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How to Develop a Healthy Mindset About Food

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podcast

featuring The Fitness Chef
Graeme Tomlinson



155 - How to Develop a Healthy Mindset About Food with "The Fitness Chef" Graeme Tomlinson

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 best-selling author of four books on mental strength. Every Monday, I introduce you to a mentally strong person whose story and mental strength tips can inspire you to think, feel, and do your best in life. And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys! Don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week. Now let's dive into today's episode!

Do you have an unhealthy relationship with food? Do you struggle to make sense of all the information out there about what constitutes healthy eating? Do you think you should be eating healthier than you do? If you answered yes to any of those questions, today's episode is for you.

Your body won't do what your mind doesn't tell it. That includes eating. The way you think about food and your health has a direct impact on what you put into your body. And of course, everything your body consumes has a direct impact on how you feel emotionally, cognitively, and physically.

We've talked about nutrition on the show before. Back in Episode 87, I talked to Dr. Drew Ramsey about how to eat to beat anxiety and depression. Well, today I'm talking to Graeme Tomlinson. He's a nutrition coach and a personal trainer who has attracted more than 1 million people to his Instagram page, making his account one of the most popular nutrition and fitness social media accounts in the world. Graeme's mission is to educate people about the unhealthy diet culture and the myths that we're taught from food advertising. His latest book, *How to Lose Weight Without Losing Your Mind*, offers insight into how we can

develop a healthy relationship with food. Some of the things he talks about today are the biggest dieting myths most people believe, how our mindset affects our eating habits, and how we can develop a healthier, common-sense approach to eating.

Make sure to stick around until the end of the episode for The Therapist's Take. It's the part of the show where I'll break down Graeme's strategies and talk about how you can apply them to your own life. So here's Graeme Tomlinson on how to develop a healthy mindset about food.

Amy Morin: Graeme Tomlinson, welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!*

Graeme Tomlinson: Thanks very much for having me.

Amy Morin: I have a copy of your latest book, right here in fact, about Losing Weight Without Losing Your Mind. Obviously you've attracted a huge following on social media, you got over a million Instagram followers simply because you've shared the truth about food and helped us figure out, gosh, there's so many myths that we're all buying into when it comes to food and healthy eating habits. What are some of the biggest myths that we've bought into?

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, there are quite a few. Let's name a couple, I think the biggest one that goes around is obviously that carbs make us overweight or prevent us from losing weight. And a lot of the theory behind this is unfortunately quite pseudoscientific, so people will say, "Oh, well, carbs don't tend to fill you up, so therefore you're going to eat more and more calories, so therefore carbs make you fat." But logically, actually that's not true. And in all the studies that have been done on carbs, there's no evidence to suggest that they inherently do any of these things.

In fact the best study that, it was actually done in 1975, so you're probably thinking, well that's old research, but it still applies. It's called the rice reduction diet, I don't know if you've heard of it. But participants were in a calorie deficit, so an extreme calorie deficit, so they're only eating a few hundred calories a day. But that comprised of rice, fruit and fruit juice, which is all pretty much 100% carbs. And the combined total weight loss was 63.9 kilos. So if carbs made you overweight, that simply couldn't have happened. So if somebody says carbs make you fat, you're like, "Well, what happened here then?" I love using that experiment, yeah.

Amy Morin: I think there's a lot of those catchy phrases that we see, and you talk about this in your book, when something says low sugar, we think, oh, it's healthy, and we

eat it. And that's the low carb idea, I think a lot of people have bought into as well, because there are these marketing geniuses that sell us on these ideas, that we can eat healthier. Is that really what's going on, that food is marketed and we buy into it without knowing the research and the science behind it?

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah. I mean, unfortunately across the world, obesity rates are rising. I guess with anything in the world, it's an opportunity for people to capitalize on that, if that makes sense, to help people do that, people tend to make up their own method to help people do that. But unfortunately what it does in the case of like low carb diets or even things like intermittent fasting, it's all a method, but they're not really necessary.

And I think the problem I have with it is that a lot of these people tend to say that all these diets are necessary, like going keto or banning carbs, or fasting is the way to optimize losing weight or improve your health. But none of the [inaudible 00:05:40] some individual studies might show this, but the body of science just doesn't support this. And it's such an unregulated field, nutrition, that people could literally say anything and sell a million copies of a book, so it's difficult.

