



EPISODE NO. 363

My Top 3 Tips for Elegant Eating

Are you ready to redefine your relationship with food? Well, in this episode of the podcast, we are going to explore the fundamental question, what is the essence of elegant eating? And how can I use it to not only lose weight but to completely revolutionize my relationship with food and my body? So let's dive in.

Welcome to the School of Self-image, where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, master life coach, Tonya Leigh.

Hello, my gorgeous friends. Where do I even start? I feel like so much has happened since I recorded the last episode. Mainly, SOSI South happened, which is an event that I just held in New Orleans, and what a time that was. The last day I was walking through the banquet hall, which is where we hosted our lunches every day, and one of the gals that works there pulled me to the side and she said, I just want to tell you something. And I said, what? When you hear that, you're like, wait, what's about to happen? But she said, I have been a part of hundreds of events in this hotel, and she said, what you all are doing in that room is magical. She was like, I've never met such energized, life-loving, amazing woman as I've met over the last couple of days. And she was like, I want to be a part of this. I'm like, well, girl, let's go. Let's do it.

But it just made me feel so proud about our community and the women that I attract, but also my team and the level of an event that we put on. Yes, our events are not cheap, but when you come to them, you understand why. From the swag to the details,

to the parties, to the overall experience, it's definitely a luxurious event. We've had so many messages from attendees since the event just saying thank you. The level of attention to detail is very much felt, and so I'm just so proud of all of us right now.

It's a lot of work going into one. I like to think of it like having a baby. When you're preparing and you're about to deliver, you're like, I'm never going to do this again. And as soon as it's over, you're like, oh, well, let's do it again. That was a great idea, but I am taking next year off from doing a big event and we are going to be doing something different. And if you're in the membership, you may have already heard through the grapevine what we're doing because I've announced it at SOSI South, but I will be announcing it to everyone probably at the beginning of the year. So stay tuned for that. It's going to be a lot of fun.

Now, let's talk about eating. There's no way to segue into eating from that. We're just going to jump right in. But it is that time of the year when I know I personally started to feel a lot of anxiety around food. And for those of you who struggle with your weight and you're trying to diet, you're trying to lose weight, you know what I'm talking about. It's the time of the year when there are a lot of festivities, there are a lot of parties and dinners and food. It seems to be everywhere and you want to enjoy it, but you're also equally afraid of it.

This is the time of the year when I would often feel my wild child start to take over. That part of me that was like, screw it. You've worked so hard all year. You deserve a break. Just eat whatever you want, and dance on tables. Allow yourself to go wild, and you can start again on Jan. 1. And this pattern that I had for years just fed this self-image and identity of a woman who couldn't control her weight, couldn't control her eating, and so the problem just became worse and worse. I had practiced this pattern for so long that around this time every year, I just knew what to expect of myself, and I could look to the past for the last four or five years and see all the evidence, be like, it's the way it's going to be. It's just who I am. It's just how I operate.

And it was a cycle that was so just disheartening and took me further and further away from who I wanted to be and how I wanted to be with food. Because at the end of the day, I just wanted a beautiful and healthy relationship with food, and I didn't understand how to get there, and all of the diet in the world just made it worse. It took me further away from the woman that I wanted to be. It's why I don't believe in extremes. I don't believe in cutting out sugar, cutting out flour. I don't believe in doing all of these radical things because oftentimes it can backfire and it's just going to reinforce the very things you don't want to reinforce because let's face it, how many of

us are going to go a lifetime with no sugar and no flour? I can count of maybe one. It's just not how we're going to want to live our lives.

Now, with all of that said, things too have to change. You cannot continue to do what you've always done and expect different results. You're going to have to change some things with your eating, but I'm going to suggest that we start to take an elegant approach. If you are in the school of self-image membership and you are a platinum member, you have access to the slim self-image, and the slim self-image is built around elegance, and this concept came to me years ago. I've been talking about elegant eating for a long time, y'all, and this concept came to me when I went to Paris for the very first time. I was perplexed by how women especially ate, men and women, but I was more mesmerized with the women, how they ate and seemed to have such a joyful coexistence with food, and how they all were rather slim.

I began to study French culture and the French paradox, and I began to dive deeper and deeper into what it looks like and what it means to have a healthy and beautiful relationship with food. It did come down to this word elegance. If you look at the Latin root word of elegance, it means to choose, to select. And if you look at the word elegance in general and the definition, it means simplicity and effectiveness.

One thing I know for sure is that the majority of people have complicated their relationship with food. I used to be one of them. I was that person who was addicted to dieting, and I know some of you can relate to that. You know exactly what I'm talking about. It's those of you who when that next diet comes out, get excited, you get a little giddy. You're like, oh my God, this could be the one. When you're flipping through People Magazine and they tell you what Jennifer Aniston's day is like and what she eats and how she exercises, you have this little burst of dopamine. You're like, oh my God, this is going to be it.

