

Episode 43: Cold Turkey or Small Changes Over Time?



Episode Transcript

With your Hosts
Mary Preston & Keysa Amaro

Mary: Welcome to The Real Life Wellness Podcast with Mary Preston and Keysa Amaro. Where we talk about different ways to integrate healthier habits into your life.

Keysa: Welcome back, friends! I'm Keysa Amaro, certified Health Coach and I work with moms to help them get control of their food cravings so they can maintain a healthy weight without deprivation or complicated meal plans.

Mary: And I'm Mary Preston, and I'm a licensed psychotherapist and a life coach and I am the founder of the Goodbye Burnout for Healthcare Professionals Program. I help healthcare professionals reverse their burnout using my 3-phase goodbye burnout process. If that sounds like you, you should definitely jump into the Saying Goodbye to Burnout Free Facebook Group, where we share information, provide each other with support, and work together to heal the healthcare profession.

If you have questions about any of our programs, the podcast, or anything about health and wellness, come join us in The Real Life Wellness Podcast with Mary and Keysa facebook group Alright. On to our topic of the day, which is...Cold turkey versus small changes over time.

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In this episode, Keysa is going to talk to you about the pros and cons of making changes slowly vs making the change quickly and completely all at once.

But first, I want to share with you a review from our number one fan:

"Don't Eat Your Feelings" is just one of the many helpful and positive podcasts where Mary and Keysa share their knowledge and insight on health, both mental and physical, and provide beneficial tips for success. This is probably my favorite podcast because of the discussion of unconditional love. However, all of the podcasts provide either new information or reinforce previous knowledge. I have learned so much about food choices and mental attitude from these two ladies. I also enjoy their humor and personal touch. Thanks, ladies.

Thanks, Sharon Hale, you are the best and we love you!

Keysa: When a person chooses to follow a specific diet, they usually go cold turkey and dive right into a specific meal plan that eliminates certain foods. For example, with the keto diet, refined carbs are off the plate. So, bread, pasta, muffins, or granola are not an option because you want to eat a very low amount of carbohydrates and a large amount of fat to help your body get into ketosis where your body burns fat as its main fuel source. Even some fruits are off the table as well. I don't know if I have ever heard of anyone "easing in" to the Keto diet, nor any diet for that matter. Most people take an all or nothing approach.

I feel like when someone wants to change their diet or lose weight, they think the only way is to go cold turkey, or have an all or nothing mindset.

And there are many awesome things about going cold turkey that I will talk about more later, but first I want to offer another way to change your diet, whether for health purposes or for weight loss. And that is to make small changes over time. Or what I also refer to as "Adding in" What this means, is to make SMALL changes towards eating healthier over time such as adding more vegetables, or just adding vegetables to your meals, or cooking more at home. Then, once you have mastered that in a couple of weeks, then make another change such as go to sleep at the same time every night, adding protein to your breakfast or first meal of the day, or not eating sugar after dinner.

So, in this episode, I wanted to look at the pros and cons of each strategy and let you decide which approach would work best for you based on your goals, your situation, and your personality.

Cold Turkey: Let's start with cold turkey since we have probably all experienced going cold turkey with some type of food.

Pro:

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Now, this can be thought of as a pro or a con, as it is a positive change in the long run, however, it sucks in the short term. When you go cold turkey and cut a beloved food completely out of your diet, you come face to face with your emotional hunger. You are quickly faced with times when you are forced to feel your emotions because you can't use food to cover them up. I say that this is ultimately a good thing because you learn how to process and allow your emotions without using food, getting rid of or reducing emotional eating. And I think that this is a big enough pro to outweigh the cons especially if you know that you eat emotionally or eat to cover or mask your feelings.

Another pro to going cold turkey is that you get it over with all at once. If you are an impatient person, this may be the strategy for you. You take out all the food you want and then it's done. It's super uncomfortable for a couple of weeks or so and then the withdrawal symptoms and energy slumps fade away and you are left with steady energy and no withdrawal symptoms.

You will also see faster results as far as weight loss or how you are feeling in regards to energy and mental clarity. When you cut say sugar and flour from your diet all at once, you are more likely to see results of weight loss faster than if you were to eliminate sugar and flour after dinner, first, and then next month eliminate it in the morning, and then a month later eliminate it all day.