Amy Morin: Something I see as a therapist is people, they follow these really rigid diets, become really strict about what they're eating under the guise that they're being extra healthy, but they're developing some pretty disordered eating patterns.

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, and that's what I'm discussing in this book, in that that's kind of what can and happen when you're too hard on yourself or you believe that you do need to follow a rigid diet or an ultra low calorie diet. Or you believe that, because you are perhaps not in great health or slightly overweight, you believe that you're not worthy, so you want to punish yourself and you want to turn things around so quickly that you end up doing a fad diet.

The thing is, sometimes these diets will work for people, if they're able to go through the torture and the punishment, but then what happens after that is unfortunately people tend to put the weight back on, or regress back to their old habits just because they haven't really built any sustainable habits to take with them long term. Or they just didn't really enjoy banning loads of their favorite foods for prolonged periods, and they went back to their old habits. And they didn't really have the knowledge to build habits that are going to actually last forever, which is important.

Amy Morin: Right. So many people have an unhealthy relationship with food, right now do you feel like people are not paying enough attention to what they're putting in their mouths or are we almost too obsessive about it?

Graeme Tomlinson: It could be both. From a standpoint of somebody... Yeah, I think you'll have a better idea of personality traits with people. But if you were to say to somebody who was overweight, "Just count calories or get a [inaudible 00:07:48] count calories," that could be perfect for somebody as a tool to understand how much calories they're consuming and therefore lose body fat. For another person with more obsessive traits or an obsessive personality, it could be the worst thing ever and could start an eating disorder. It's entirely down to the individual as to what's best for them, really. I always think counting calories or going low carb, or whatever you choose to do, it's got to be something that you actually enjoy. The key is that you're going to keep doing it at the end of the day.

Amy Morin: On the surface it sounds simple, we'll just count calories and make sure that you aren't consuming too many. Why doesn't that work for most people?

Graeme Tomlinson: Because it's really boring. Can you imagine, and this is the kind of... A lot of people who are against calorie counting would suggest that for every day, for the rest of your life, you have to weigh out every gram of every morsel of food that you eat. And I think to myself, well, you could do that, but isn't it more like a temporary education whereby, okay, you're going to have a bowl of porridge in the morning or something, so you weigh out 50 grams of oats, and then slowly but surely you're able to eyeball these portion sizes, so you just have that education for life. It's like a temporary education, as opposed to like a prison sentence that a lot of people think it might be.

Amy Morin: Because we have these apps now that help us, so you don't even have to write it down in a journal, there are apps. What do you think about the apps that you just enter what you're eating and it counts it for you?

Graeme Tomlinson: Useful, but again, not essential. I actually have one, but I don't say to people, "You must use this app to lose weight or improve your health." They can be useful tools, but after a while you should be able to eyeball portion sizes yourself, and you shouldn't really need these apps. If it came to it that you maybe let things slip for a little bit, it could be a great starting point again to go back and think, right actually let's have a look at this again. But I can see how they can become obsessive. There are even apps that come out, I'm not going to name the companies, that kind of say that they are against this whole diet culture type thing, but actually deep down, they're promoting it within their app, unfortunately.

Amy Morin: Yeah. You can't really talk about eating without talking about body image, because that comes into play. Most people who are concerned about calorie counting, tend to be more concerned about how they look, rather than actual health, at least that's what I find in my therapy office. And then the impact it has on our mental health, food can be so emotional for a lot of people, whether they eat because they're stressed out or they eat because they're anxious, or they don't eat because they're depressed. What do you find about that, in your experience as a personal trainer and a health coach?

Graeme Tomlinson: It's really difficult. I remember, as a personal trainer, I had this one client who I actually speak about in the book, who came on and off for two years, and her goal was to lose body fat. But she spent so much money on personal training sessions and her goal was basically to fit into a dress or to have a picture of her leaner, for a dating app. She spent thousands of pounds on boot camps abroad, going to motivational talks abroad. And no matter what I said to her, all I was trying to do was keep it really simple, it just didn't go through. And I just wonder, was her motivation too extrinsic? Was it coming from outwith? She thought she had to look a certain way or conform to what she saw on social media from influencers or models with airbrushed photos and so on.