And we begin to give our power away to external forces, whether it's the next doctor, the next guru, or the next celebrity, and we neglect just timeless truths and wisdom that have worked throughout the ages that reside in elegant eating. And I'm going to give you some tips on how to do that in a moment, but elegant eating also is very simple. It's not complicated. It's almost so simple that you think it's not going to work, but often it's the simple things that work the best, have you noticed? Elegant eating is about quality over quantity, eating good, real nutritious foods. Elegant eating is also about you being a self-possessed woman and not giving in to your moods, your feelings, and immediate gratification needs, but thinking about yourself long-term, thinking about your future, and thinking about who you want to be.

It's also not just about what you feed your body, but how you feed your body. When it comes to eating, I think that is just as important as slowing down, really enjoying, savoring, not eating in a state of fight or flight, but waiting until your body's relaxed so you can get the most nutrition from your food. There's also a maturity and a sophistication to elegant eating, meaning that you are inclined to think about what you want long-term, your goals over that, again, immediate gratification at the moment, and you stay committed to the woman you want to be and the future that you want to create. And your relationship with food supports that.

Now, with all of this said, it takes time, you all, and it takes a lot of love and a lot of patience and a lot of grace because when I think of elegance, I see a woman who loves herself, who treats herself well, even when she fails. Even when maybe she just scarfed down a Big Mac in her car, she loves herself enough to be like, you know what? I'm not going to beat myself up. That's not going to help me create what I want. I'm going to learn, I'm going to grow from this experience. So at the end of the day, elegant eating is about eating with love and grace for yourself. And when you start to do these things, it's going to completely transform your relationship with food.

When I think about how far I've come with food from someone who had an eating disorder, from someone who overindulged, felt completely out of control, and was obsessed with food, I was one of these people where I was thinking about lunch and dinner when I was eating breakfast. I was obsessed with it. I was obsessed about eating it, and then I was obsessed about not eating it. How can I not eat it? When I think about my journey with food, I am blown away that today food is just something I enjoy, something that I look forward to, and something that I feel complete peace with. I never thought that I would utter those words. I never thought that I would be where I am today with my body and food. It is miraculous, you all.

And I know there are some of you listening to this right now and you're thinking the same way. You're thinking, there's no way, this is just always going to be an issue in my life, and I get it. But what if you're wrong? What if there is a path for you that will lead you to healing, that will lead you to health and vitality, and it'll lead you to self-love? And I believe it's in elegant eating and doing the work that we do within the slim self-image. So as we embark on the holiday season, I want to offer you just three, I have more, but just three of my favorite tips for elegant eating to support you throughout the holidays. Are you ready? Okay, let's go.

Tip number one is to slow down. I know this sounds so elementary, but hear me out. So many people when they're eating, they're eating so unconsciously. They're asleep at

the plate, and they're eating so quickly that, number one, they don't even taste the food and they don't even give the food time to register in their brain that they're full. And so naturally they feel very unfulfilled. They feel like they missed out and this can lead you to go back and get seconds, and sometimes thirds. What I like to do is I like to put less on my plate. So whatever my brain is telling me that I want, and this is for those of us like at Thanksgiving and when we're over at the parents' house or we're all dipping our food and it's not being served, but I like to put less on my plate.

So sometimes I'll do half of what my brain tells me that it wants, knowing I can always go back and get more, and then I like to double the amount of time that it takes me to eat that half. And so what that looks like is taking my time, chewing really well, tuning into my food, really paying attention to what this tastes like. It's also me putting my utensils down and talking and enjoying the people around me and letting food just be a compliment to the gathering, to the connection to the conversation.

Now, listen, if you're hanging out with people you don't like, this will be more challenging and you may find that you're overeating because you are in a room of people you don't like. And then you have to ask yourself, why am I placing myself in rooms that I don't like that cause me to want to overeat, to avoid talking to and hanging out with the people that I don't like? It's really crazy, right? These are the predicaments that we sometimes find ourselves in, but even still, a lot of times we're eating too numb. We're eating to avoid, to check out. And what I'm asking you to do is to check in, to allow, to feel, to understand, because what I have found to be true with myself and even in my client's lives is when you start to feel, you start correcting. When you start understanding, you start changing. And as long as you're eating to numb from your life, you're cutting off some very critical data that's trying to guide you, and so slow down.