Con: When you take out all of a certain type of food such as sugar or flour, you will most likely go through withdrawal symptoms. Your body will be in shock and will be craving what you eliminated, such as sugar and flour you once fed it. You might get headaches, muscle cramps, be highly irritable, or tired. But know that these withdrawal symptoms are completely normal and that they will go away after a period of time, usually two to three weeks. And after that, you will feel amazing!

However, another con is that many times someone will feel withdrawal symptoms such as massive headaches and they will think that this diet doesn't work for them and that they need sugar in their lives. They don't always realize that these are withdrawal symptoms and that they will subside shortly. Or maybe they just don't have time in their life for headaches. They have to be on it at work and a headache is not an option.

Another con with going cold turkey is that you will most likely experience very strong cravings, that feel uncontrollable. You may think that the cravings are out of your power and that they take over, you give in and "ruin" your diet and think that this diet doesn't work for you.

When you go cold turkey, having the ability and knowledge of how to process emotions without food will help you handle and manage your cravings without eating the food you are craving.

Also, realize that when you go cold turkey and you "slip" or "fall off the wagon" that you have NOT failed! So what if you ate a piece of cake. Look at why with curiosity and see what you can do next time to help you allow your feelings. Going cold turkey or starting a diet or food protocol that calls for eliminating certain foods does not mean that you should never eat those

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foods ever again and that if you eat those foods you have “failed”. Going in with that mindset will set you up for failure. When you eat something off of your protocol without planning it ahead of time, look at the experience as an investigation. Pretend it’s your best friend and you are trying to help her figure out why she ate the brownies that were at the dessert table at the potluck. You would never yell or belittle your best friend for eating a brownie.

One other con is that it may be overwhelming to make so many changes with your food intake or to use a completely new meal plan that you may “give up” and just go back to your previous way of eating. I have tried using meal plans before and it was so overwhelming with the new foods and amount of time I had to spend in the kitchen that I didn’t really like it. And this is why I don’t use specific meal plans with my clients. It is so much better for the person to find a new recipe that they would like and enjoy versus me telling them what to make. They are taking ownership of their food intake and it is more meaningful to them when they are able to find recipes or make them up on their own.

Small Changes Over Time:

Pro: Fairly easy to implement one change at a time. Especially if you are a busy mom with a job and house and family to take care of. Whereas the idea of a complete makeover of the pantry, fridge, and recipes seems daunting and impossible. This approach is completely doable. You would be the one deciding what changes to make and you would make ones that you think you can do with your environment and lifestyle. Eating specific foods at certain times of the day may not be the best change when you have a fast paced job that only allows you breaks at certain times of the day that may not align with the timing you want to make. So, choose changes that are doable and that fit in with your schedule and your life.

You don’t go through major withdrawal symptoms when you make small changes over time. This will help you stick with your changes and make them life long habits. Often we stop a diet because we can’t handle the withdrawal symptoms. But if you are adding in protein to your first meal then you won’t go through withdrawal symptoms. Or maybe you want to do intermittent fasting, so you would start with a 12 hour fast and then move it to 13 hours and then 14 hours and so on until you find the right fasting time for you. You wouldn’t go from an 8 hour fast to a 16 hour fast.

The idea of adding in nutritional food is that you will “crowd out” less nutrient-dense food, or food that isn’t working for you. So the focus is on what you are adding in and not what you are eliminating. When you focus on what you are adding in and the healthy foods you are eating, it is a lot easier to eat less of the foods you don’t want to be eating or foods that don’t give you the results you want.

Slip-ups don’t seem as catastrophic. When you are making small changes over time and you eat sugar after dinner one night, it doesn’t seem like such a big deal. You haven’t “ruined” your whole diet or “failed” because you have made these decisions and changes and they are not written in stone. And if you ate sugar after dinner, you probably have other previous changes

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that you are sticking with like eating more vegetables at lunch and dinner. So that is a total win and awesome.

From the pros of making small changes over time, you may think that this is “easy”, but know that any change is going to be a challenge, it just may not be as big of a challenge as going cold turkey.

Con: you won't see results right away and it may keep you motivated to make and keep changes. You have to look at the long term goals and focus on those verses focusing on how much weight you lost this week. Often people want to see results like yesterday, and when they don't lose any weight within the first couple of weeks they get frustrated and give up or go back to their previous habits. So, if you are looking for fast results, this probably isn't the approach for you.