Then I thought to myself, but surely if she wanted it so much, she would've just done it, but I just wasn't inside her head, I didn't know what happened. And eventually we had to part company because it was just pointless at the end of the day. But I think there's certainly a lot of issues to do with the way that we label food as good and bad, it just doesn't seem logical. In a way it does, you could say if you were to compare a cookie to an apple, if I was to say which one is good and bad and you had to decide, you would obviously say that the apple is good.

But in the context of an overall day of eating and an overall week of eating, and a month, and a year, that cookie, all of a sudden the badness or the bad concept of it just gets less and less, and less, and less. And it matters what you're eating over the whole period. If you have one takeaway in a week, one meal out of 21 meals, unfortunately people beat themselves up and think that they're a bad person for eating a pizza, when actually it turned out to be like 4.5% of their weekly intake.

Amy Morin: That's one of the things that's gotten you so many followers on Instagram, you offer this common sense advice that's counter to what most of us have been thinking. You show a piece of avocado toast next to a piece of toast that has Nutella on it and teach us a little bit about, well, is the avocado toast necessarily

the good one and Nutella is bad? And educate us about that. Clearly that's really resonated with people.

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, the first time I ever posted that was three years ago and I still repost it and it still drives people mad. But yeah, the concept of it, a lot of people simply don't understand that I'm just conveying information when I post on my account, it's not telling people what to do. In that case, yeah, the avocado is obviously a lot more nutritious than the Nutella, but in that example it had more calories, so perhaps if you're trying to lose weight or maintain weight, you have to still consider that. Don't just think avocado is healthy and good for everything.

And in that case the Nutella obviously had fewer calories, but that doesn't mean to say you can't just enjoy Nutella whenever you like as well. I think you need to have the freedom to understand that you can eat any food you like in any context, but if you have a health goal in mind, it's important to understand what you're eating over time.

Amy Morin: I'd love to go through a couple of things that I often hear in the therapy office or even out in public in general, from friends and family members, and I'd love to know what your response would be. If somebody is going to eat something, say maybe they're going to enjoy an ice cream on a hot day with their family, and they say, "Hell, let's be bad today," because they're about to eat an ice cream, what would you say to that person?

Graeme Tomlinson: If they were really happy when they said, "Let's be bad today," I wouldn't probably say anything.

Amy Morin: Okay.

Graeme Tomlinson: Because I don't know if they would really mean that they thought they were actually going to be bad. But if they said it with a more of a serious tone, I would probably try and address why they thought it was going to be bad. I would maybe ask, "Why is it bad?" And I don't think they would be able to come up with a logical answer. I think that the standard answer that would come back would be, "Oh, ice cream's bad for you," or something.

Then I would come back with something annoying like, "Is it? What about that salad you had at lunch? What about the rest of your week where you ate nutrient dense foods, rich in fiber, micronutrients? This one ice cream, is that going to make you bad?" And then hopefully they would realize. Of course, if

they were eating ice cream for every meal, then I would say, "You might want to address that."

Amy Morin: Right. Okay I like that. What about when somebody says, "Okay, tomorrow's my cheat day," what do you have to say about that?

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, I would ask what they're cheating, basically. I still don't understand why... I think it came from fitness professionals on social media, this term. I don't know why it's still called cheat. I don't know why they just didn't call it like... Yeah, I still don't know what they're cheating. I would probably ask, "Why is it a cheat day?" You're just eating food, some of it'll be highly processed, calorie dense, but it's still a meal. It just gives negative connotations unnecessarily. It's still happening, you're still eating those foods, you're not cheating anything. And they would probably say, "Shut up, stop being such a buzz kill."

Amy Morin: Right. But for a lot of people, I think that's what happens, right? Six days out of the week, they really restrict themselves and then they go completely wild on that seventh day to say, "Woohoo, I'm going to party, here's my cheat day." Does that work into the overall plan? I guess, do you endorse that idea? Or do you feel like when we have "cheat days" that we blow all the progress that we did the last six days?