What if this holiday season, you put half on your plate, allow yourself to eat whatever you want, but half of it, and then you double the time it takes to eat that? You're going to enjoy it more, you're going to taste it, and you may find that you don't need a lot of food. In fact, most people are eating way more than their body needs. So again, I'm not asking you not to enjoy what you want. I'm asking you to enjoy it, to really enjoy it, and more does not lead to more enjoyment. That is a fallacy. Have you ever noticed? It's usually the first couple of bites that taste the best, and then the pleasure factor starts to diminish. It's true, and so get the most pleasure out of your food by slowing down and really, really enjoying.

Tip number two is to learn to eat to the point of elegant satisfaction. Instead of listening to all of these diets and following the latest trend, what if you listened to the expert on your body, which is your body? Your body, if you pay attention, will not only tell you what kind of foods it really enjoys, but it'll also tell you how much it enjoys. It'll tell you what combinations of foods that it enjoys. Your body has all of the answers that you're looking for. I always find it so fascinating how so many people are trying to create a body that they love by ignoring the body that they have. Really think about that.

It's like, I want to love my body. I want it to behave a certain way. I want it to look a certain way, and yet you neglect it. You don't tune into it. You don't listen to it. And I've been saying for years, that to create a body you love, you have to love the body you have. Think about someone you love, you listen to them. You really want to get to know them, you want to care for them. Well, we have to extend that to our selves, and it requires that we pay attention and listen.

So I teach the hunger skill and I teach how to listen to your body to understand what the point of elegant satisfaction feels like in your body. And I don't have time to go in-depth with this lesson, but I want to give you some tips. You will know when you are at the point of elegant satisfaction because you have energy. You have consumed enough food to give you enough energy that you can then carry on with your day.

So think about it this way. When you all are super hungry and you're feeling lightheaded, you're feeling maybe a little hangry, you don't have a lot of energy, your body is telling you, Hey, listen, it's time to eat. And so you eat something and your blood sugar goes up, you feel that energy. But a lot of times we keep eating and now we're back into lethargy because when you overeat, you start to take away your life energy as well. That point of elegant satisfaction is when you feel your best. You're like, yes, I have enough energy to now continue to the next part of my day.

Also, the point of elegant satisfaction is a feeling that it took me a while to get in touch with because I always thought it was a feeling of fullness. In fact, that's a saying that we may have said before. We've heard people in our family say, when they finish eating, they're like, no, I'm full. I don't want anymore, I'm full. And fullness to me means that you have gone past the point of elegant satisfaction. Elegant satisfaction feels like lightness to me. It's the point where I don't feel full and I also don't feel empty. I just feel this energized lightness.

And again, for people who struggle with food and are so afraid of being deprived, elegant satisfactions can be very uncomfortable because their brain's like, oh, no, no, no, you're not full. You're not. You still need to eat. There's still room in there. That's what the brain will tell you. And so that's where you have to do a lot of the emotional work of being okay with not being in your normal state of being, which if you struggle with food, the normal state of being often when you're eating is overeating and feeling that extreme fullness.

But your body will tell you, just tune in. As you're eating over the holidays, just ask yourself, have I had enough? Do I feel light? Do I feel energized? And practice walking away, practice pushing the plate away and doing it to provide evidence of this is who I'm becoming. A lot of the work that we talk about in the slim self-image is doing things not to lose weight, the weight loss will happen, but taking action to reconfirm a new identity. Because once you begin to see yourself as slim, once you begin to see yourself as a woman who eats elegantly, once you begin to see yourself as a woman who has a healthy and beautiful relationship with food, then it becomes so easy to do these things and to make the choices that support you because we will always take action to support our identity. We will always take action to stay in harmony with our self-image.

And that's why the work that I do is around self-image, because once you change how you see yourself, then the actions become effortless. And so when you're taking these actions, don't do it to try to lose weight because that's just reconfirming that you have a weight issue. Can you all see the nuances of this work? But think about it. If you're doing something to lose weight, it's just reconfirming, Hey, I got a weight problem, versus I'm doing this because I'm a woman who takes care of herself. I'm a woman who respects herself. I am a woman who has a beautiful relationship with food. I'm a woman who is disciplined. I'm a naturally slim woman, right? We're doing things to change our identities because the results will just naturally follow. Okay, so that was tip number two, learn and practice eating to the point of elegant satisfaction.

Now, tip number three, and this tip actually has nothing to do with food. And I think it's very important, and it's something that really supported me when I was learning how to eat elegantly because you see, our brains are wired for pleasure and they're wired to avoid pain. And if most of your pleasure comes from food, then it's understandable why you will want to go back and eat seconds and thirds and sit around all day, maybe at your parents or at your house, just snacking and eating because that is your source of pleasure. So there's nothing wrong with you. You're just doing what you are genetically wired to do. So to overcome this, we have to begin to

get pleasure from other things and begin to associate pain with staying in the cycle that you're in of overeating.

