

51. From Impulse to Intention: Navigating False Desires with
Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma



FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

51. From Impulse to Intention: Navigating False Desires with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma

Arpita: Well, hello, everybody. Welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. We are excited to have you join us today. And I thought it would be nice to talk about something now that we've gotten a couple of weeks into 2024. But before we jump into that, I want to welcome my co host, Dr. Michael Hersh. How are you doing?

Michael: Hey, everyone. I'm, doing great. Thanks. Excited to be here.

Arpita: Okay, there we go. That's more like it. You're excited to be here. Of course, you're excited to see me, right? So what I wanted to talk about, like I mentioned, since we're a couple of weeks into January, is to maybe consider or reflect on some of the things that might have come up for you over these past couple of weeks where you just had to kind of give in, like, so what am I talking about? I'm talking about like urges that we have. Maybe it's around what we're eating, what we're drinking, what we're doing, but have you found yourself making a commitment to yourself, maybe it had to do with the goals that we talked about. Like I'm going to start working towards losing weight. I'm going to start working towards eating healthier, whatever goals that you made for yourself for this year. And then realize that these damn urges keep coming up that are pulling you away from doing that. So tell me where that's coming up for you.

Michael: So one of my goals for 2024 is to spend less time on my phone when I'm around my family. Right? And I really, it's amazing how addictive our phones are because I just constantly have this urge to check my phone and so I have tried to come up with different strategies so that it makes it more challenging for me to check my phone, but the urge is there and I'm always like, you know, I like need a fix. I need to check my phone. Is there a notification? So that's I think that's one of the biggest things for me that I have been trying to overcome in terms of urges.

Arpita: Yeah. And the thing is, these urges, they're like, what, what is an urge exactly. There, there are these intense desires that we have that are really generated by our thoughts, right? But we may not be aware of the fact that they're coming from what we're thinking. We just have all of a sudden this emotion, this urge, this desire come up for us, this feeling come up for us. And we have to satisfy it, because that urge that's there doesn't really feel good. It's like needing to be addressed, needing to be satisfied. And the way we do it is by whatever the urge is driving us to do. That spoonful of ice cream after dinner. That let me check my phone and see if anybody liked my post. Let me go and have that glass of wine after work, because I need to relax now. It can show up in so many different ways. The urge to eat the cookie that's sitting there on your counter, because there's a whole box of brand new cookies from Trader Joe's, whatever it is, right?

And so what we have to do is build the awareness around the thoughts that are leading to these urges. So common ones, Oh my God, it's somebody's birthday. That cake looks yummy. That cupcake looks yummy. That donut looks yummy. And one won't hurt me. Right? Or like I mentioned, my specific fix is I have to have that bite of ice cream after dinner. Oh my God, it's just one bite. It's not going to hurt. It's not going to do anything. It's not a whole bowl full. Or even you know, Hey, how many people have liked my post? Is anybody reading my, my information that I'm putting out there? What can I see? Can I see how many people have viewed it? So those are all these thoughts that we have in our head that lead to this emotion of intense desire to have the urge to move forward with whatever behavior.

51. From Impulse to Intention: Navigating False Desires with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma

And even though we think that we're in control, a lot of times we don't even recognize what it leads to us doing. Like going and eating more than three cupcakes. And we said, okay, I'm just going to have a bite of one or having two bowls of ice cream. Instead of that one spoonful, we're spending three hours on internet and social media, instead of just doing a quick check and scroll and move on. It becomes a rabbit hole where we're going into all the different directions. So even though these thoughts fly through our brain so quickly, creating these urges, it has a significant impact on us. And we don't always have the awareness around that. We don't realize how it is impacting us. Tell me where this has shown up for you.

Michael: Well, I'll tell you where it's showing up right now. You mentioned Trader Joe's, and I don't know if you've ever had a Kringle. Do they have those in Virginia? Yeah, so, you know, growing up in New York, it was kind of like a Danish but Kringle's there's a factory in Wisconsin it's delicious. And Trader Joe's always has, like, a, you know, a different flavor, but they're seasonal, and there's a limited supply. And so you mentioned Trader Joe's and sweets in a sentence, and I immediately went to the Kringle and had an urge to go and see what kind of, what the seasonal Kringle at Trader Joe's is. Maybe that's a Chicago thing. I'm not sure.

But yeah, I mean, I, I definitely have a sweet tooth, so you know, trying to be intentional about whether or not I want to have something sweet after dinner and before I go to bed and I do have a tendency to give into that urge and it can be really challenging to just try and shut it off and not do the thing

Arpita: I think we don't really understand the fact that these urges are false desires right? They're emotions that have come up for us because we are trying to feel good about something in the moment and maybe avoid another negative emotion. Like just sitting doing nothing or, you know, having that sense of desire there, but being able to sit with it. And so when we have these false desires where we want to do things that we know ultimately are not moving us towards our ultimate goals, we can decide if we want to move forward with it or not, but that's where the kind of the struggle is where the challenges, right? Because a lot of times it's in the heat of the moment it comes up for us and we just want to satisfy it to make that urge go away. How do we work through it instead without giving into it? That is the key here to really living deliberately in a way that gets you to feeling how you want to feel.