Graeme Tomlinson: It just depends. Physiologically it will just entirely depend on what comprises that supposed to cheat day. Is it just half a pizza or so something? Or if you're having a takeaway that's 3,000 calories, ice cream that's another 1,000 calories, that can start to blow the progress that you've made over the whole week. I guess it just depends what you eat. And again, comes back to having the knowledge of what you're actually putting in your mouth. It's not necessarily an obsessive thing, it can actually be a liberating thing to know, actually I can have half a tub of ice cream there, or actually I can have three of those cookies, or actually I can have that whole pizza.

And actually I can have that 1,500 calorie takeaway, knowing that I could swap from whole milk lattes to skimmed milk lattes for the next week, and that'll offset the calories that I've eaten from that pizza, and I'll stay on track. And it's just like these small little opportunities to try and give yourself perspective to calm everything down and just try and make it as logical as possible, whilst still enjoying everything that you're eating.

Amy Morin: What would you call it, instead of a cheat day?

Graeme Tomlinson: Giving back the longest answer. To be honest, I don't know, nothing. I mean, I would strongly advise that people didn't set up for a day whereby they specifically planned to eat certain foods. Typically these cheat days would happen over a weekend, I guess, because social occasions, or people want to watch a movie with a pizza, whatever it is, but I would just say, "Well, whenever you want these things, just have it. Just eat it and move on," it's happened. If you find that you're having four pizzas a week, then that's maybe something that you have to address if you're not achieving your goals. But yeah, I would strongly advise not to create a day where you think you have to eat certain foods.

Amy Morin: Makes sense. All right, one more for you. What about when somebody's about to eat something, maybe it's pizza, and then they say, "Oh, I'm going to have to workout extra after this."

Graeme Tomlinson: I would say to them, "You probably don't." Again, depends on your overall intake. If that pizza's the only thing you've eaten that day, you might still be under your maintenance calories. Again, it depends on everything that you've done. I think it's usually problematic when people say... Sometimes in the UK here, they were going to put on food packaging it'll take you X minutes or hours to burn off this, whatever it is, Mars bar or whatever. And then the message that that sends is that people will eat it and immediately think they have to go and burn it off, so in order to eat food, you must then burn it off. And that is a notorious trait of an eating disorder, and it's hugely problematic. What I'd probably say to them is, "No, you could probably burn that pizza off by sleeping at night because you're constantly burning calories." 70% of the calories that we burn each day is just from resting, sleeping, sitting around, which is actually a huge chunk.

Amy Morin: Right, and if you look at how long it takes to actually burn off calories by exercise, I mean, it takes hours to burn off a candy bar or something that you're going to eat and-

Graeme Tomlinson: Exactly.

Amy Morin: ... you're going to work really hard.

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, typically, if you exercise regularly, it's only about 5% of your daily energy expenditure by going to the gym or going running, typically because it's quite hard to keep it up, lifting weights or running. You can only do it for a short period of the day before you get so tired and run out of energy. Yeah, the rest of the time your body's still burning calories and I think a lot of people don't realize

that. Whilst you think, "Oh God, I've got to go on pound a treadmill for six hours to burn off pizza," actually, in the course of the calories you're burning each day, week, month, and year, two nights of sleep will burn off that pizza. But the problem comes when you constantly are eating excessive calories, and so you will be creating a calorie surplus all the time, as well.

Amy Morin: How do we deal with feelings of guilt? So many people feel guilty about eating like, "I didn't mean to do that," or, "I blew it today." How do we deal with those feelings?

Graeme Tomlinson: It's a really good question, and I think I'd be doing a disservice to everyone if I was to say, you should do this one thing, because everybody's different. But I think what I would say is try and get into bed with not as much knowledge as you can, about what you're eating. Whilst you're eating that cookie thinking, "This is awful and I may as well go and eat the rest of the packet," it's just, try and zoom out. So instead of zooming in on this one moment in time, the three minutes that took for you to enjoy that cookie and then feel bad about yourself, maybe zoom out, what else did you eat throughout the whole day? What exercise did you do? What about the week? How about the month? Are you eating five cookies every day for a month or is it just three a week? Try and zoom out and it'll give you a better understanding and a logical way of why you probably shouldn't feel guilty when you eat.