When making small changes over time, you are not necessarily faced with your emotions and having to process them without food. For instance, if you eliminate sugar before bed, you won't be able to eat cookies or ice cream to cover your loneliness, but you could still have popcorn or chips. You will find other ways of covering up or buffering your emotions. So, if you decide to make small changes over time, I suggest that you really look at your eating habits and emotional hunger to see if you are still eating to buffer from your emotions. And learn how to process and allow your emotions without food. And I believe that this is the key component to sustainable weight loss. So, don't skip this step!

It takes more time to get to your end result. This is the slow and steady way of changing your diet. When you make small changes over time, it may take you 6 months to get your food intake to your final goal. This may seem like a long time, but with this process, you are making sustainable and long-lasting changes over time so that they become your daily habits.

The idea of adding in is a concept where you choose one or two new foods that are whole, nutrient-dense and add them into your weekly meals. This way you are making small changes throughout the weeks. You can choose one new recipe and plan it into your weekly meals. If you are constantly adding in new healthy recipes and food, over time, these changes will add up to a huge change in what you are eating. The changes don't have to be around food. You can add in healthy habits to your life like adding in movement, relaxing activities, or getting more sleep.

When you take out all of a certain type of food such as sugar or flour, you will most likely go through withdrawal symptoms. Your body will be in shock and will be craving what you eliminated, such as sugar and flour you once fed it. You might get headaches, muscle cramps, be highly irritable, or tired. But know that these withdrawal symptoms are completely normal and that they will go away after a period of time, usually two to three weeks. And after that, you will feel amazing!

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I also feel that when you go cold turkey and cut a beloved food completely out of your diet, you come face to face with your emotional hunger. You are quickly faced with times when you are forced to feel your emotions because you can't use food to cover them up.

Adding in and making small changes or going cold turkey and jumping into the deep end by taking out all sugar and flour are two different approaches that you can take when changing the food you put into your mouth. It's completely up to you, your lifestyle, and where you are at in your life. Be sure to choose a way that is supportive of you and approach it with compassion.

5 tips to help you decide if you should go cold turkey or make small changes over time.

1. **Evaluate your lifestyle:** Look at your lifestyle and your environment. What approach would better serve you and help you to be successful? Choose the approach that would work best for you. Make a pros and cons list or imagine yourself doing each approach and see which one feels better.
2. **Make a choice and stick with it:** Once you choose, know that whatever you choose is the right decision, so stick with it. Because I bet that if you choose cold turkey and a couple of weeks in when you are feeling the withdrawal symptoms that you will be like "small changes over time is what I should have done. It would be so much easier." Or if you choose small changes over time and a month into it you haven't lost a single pound, you are probably going to think "this isn't working, I should have gone cold turkey." Choose a timeline for your decision. Such as I will commit to making small changes for 6 months. Or I will commit to eliminating sugar and flour for 2 months.
3. **Make a plan:** Write out a plan of what you are going to do. If you are going to make small changes over time, write down how often you are going to make changes. Will you add a change every week or every two weeks. If you are going cold turkey, write down exactly what you are going to allow. Be specific so there is no wiggle room. Decide how long you are going to follow your protocol. Say 1 month. And then make a plan for how you are going to add foods back in such as dairy or sugar.
4. **Process your emotions without food:** No matter what approach you choose, you need to learn how to allow and process your emotions without using food. This will be a game-changer, my friend! If you need support, hire a coach to help you through the process. I know that Mary and I have a unique way of identifying and processing that has changed my life.
5. **Be kind to yourself:** Always be kind to yourself when going through changes. Coming from a place of shame and hatred will not serve you. Pretend you are talking to your best friend when you talk to yourself about food you eat.

Mary: Alrighty, friends, that's all we have got for you today. Thank you so much for being awesome as always and listening in.

Tune in to our next episode where we talk about ... the point of mindfulness...Why should we be mindful and what's it all about?

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If you'd like to know more about us, and if you have any questions or comments, head on over to our dedicated Facebook group! You can also contact Mary at her [website at www.maryalycepreston.com](http://www.maryalycepreston.com) or Keysa at her website at www.keysaamaro.com!

Keysa: If you know someone who you think would benefit from the information shared on our podcast, please share this episode with them! We want to extend our message to, and support as many people as possible, and we need your help to get our message out.

Mary: And if you enjoy the show, we would love it if you would leave us an honest review on iTunes. Simply go to iTunes and search for the podcast page. Hit the tab for ratings and reviews, and click on Write a Review. That's it! Super helpful!