So how do we do that? Well, when you go back and you want to eat more than your body needs, you need to feel the pain of that. You need to look into the future and remind yourself if I keep doing this, where is it going to lead? And really allow yourself to come to terms with what that's going to look like for you and make it painful to be a woman who is constantly overeating, ignoring her body and staying stuck in a cycle that you so desperately want to break out of. But then we just don't want to leave you there sitting in pain, because the brain's looking for pleasure. The brain's like, where do we go for pleasure? And that's why it's so important for all of us to have other sources of pleasure outside of food. This is something that I now have in spades, and it's why I believe that food isn't such a main focus in my life anymore because I have so many other pleasurable things that I'm excited to experience.

And so think about this at the table, think about this when you're hanging out with your family and there's food everywhere, this is where you begin your pleasure hunt. This is where you begin to diversify your pleasure portfolio so that all of your pleasure isn't coming from food. Now, it is challenging when you're around people and all of their pleasure comes from food because guess what they're going to want to do? They're going to sit around all day watching football and eating seconds, thirds, and fourths. Again, you're going to have to tie pain with that behavior and you're going to have to find your pleasure.

Can you all tell I'm talking about my life? This is how it is at my mom's house. Everybody's sitting around watching football, taking naps, waiting to go back and eat, but I don't want to live my life like that. I had to find other sources of pleasure for myself. And for me, it was getting outside and just taking a little walk. It was reading a good book. I started to introduce games to my family. And so my mom loves to play dominoes, and so sometimes after Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner, I'm like, let's play some dominoes and get everybody involved. And now, you know I love to go play pickleball, my mom and dad actually set up a court in their driveway. And so now I'm like, okay, guys, dinner's over. Let's go play some pickleball. And getting everybody outside and getting them active and getting them involved, it's so much fun, and it takes my brain off of food.

It's like training a puppy. You have to train that puppy where to go to the bathroom, right? And it's going to come in the house and poop and pee in the house, and you have to take it back out and be like, Nope, we don't do this in the house anymore. And that's

what it feels like to train the brain. The brain's going to want to come back to old patterns, come back to old ways of thinking, place that attention on the food, and you just have to train it like, no, no, no, no. It's not where we're going. It's not what we're doing here. And over time, it's just not where the brain goes anymore.

And so for me now, after years of practicing this work, my brain doesn't go there anymore. My brain is like, oh, we're done eating. Now, let's go do something fun. Let's go play. Let's go read a book. Let's go outside. Let's go for a walk. Let's get in the car and ride around the neighborhood, go find something interesting. But it's important that you have something outside of food as a pleasure source because your brain is seeking that.

And for some people, you can begin to find pleasure in just showing up for yourself. I know that's some of the work that I did, just finding extreme pleasure in being proud of myself for saying no to more food, for being kind to myself, all of those little wins, finding pleasure in that. But find other sources of pleasure in order to have an elegant relationship with food, because again, if all of your joy, if all of your pleasure is coming from food, you're going to want to consume a lot of it, and understandably so. And so this is the deep inner work that must happen in order for you to establish a very healthy and beautiful relationship with food.

And if this is some of the work that you've been wanting to do and you're hearing me talk and you're like, oh, my gosh, this is it, this is what I need, come join us within the School of Self-image when the doors open. I don't think we're open for enrollment right now, but we will be soon at some point. And as an annual member, you will have access to the slim self-image where we go deep into this work. And we also have monthly coaching calls just for the slim self-image members, and so come join us. It is the most powerful work you will ever do because it literally changes how you see yourself so that eating elegantly just becomes second nature. It just becomes who you are.

And as we approach the holidays, just practice these three tips. They're really powerful. And I want us all to just decide right now that we're just going to love ourselves madly throughout the holidays, no matter what we eat, no matter if we screw up because at the end of the day, loving yourself is what we're all trying to get back to. And unfortunately, we have all of these preconditions that must happen in order for us to love ourselves. But if we just loved ourselves, we would be so amazed at how things just fall into place naturally on their own. And so can you do that for me? Actually, can you do that for you? Just commit to practicing loving yourself through the holidays no

matter what, because what a beautiful way to enter into the new year than having practiced just being madly in love with yourself, setting yourself up for an incredible 2024. All right, my friends, have a beautiful week and I will see you on next week's episode. Cheers.

Hey, have you grabbed your free copy of the School of Self-Image Manifesto? If not, what in the world? Head over to schoolofselfimage.com/manifesto and get a copy that teaches you how to think and show up in the areas of mindset, style, and surroundings so that you can transform your self-image.