I think that's in terms of a body compositional thing. I think these days there's a lot of buzzwords to do with you shouldn't eat chemicals, or if you can't pronounce the ingredients, don't eat it. And all these things don't really mean much at the end of the day, everything's a chemical, water is made of chemicals. I think there's just a lot of information that flood people's brains and cause them to think that what they're doing is bad, and it'll make them feel guilty [inaudible 00:23:08].

Amy Morin: Yeah, we all develop these rules for ourselves, right? If I just don't eat these foods, I'll be okay. Or if I don't do these certain things, then somehow I'll make it through life or I'm eating healthy. But when you look around, what's considered healthy for one person is considered very unhealthy for somebody else, according to them, we get kind of judgy too, right? We look at somebody else, we go to a restaurant and eating with somebody else and they say, "You know, that's not healthy, right?"

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, that's a good one. I guess if somebody asks you that, you could just reply with, "Why? Why is that not healthy? What does healthy mean?" And then you'll say, "Do you know what I ate for lunch? Do you know what I ate

yesterday? Do you know what I've eaten for the last year?" And when they say no, you'll be able to say, "Well, how do you get to judge what's healthy for me when you don't know anything about what I'm eating, overall?" I guess is a good reply, but you might not be friends with them after that.

Amy Morin: Because I feel like somebody that is completely against carbs, if you sit down to a big bowl of spaghetti, they're often quick to tell you why you shouldn't be eating a giant bowl of spaghetti, right?

Graeme Tomlinson: I think it comes down to people like... What you've said there is really interesting, people like to enlighten people with new information or be right about things. They've probably heard in the media, and God, it's been everywhere that carbs do X, Y, and Z. When they see someone eating a bowl of spaghetti, it's more a case of them wanting to assert authority that they know something, to say, "Oh, carbs do X, Y, and Z." But actually the likelihood is that that person's probably only ever seen the headline and not actually become knowledgeable on the subject.

There was a great... Actually it wasn't, it was a very terrible post on TikTok from a health coach. It was about... Oh yeah, so he was going into a shop and naming all these toxic ingredients and he couldn't pronounce them, so therefore none of us should eat them. And what he was actually naming was chemical names for proteins and carbs, and fats.

Amy Morin: Interesting.

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah, so essential things for infants to consume, basically. And this video got over a million views, people agreeing with it and all this stuff. And all of a sudden people are now saying that you shouldn't have baby formula and all this kind of stuff, based on this, which is crazy.

Amy Morin: Interesting.

Graeme Tomlinson: [crosstalk 00:25:31].

Amy Morin: But so easy to buy into that when you see it, it's popular, you think, "Oh, it must be true." And on the surface, it almost makes sense, a lot of these buzzwords and marketing schemes people have where there're quick slogans and sayings that sound catchy and they sound good on the surface. How do we educate ourselves about the truth? Other than following you on Instagram and reading your book, what other ideas are there about how we figure out what's the truth about food and what constitutes a healthy lifestyle for ourselves?

Graeme Tomlinson: It's so difficult because collectively, we're not doing very well, are we? Things are getting worse.

Amy Morin: Right.

Graeme Tomlinson: And it's just a massive disconnect, and I think the introduction of social media over the last 15 years has made things a lot harder. For instance, as I've just described, personalities who are hugely engaging can resonate and connect with people emotionally, with the wrong information. Therefore hundreds of thousands and millions of people will now believe this information to be true, when it isn't. And unfortunately, you'll know this as well, a lot of science is very, very boring and hard to access and hard to interpret. People will comment on my posts, "Why don't you share the science more," and stuff? And I'm like, "Well, I do, I do try, but what I'm trying to do is summarize it so that everybody can understand it." Because a lot of the scientific papers that I look at are very difficult for me to understand, to be honest. Sometimes I just skip to the conclusion and have a look at what actually happened.

