145 - Friday Fix: Ask Me Anything Part 2

Amy Morin: Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast. I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a bestselling author of four books on mental strength. You're listening to the Friday Fix. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life. And the fun part is, we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys.

Today, we're doing the second edition of “Ask Me Anything.” I get tons of voicemails from lots of you with really good questions about everything from relationship issues to depression. So today, I've picked a handful of questions to answer on the show. In the meantime, if you have a question that you want me to answer, go to verywellmind.com, and check out the Podcast page. On the show notes for the “Ask Me Anything” episodes, there's a link at the bottom to a special voice mailbox where you can leave me a message and ask your question.

Every day, my mail inbox is flooded with questions from people, and I no longer have time to respond to all of them, so this is the best thing I could come up with. Ask me your question here, and you don't have to leave your name. I'll answer it publicly because there are often a lot of other people who could probably benefit from hearing the same response. Now, let's dive into today's episode! And I'll get on with answering your questions.

Anonymous: Hi, Amy. I had a question about my diet. I know that eating well is important to keep your mind healthy, and have mental strength. However, whenever I'm trying to plan for my meal schedule, and I go to the store, even though I have a list, I look down on my cart and it's always full of junk food anyway, and I just can't get out of the habit of eating horribly. Do you have any tips? Thank you.
Amy Morin: So, the good news is, it sounds like you're doing what most people don't do, you're planning ahead. So you're already a step ahead by knowing what your plan is when you get to the grocery store, you know what you want to buy. The issue is, you're not just sticking to the list when you get there, you're putting extra things in your cart.

So you could try a couple of different experiments. I'm not sure exactly which one is going to work with you, but if you give it a try, you might find that one of these strategies works best to help you stick to the things that are actually on your list.

One thing that you might ask yourself is whether your diet is too restrictive. You might find that your list really only includes foods that are so healthy and nutritious that you don't actually like eating them. So, maybe if you put a couple of things on the list that you would allow yourself to eat, maybe then you'll feel like you're not restricting yourself too much, and it might make it easier to stick to the list.

Another thing you could do is just create a list of all the reasons why you want to eat healthier, and also create a list of all the reasons why you shouldn't eat junk food. Keep that list in your purse, or in your pocket. When you get to the grocery store and you're tempted to check out with lots of other things, read that list, over and over again. You might find that helps you put some of those other items back, because it's likely in the moment when you're looking around at all the things that tempt you, your brain comes up with 101 reasons why you deserve those things, or why you shouldn't bother to stick to your list. So writing yourself that little list might help you get that extra boost of motivation that you need.

Another idea might be to find someone else to hold you accountable. If you have a friend or a family member who knows that you're really working on this, you might agree that before you check out of the grocery store, you're going to take a picture of your grocery cart, and send that to them. Just make sure that you don't cheat by putting the ice cream under the lettuce, or something like that, but be honest. And just knowing that you're going to send someone a photo of what's in your cart might help you to stick to your list a little bit better.

And I guess one more idea would be, when you're tempted to buy something that isn't on your list, you might just give yourself permission to go back to the store and get it later, if you want. And if you can manage to get through the checkout line without buying that item right now, once you get home, you might find it's not worth the energy to drive back to the store and buy it.
So I would say, give some of those things a shot, experiment, know that maybe this will work for you, might take a couple of times of practice, but, just paying more attention to the things that you can do. And if you have more experiments you can try on your own, give those a shot too, until you figure out what really works for you.

Anonymous: All right, so you might remember from last time, hi Nick, hi Amy. I do have a question for you. I am sort of wondering how people get out of negative thinking, because I have a tendency to feel bad for myself. Like, other people tell me their problems and I'm just thinking, "You want to hear problems? I can tell you problems. I got this to do. I have that to do." And I just, I mean, I want to give back, but sometimes I just, I don't have much left to give back. You know what I mean? What do you do? How do you get around that? Well, right. Peace out.

Amy Morin: All right, so there are lots of things tied to this question. Let's start with the idea that you said that you were feeling bad for yourself, and that's one of those habits that can drain you of mental strength. It's one of the things in my book, 13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do. So, just to be clear, it's okay to feel sad about your problems, but just make sure that you don't convince yourself that your problems are worse than everybody else's, because it's that that will keep you stuck, and keep you from taking action that could improve your life. So the best way to stop feeling sorry for yourself is to do something that makes it impossible to fall in the self pity trap. So pause and take a minute and say, "Okay, what's something I could do to either solve the problem? Or do I just need to solve how I feel about the problem?"