Because ultimately, if you think about it, when you give into those urges, when you eat the donuts, you eat the cupcakes, you eat the ice cream, you drink the wine, whatever it is, you scroll and waste all that time, you feel like shit afterwards, right? You end up regretting it down the road. So in the heat of the moment, it's making you feel good temporarily. But ultimately at the end, you feel worse. You feel like crap. And so what do we do? We start sitting in that for a little bit and then we have another urge again to satisfy so we can make ourselves temporarily feel better. And it becomes this vicious cycle of building more and more negativity for ourselves with the ultimate end result.

So why does this happen? Like, why can't we give ourselves the ability to have the urge and just sit with it? And I think it really goes back to the fact that humans don't like to not feel good. They don't like to feel uncomfortable. And so what I really have found to work is letting ourselves just sit there and be present with the urge. Right? We're not giving into it. We're not resisting it because when we resist it, we push it away. Okay. I'm not, I, that urge is there for that ice cream, I'm going to push it away and go away and do go distract myself. All we're doing is making it stronger. So can you just sit there when the urge comes up to get that spoonful or drink that wine and just say, okay, I see this urge. I know in the long run, it's not going to get me

51. From Impulse to Intention: Navigating False Desires with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma

where I want to be and I'm just going to be present with it for a moment. I'm going to feel uncomfortable and just sit here and kind of yuck it out. What's the harm in doing that? Have you ever found yourself doing that at all?

Michael: Oh, for sure. Right? And, and I just want to highlight one thing that you were just saying, right? So a lot of people try to strong arm getting through these urges, right? They think if I can just like have enough willpower to not eat the thing, then eventually it's going to go away. The urge is going to go away. And the important thing to remember is that willpower is depletable. Right so you start really being yes, I definitely am not going to eat that cookie. And the longer you try to resist it the longer you try to use willpower to not eat the cookie the harder it gets to resist the cookie, right? So what you were just highlighting is noticing the urge, and then letting it be there, just admitting to yourself, yes, I really, that cookie looks amazing. I like chocolate chip cookies, and you guys are learning a lot about me in this episode, and all of my poor eating habits. So, you know, I really want that cookie. And it feels really uncomfortable, but I'm not going to eat it. Because when you can allow yourself to be uncomfortable in the desire itself, recognizing it's there, not resisting it, not trying to pretend like you don't actually want to eat it that's when it starts to dissipate. That's when the urge starts to get better.

Now, the downside of this is that that urge can come right back. And so this can be a process that you have to repeat, particularly when you're first starting to overcome an urge, letting it be there, letting the urge fade away, having it immediately come back and having to start the process all over again.

Arpita: Yeah, it's like your urges make you feel like you have to take action. I know we're referring to cookies and cupcakes a lot, but this can be applied to anything, any urges that you have for, you know, Hey, I have to go and I don't know, go smoke a cigarette, which I mean, it's not really up my alley, but yes, you know, you have these urges to do things, these habits that we have, that we know that ultimately don't serve us. So these urges make us feel like we have to take these actions that they are in control of us, but really what controls us is our brain, right? So we have to make conscious effort to retrain our brains when these are just pop up, right? It just needs to be in the driver's seat. The brain needs to believe that it is in the driver's seat. It's in control of what's going on. It's the one that's making the choice of whether or not we're going to act on the urge or not. So can you instead of giving into the urge, tell your brain, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to plan ahead. Next time that urge comes up for me to go open that freezer door after dinner, I'm going to just give myself permission to sit here and notice that I'm having the urge. Okay. That it is there. I'm going to notice it. I'm going to acknowledge it. And then I'm just going to allow it to be there for a couple of minutes without acting on it. I'm just going to give it a couple of minutes to sit there and be there and be present with it. And I will guarantee you that almost always it will gradually start to dissipate. It will slowly start to go away. And more likely than not, you will get distracted by something else that calls your attention where you don't even realize the urge is not as intense anymore. It happens almost all the time.

And I've actually gotten to the point now where I have noticed where, okay, I really have this, I want to get that ice cream. Oh, my God. I have to get this ice cream. I have to get this fix.. I got to get that dopa hit get the ice cream with the ice cream. And then something distracts me. I get totally pulled away. And then an hour and a half later, I was like, huh, that was so funny. It was like, so intense. I needed that ice cream and I got pulled away and it's gone now completely. So we need to put our brains back in control here of what we're going to do when those urges come on, and that's how we retain and regain our power, right?

