writer. I hope my conversation with Jenna helped you to just gather some more strength and namely, like we said, compassion for where you are right now.

Julie: (ad break): I see that food has written back, but before we get to food's letter, this episode of the Love Food podcast was brought to you by my PCOS and Food Peace course. Get to all the details at PCOSandFoodPeace.com.

Julie (ad break): This episode was also sponsored by the ovofolic, a new way to get your inositol supplement for those of you affected with PCOS. Would you like 15% off? Just for Love Food listeners, go to elanhealthcare.ca/discount/foodpeace. There's a link in the shownotes, and remember Elan is spelled E L A N. So go to elanhealthcare.ca/discount/foodpeace.

Julie: Alright, enough of all that. So until next time, take care.

Julie (as Food): Dear perpetual warrior, it's been quite a year on an already tough journey. We've had our ups and downs and no, that's not your fault. You were taught to fear us, and even with intuitive eating practice, stress will bring about doubt, panic, and self-blame. We hope you can forgive yourself and show compassion on the wounds. Tend to them with care, unconditionally, or at least practice that. Love them and care for them. Notice the worry, and name its root in diet culture, not truth. Love, food.

Julie: Thank you for listening. I am Julie Duffy Dillon, and this is the Love Food podcast. Do you want access to more food peace? Jump on over to my website and join my email list. There, I share exclusive content that I don't share anywhere else. Get access to these tips and strategies by going to juliedillonrd.com/signup. And, I look forward to seeing you here next week for another episode of the Love Food podcast. Take care.