

Friends with Food

July 2019

I Can't Keep Cookies in the House!

This month I want to address controlling your food environment and what that all means. Can it help? Or is it a bandaid? The short answer is, yes, it's probably a bandaid.



If I don't keep cookies in the house, then I can't eat them!

Ever said something like that? Me too. And then when I finally did let myself eat the cookies, I'd take it wayyy too far.

In my mind, I'd hit a temporary jackpot and needed to fit in as many cookies as I could because who knows the next time I'd let myself do something like this again?

Now let me ask, is this you? I understand trying to surround yourself with food that is nutritious and wholesome so you will be more inclined to eat it. That can work if it's not

too laborious to prep AND it's delicious and you have some know how on how to throw it all together. The harmful part is when you *ban* certain foods.

Some steps you can take:

1. Take urgency out of the equation:

Let's talk about the "Abundance Mindset." This is realization that I really can eat *whatever* I want *whenever* I want. An abundance of food is available any time. Those cookies? They are literally less than a mile away at the store or a click away on Amazon. There is absolutely no urgency to polish off the whole package. They will always be available to me. Such a simple concept, right? So then why did some of you immediately think, *I could never do that?*

I get it. It's difficult to wrap your mind around eating whatever you want to the satisfaction point. It's much more American and "stronger" to say you've sworn off certain foods and then make sure everyone around you knows about it. It's called food perfectionism (i.e. diet culture) and it's not a fun way to live. It's also not sustainable. When has this ever worked longer than 1 year?

2. An abundance mindset, on the other hand, seems much less efficient at first. Why? Because it takes work.

And by the way, I'm not referring to allergies and food sensitivities in any of this. If a food needs to be avoided so you don't get sick, then avoid or limit that food so you can honor your body. When it comes to food, the concept of abundance requires a certain level of trust in our ability to make the "right" choice. And that's scary because most people don't feel ready for that sort of freedom. But the popular alternative is to set all of these rules around food and ward off the "bad guys" because you're not sure what will happen and you'd rather not find out because you need to fit into your jeans by next Friday. It's pretty exhausting. An abundance mindset stands in direct opposition. The whole point is find out what will happen. To trust the process. *To experience food freedom.* Because for some of us, not exposing ourselves to the food we so desperately want speaks volumes about the power it has over us. We think we're the one in control. But the funny thing is that *we're not in control at all.* The food has so much power over us that we won't let ourselves be around it for fear of bowing down in defeat.

I understand this well! I've been there! We say no to certain foods because they don't align with our goals. This is very challenging for a dietitian! I know WAY too much about food science so I have had to push past the nutrient makeup of food to check in with my mind and body to see if I really just wanted the darn thing. So... when "just don't keep it in the house" advice starts pouring in, we take it

because it makes sense. And it does. It really can serve us well for a season. But some of us may reach a point where we need to dive a little deeper. When that forbidden food feels all too powerful and you really have to work hard to avoid it, that's the very food you should try to have around more.

3. **Abundance Mindset 101:**

Buy the cookies (or whatever food you find forbidden). Keep your "forbidden food" item (only do one at a time) in the house for a couple weeks. A lot of it. Allow yourself to eat some every single day. The point is to expose yourself to the cookies. To understand that they are there, but *you* get to call the shots for once. Here's where it gets real. Are you scared you'll overeat on your first try? You might. It could happen a second time too. And then a third. Give yourself permission to experience what you think is "failure," but stay mindful the entire time. Eventually, the newness will wear off and you'll be able to eat more intuitively. And I get it. This all sounds kind of magical especially when you're used to a checklist of structured food rules. But I promise this is worth a shot. Keep a journal so you can write down your experience. Make sure to eat when you are not ravenous but mildly noshy or even neutral on the [hunger scale](#).

Above all, take things slowly and with lots of grace. Consistently expose yourself to the food until it loses its luster and becomes less forbidden. Which doesn't mean you don't savor the food or love it any less, by the way. It just means you're *free*.

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