And if you want to find the truth about something, there will be conflicting studies, one saying one thing, one saying the complete opposite, so it is so difficult. I think if possible, and you do choose to go and look at some of the science and research, make sure that you have a look at quality papers like meta-analysis or systematic reviews, as opposed to just single studies on certain topics. But it's a question that I can't answer, I don't know how everybody... I guess, like here in the UK, the government could do a much better job at educating us on basic calorie balance, for example. Instead, what they're doing is promoting slimming clubs who don't educate people about the one thing that you definitely need to lose weight [crosstalk 00:27:49].

Amy Morin: What's a slimming club? We don't have those, so I don't know what that is.

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah. It's basically a club where you join as a member and pay each week to go and get weighed.

Amy Morin: Okay. We have those, we just don't call them slimming clubs, got you.

Graeme Tomlinson: Okay, yeah. The problem with that is that the measuring system is flawed. There is very little education. So instead of educating people about how many calories they're eating or protein, or fiber, and things like that, they make up their own terms like points, or it's kind of like yeah, sins and things like that. So yeah, you've got people who will be relying on that, turning up every week, paying money, stepping on the scales, and then if they've gained weight, it's a disaster.

If they've lost weight, it's euphoria. But as we know, your weight is measuring more than just body fat and it can fluctuate from day to day. Depending on what foods you've eaten, whether you've eaten carbs, you'll be storing more glycogen, whether you've eaten salty foods, you'll retain more water.

Or your menstrual cycle as well, and you can turn up and have gained weight, but actually lost body fat and the "consultant" will say, "Unlucky, do X, Y, and Z." And it's just like a cycle of hell, really. I find a lot of people who have actually reached out to me, have been going to these slimming clubs for years and just yo-yo dieted, and they've finally understood what they should be doing.

Amy Morin:

Yeah. I'm sure you've heard horror stories, as have I, of people before they go to get weighed in, they don't drink for 18 hours and they don't consume any liquid so they can win that week. Then the next week they have to figure out how do I still come in? And it just becomes all about almost cheating the scale, rather than creating a healthy lifestyle. What can we do? When we're walking around the grocery store, when we're buying food, when we're making better choices for ourselves, how do we decide how to create this healthy lifestyle for ourselves?

Graeme Tomlinson:

Yeah. I think keep it as simple as possible. If you're somebody who doesn't know what to buy when they're going shopping, I would say let's just strip it back and think, for each meal let's try and include a high quality protein source, whether it's plant based or animal based, depending on your preference, and make sure that you have that all the time. Make sure that there's at least three vegetables on the plate, make sure that there's some fiber on the plate. And make sure there's some form of carbohydrate, whether it's pasta, potatoes, whatever you like. And above all, make sure you are actually going to enjoy these meals so that you're going to eat them. Yeah, in terms of that, if you go around the shops, buy ingredients for say the week ahead, it means that you've planned ahead, it means that you're not going to get home from work and you're not going to think, "Oh, I've had a really bad day, I'll just order a takeaway."

It's these simple little tweaks. If you were trying to lose weight, for example, you could have a look at different cuts of meat and select a leaner meat, which is lower in calories. You could select a lower fat cheese but eat it in the same quantity and still reduce calories, the same with yogurt. And these small things chip away over time and they don't really cause much upheaval, but they will be helping you progress with your goal. You're not actually making too many changes, it's really small, but the impact over time is going to be quite big. The key is buying into it and accepting that it's going to take a bit of time.

As a rule of thumb for improving health, I guess there's a basic advice of eat more fruit and vegetables, eat more plants. And you can make vegetables taste great in a variety of meals by adding things like spices and herbs if you don't already like the taste of the vegetables, cook them in lots of different ways, maybe even buy a few cookbooks. Myself, I'm really guilty of cooking the same things over and over and then I would get really bored and think, I might just order a takeaway, for example. So try and keep it really exciting.

Yeah, and a lot of the questions I get from people are about snacking, so it's like, "Should I snack? Should I not snack?" And again, it's entirely up to you. One day you might fancy a chocolate bar, eat the chocolate bar, move on. You enjoyed it, move on, have some more nutrients when you're having dinner, for example. On some days you might think, right, I'm going to include more protein with my snacks today because I didn't have much protein at lunch. So yeah, there's lots of different ways that you can approach it, but trying to keep things as simple as possible is probably the best bet.

