



OAC
Community

Perspectives

Learning to Forgive Myself

by Andrea Matthes, OAC Community Member



Andrea Matthes

At 34 years old, I found myself trapped in a body that wasn't allowing me to live the life I wanted. I was stuck in an endless cycle of "diet-fail-repeat," believing I had to execute the perfect diet and exercise program in order to lose weight and live the happy and healthy lifestyle I desperately wanted. Instead, I spent nearly 20 years starting a new diet on Monday only to "mess up" on Wednesday by eating off plan or skipping the gym.

Every "mess up" felt like a failure. I would go to bed at night and beat myself up for failing. I'd cry myself to sleep, promising to do better next time and planning to start over next Monday (or after vacation, or my birthday, or January 1st). Then I'd throw myself a food funeral and eat all of the food I was never going to eat again.

Much to my dismay, no matter which day I started over, I found myself "failing" again. The number on the scale got higher, my body continued getting larger, and my world became smaller and smaller. I reached 328 lbs. in 2011 and worried that if I didn't do something drastic, I would need to be wheeled out of my house on a stretcher before my 40th birthday. I felt hopeless and helpless and wondered what was wrong with me.

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A Learning Curve

After seeing a few friends quickly lose 100+ pounds with bariatric surgery, I decided to give it a try, too.

I thought that surgery was going to cure me of my “fatness.” I thought I'd be like my friends who seemingly lost weight overnight, barely had an appetite, and got violently ill if they ate carbs.

I was wrong.

It took me almost an entire year to lose 100 lbs. (average of eight lbs. per month) and another 13 months to reach my goal weight of 165 lbs. Despite counting every calorie and doing Paleo, Keto, and CrossFit 5-6 days a week, it took me two years to lose 164 lbs. — and according to the BMI chart, I was still considered to have obesity.

At the time, I felt extremely frustrated and couldn't understand why my body wasn't responding the way I had hoped. What I came to realize was that during those two seemingly long years, through all of the trial and error with different ways of eating and maintaining my weight rather than gaining weight through months-long plateaus, I had created the mindset shift I never knew I needed.

“The most powerful lesson I learned was that in order to make progress, I had to learn how to forgive myself, always.”

A Mindset Change

It turned out that being happy and healthy had nothing to do with being “perfect.” In fact, just the opposite was true! It had everything to do with letting go of perfection and living what I call an imperfect life. The most powerful lesson I learned was that in order to make progress, I had to learn how to forgive myself, always.

Ate too much pizza? Forgive myself immediately and move on. Skipped the gym? Forgive myself immediately and move on.

By doing this, I didn't have to wait for tomorrow or Monday, or for the next time the stars would magically align, so I could start over...again.

I didn't have to throw any food funerals, beat myself up, or make empty promises that reinforced my belief that I was a failure. All I had to do was forgive myself, move on, and make the next choice. It's crazy, but for whatever reason, we're taught to forgive others and ask others for forgiveness — but we're never taught to forgive ourselves. Or at least I wasn't.

Learning to forgive myself is what finally allowed me to escape the cycle of "diet-fail-repeat" and start living a truly happy and healthy lifestyle.



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Forgiveness

Learning to forgive myself allowed me to enjoy what I ate, whether it was a kale salad or pepperoni pizza, because I no longer had to abuse myself with negative self-talk for “messing up.” I didn't have to throw myself a food funeral before starting over.

Learning to forgive myself helped me find joy in exercise, making it something I wanted to do rather than something I “should” do...and then beat myself up for not doing.

Learning to forgive myself allowed me to let go of unfair expectations that I had put on myself, my body and my life, which gave me the freedom to experiment with trial and error so I could figure out what worked for me and finally establish sustainable habits that met my needs.

Learning to forgive myself was the first step in creating the happy and healthy lifestyle I always wanted to live. Like I said, I used to lay in bed at night beating myself up for letting myself down. It was followed by empty promises I never kept, reinforcing my belief that I was a failure. This kept me in an endless cycle of diet-fail-repeat.

By forgiving myself in the moment, every time I let myself down, I'm able to take back my power. I can honor myself, my body and my goals with my next choice rather than waiting for another fresh start.



An Exercise in Self-Love

This simple exercise in self-love freed me from relentless feelings of regret, guilt and shame that kept me stuck for so long. I know it will do the same for you.

Try it right now....

Take a deep breath.

Place your right hand over your heart.

Close your eyes and say, "I forgive myself"

Allow yourself to feel uncomfortable (and probably a little emotional), knowing that you deserve to be forgiven, by you. Do this over and over again every time that little voice creeps in and starts beating you up. It might feel uncomfortable at first, but that's okay. It's like this for most people.

If you feel resistance and think to yourself, "How do I just keep forgiving myself when I keep making the same mistake over and over again?" I'll tell you... You just do! Not forgiving yourself doesn't fix the "mistake." It just makes you feel bad about yourself for making the supposed mistake, and that's not productive. In order to move forward, make progress or create positive change, we must start from a place of love.

Forgive yourself to love yourself. Love yourself to improve yourself. Free yourself from regret, guilt and shame. End the cycle of diet-fail-repeat. Live a happy, healthy and imperfect life.

Forgive yourself, always.

“By forgiving myself, in the moment, every time I let myself down, I’m able to take back my power.”



Do You Want to Share Your Story?

Whether you have a story about navigating obesity, facing weight stigma, or inspiring others, your voice is important. Visit the OAC's story project at **WeightoftheWorld.com** to share yours today. Not sure what to say? Consider one of our question prompts to guide you.

If you would like your story to be featured in a future issue of *Weight Matters Magazine*, please email **membership@obesityaction.org**.

More about Andrea:

Andrea Matthes used her experiences to become a health coach for others looking to improve their health and change their mindset. Today, she helps her clients learn self-love, self-care and sustainable habits so they can live the life they've always dreamed of. You can learn more about Andrea and her story at **ImperfectLife.com**.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



PUBLIC
EDUCATION



ADVOCACY



ANNUAL
CONVENTION



NATIONAL
AWARENESS
CAMPAIGNS



VIBRANT
COMMUNITY

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

**Through the OAC Community,
you can get access to:**

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](https://obesityaction.org/join)

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