You might find that it's helpful to take care of those feelings for a little while, and that might be some self-care strategies that help you feel better. And keep in mind that it's tough to hear other people's problems when you are struggling too. So you may need to set some boundaries with people if you're in a rough spot. If you're not in a place to listen to somebody else's problems, sometimes it's okay to speak up. You might say, "You know, I'm just emotionally drained today. I'd love to hear about this when I'm in a better space, but right now, I just can't give this conversation the attention it deserves."

If you're not used to doing that, it's going to feel really uncomfortable at first to say those words, but other people will probably give you more grace than you expect. In fact, they might appreciate that you told them that rather than just standing there and nodding as they were pouring out their heart. And then if there is a day when you feel like, "Okay, I can go back to this person." You might say to them, "I'm in a much better space today. Let's talk."
So, just because you're asking this question, it means that you've already caught yourself falling into this trap of negative thinking, so the other thing you can do when you notice that, when your thoughts are really negative, pause for a moment, take a deep breath and just say, "What would I say to my friend who had this problem?" And give yourself the same kind, compassionate words that you're probably just used to giving everybody else.

Dana: Hi, Amy, my name is Dana. I love your work and books. I think we all want to know how we can know when it's in our best interest to see a therapist, and how to find the right one. Thank you so much.

Amy Morin: I get this question all the time, about how to find a good therapist. In the past, we used to tell people the telltale sign that you needed therapy was when you had symptoms that were interfering with your daily life. Like if your depression made it so difficult that you weren't able to work, or your anxiety was interfering with your ability to eat or sleep, it was a telltale sign that you needed help. Those things are still true. Certainly if you have symptoms that are interfering with your daily life, you should probably talk to someone. But we also know now that you don't have to wait until you're sick to get help. The mental health world is shifting, so it's more like you can talk to somebody when you stressed out, when you're struggling, and often you can learn how to prevent problems before they develop into full blown mental health diagnoses.

So, think of therapy as something that can be preventative medicine. And if you're asking, should I see someone? It never hurts to go in and talk to someone, even if it's just one session to say, "Do you think this is something I should come back and talk to you about more often?" It might just give you the peace of mind that you're on the right track, or a therapist, in maybe three or four sessions, could give you some ideas of things you could do to stay healthy and to build more mental strength if you need it.

So don't think of therapy as a lifelong commitment or something that you either have to do or not be doing, sometimes you can just schedule an appointment and get kind of a mental health check up with somebody, and say, "This is what I'm thinking." And you can do that a lot of different ways now, you can go to a therapist in person, or you can talk to somebody online. There are a lot of online therapy websites that let you just meet with a therapist, sometimes for just one session, if that's all you want.

And to figure out how to find the best therapist for you, you might spend some time imagining who you think that you would be more likely to talk to. Who's the person that you would feel most comfortable? For some people that might be a younger man, for other people that might be an older woman, maybe there are certain characteristics or qualities that are really important to you, or you want
somebody who understands your religion. You can usually find therapists who specialize in certain things, but having a vision in mind of who you think you could talk to, before you start looking, can be helpful, and then you can narrow it down.

You might also ask for a referral. Your physician can be a great place to start. If your doctor knew that you're struggling with something, you might ask, "Who could I talk to about this?" And they might be able to give you some people in your community as options. And if you know somebody who's seeing a therapist, maybe a friend or a family member, and it would be appropriate for you to see that person, you could ask for a referral. But if it's, say, somebody that lives in your home or somebody that's really close to you, you may not want to see the same therapist, but you could ask them if they could ask their therapist for somebody that they would recommend, and you might get a great recommendation that way too.

So that's it for this “Ask Me Anything.” Thank you so much to everybody who submitted your questions! And don’t forget, if you want me to answer your questions, find the show notes on this episode on verywellmind.com, and leave me a voicemail message. I’ll try to answer it on an upcoming episode.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

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Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast! And as always, a big thank you to my show producer (who doesn't love it when I start my answers with statistics on what research says), Nick Valentin.