Amy Morin: I like that, so if we're going to have rules for ourselves, just make them common sense rules?

Graeme Tomlinson: Yeah.

Amy Morin: When you look at a lot of fad diets people are buying into, we think, well, if we backed up for a minute and we thought, wait, does this really make sense? We'd probably be pretty quick to be like, "Oh, this is absurd." But because we're seeing so many people talk about the success they're having with it, sometimes we jump on the bandwagon and think, okay, I'm going to try this too. So I like that, common sense approach. Any last tip, I guess, for somebody who says, "Gosh, I've struggled my whole life with this. I've been up and I've been down and I don't even know where to begin." Where would you say people should start?

Graeme Tomlinson: Good question, inside their head. I think asking themselves a few questions, so what is it that you want to change? Why is it that you want to change? And how are you going to make that change? If you don't make it past the first question and so it turns out you don't want to change anything, then that's it, you don't really need to change anything with regard to that. But then once you get to the what, why is it that you want to change? And if it's for yourself, if it's because it'll improve your health, your quality of life, or even your self-esteem, then you can proceed to the next stage of how to do it. If you don't proceed past the second stage, again stop. Then if you get to the how, I guess that's the all important question, which is going to be different for everybody, depending on

what the goal is. I would just say have those three simple questions, and if you don't make it past at any stage, just stop.

Amy Morin: Makes sense. Graeme Tomlinson thank you so much for sharing your advice with us. I hope everybody goes out and buys a copy of Lose Weight Without Losing Your Mind. And we'll link to your Instagram account, @thefitnesschef_ so that people can find you on Instagram and see what we're talking about when we discuss these helpful infographics that you're sharing that help us make more sense of what's going on with the food that we eat.

Graeme Tomlinson: Thanks very much for having me, a pleasure.

Amy Morin: Welcome to The Therapist's Take! This is the part of the show where I'll break down Graeme's mental strength-building strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here are three of Graeme's strategies that I highly recommend.

Number one: look at what you consume in a week, not a day. I like that Graeme talked about the importance of looking at the overall picture of what you're consuming, not just one meal. If you eat some cake and ice cream today, don't convince yourself that you might as well keep eating sweets because you've blown your diet. Instead, go for a balance over the course of the entire week.

I also like that Graeme isn't a fan of cheat days. When we convince ourselves we have to be on target for six days in a row, and then we allow ourselves to cheat for one day, it affects our mindset. We feel like we're being deprived for six days, and then we think we're being rebellious one day. Instead, trust that you can incorporate the foods that you like into your life on a regular basis, as long as you're keeping your eyes on the overall picture, not just what you consume in one meal.

Number two: keep your overall goals with food in mind. Graeme talks about the importance of having goals in mind. And having a goal to fit into a certain size might not be good for your mental health. But eating to feel good and power your brain might be helpful goals. Keeping those things in mind can help you feel better about the food that you eat, and you might worry less about how many carbs you're consuming, and you might reduce the guilt you feel for enjoying some cookies at lunch. I also like that he talked about buying cookbooks and preparing meals at home. There's something really satisfying about knowing what's in the food that you're eating and that you made it yourself.

Number three: don't be too hard on yourself. I'm glad that Graeme mentioned the importance of not being too hard on yourself. As a therapist, I hear so many people say things like, "I'm so stupid, I messed up again." Being too hard on yourself backfires though. If you shame yourself into thinking you're a hopeless cause, or you're telling yourself that you can't do this, you'll repeat your mistakes. If, however, you talk to yourself with a little self-compassion, you can forgive yourself. Then you can move on, and you'll do better next time.

If you're upset that you aren't seeing the results as fast as you want, or you're down on yourself for not getting as much exercise as you want, pause and ask yourself, "What would I say to my friend right now?" Then, give yourself those same kind words. The way you speak to yourself matters. That's especially true when it comes to daily habits revolving around food and exercise. If you want to change the way you eat, start by changing your mindset.

To hear more of Graeme's tips, check out his book *Lose Weight Without Losing Your Mind*.

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. Do you want free access to my online course? It's called "10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential." To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* And as always, a big thinking to my show's producer (who actually doesn't enjoy eating junk food), Nick Valentin.