51. From Impulse to Intention: Navigating False Desires with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma

Michael: So how do you recommend, right, so you've mentioned that these habits, you know, these urges can come back over and over again. And if you're looking for an example that isn't food you can talk about my checking LinkedIn urge, which uh, by the way, for all the doctors out there who don't think that LinkedIn is for doctors, there's a great physician community on LinkedIn. And I feel myself kind of getting pulled in there and I love interacting on LinkedIn and so I get all of these urges. So how do you recommend, like, as these urges come up throughout the day, I'm noticing them, and how do you go about dealing with it so that, you know, I'm not constantly giving in to social media?

Arpita: So I want you, it's going to be hard because you're just like plugged going on to LinkedIn. Okay. So now you're going to have to sit back and not do it. All right. This is what you're going to do. You are going to notice how many urges you have to go hop on LinkedIn quickly and then count how often you can just allow them to be there without giving in. Right? It's not going to be easy. Your brain is trying to keep you safe by jumping and satisfying that urge and getting that dopa hit right there to feel good in the moment. But I want you to just instead allow it to be there and not do anything about it. Right? And so there's a system that I use with clients or when they're trying to specifically handle certain urges like the LinkedIn fix or their cupcake fix, whatever it is, I want you to get a jar, a clear jar and I want you to get about 100 little marbles, jingle bells whatever, some maybe little Valentine's hearts with Valentine's day coming up, whatever you want, but get about a hundred little units that you can put in this jar. And every time that you notice that you have an urge. I want you to just be present with it, sit there, allow it to be there, allow it to slowly dissipate. And if you successfully can do that without giving into it, without resisting it, then I want you to put one of those marbles in the jar.

Okay. When you do this repeatedly, it takes about 100 times of doing it for a habit to become a routine. So what we're doing is retraining our brains to allow the urges to be there without acting on them. Okay. And so when you have that visual gratification. That, Hey, yeah, I've done it this many times, it's further reinforcement. It's further validation that you are accomplishing your goal. Okay? So that jar is super important here because when we do it here and there off the cuff and we don't keep track of it, we don't get that validation. So do use the jar, put it in there and see how often you're able to do this and watch that jar fill up. All right. That's how you're going to make this habit a new routine.

Michael: And because doctors are rule followers, I will point out just because you give into an urge does not mean you start over. Right? So it's a hundred urges that you have not given into, but it does not need to be consecutive. And the other important point here is that if you decide that you want to do the thing, right, if I decide, okay, I am going to go onto LinkedIn and look at it as long as it's intentional, it's okay, right? You can intentionally, you can decide ahead of time that you want to do something. It's the unintentional giving into urges that causes us issues, that prevents us from getting the life that we want. So, it's not about doing the thing, it's the thing in alignment with what you want in your life? And I do like going on to LinkedIn and I probably am going to check it at some point and I shouldn't spend my entire day on it. So that's the essential difference there.

Arpita: That's a completely amazing point. Right. Yes. So schedule it in your calendar, right? You want to plan for it in advance, 24 hours in advance. Okay, so I wanted that ice cream. I wanted that wine. I wanted my LinkedIn fix. And I didn't have it on my calendar for today or I've already used it with my calendar. So when is the next time I plan for it? It's not right now. It's not tomorrow. Let me give myself at least 24 hours in

51. From Impulse to Intention: Navigating False Desires with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma

advance. So plan for your urge that comes up now, give yourself grace to allow yourself to have it at least 24 hours in advance. And you might find that when you get there, you don't want it anymore. Okay? That's how you know if it's a false desire versus a true desire. And I did touch on that a little bit, but going back to that, the false desires, obviously they don't lead us to create what we want in our lives ultimately, it leads to more negativity. You know, it's a true desire when it's there, when you're settled into it, and it's kind of effortless, it's ease. So for me, one of my true desires is to create a network of connection here locally, because I have girlfriends and friends all across the world now with the zoom and the coaching, but I really was missing this void. So I have this desire for connection and for friendship, but the desire, I have a specific Idea of what I want it to look like so I get to cultivate that with intention now. So that's how you kind of decipher the difference between false desires and true desires and move towards how do I really live up to the life of true desire?

Michael: So yeah, I mean, urges is literally how we have learned to survive. We have, you know, urges to eat specifically because it was intended for survival. And from an intentional standpoint, right? It's very important that we have these urges. And as long as we're giving into them in alignment with with our goals and the life that we want. I think that's all we can ask for.

Arpita: Perfect. Well, thank you, Michael Hersh.

Michael: Awesome talking to you as always. And we'll see everybody next time on the next episode of doctors living deliberately. Take care.

Arpita: Bye.