

Ep #261: Break Up with Dieting for Good with Jen Madden



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With Your Host

Jill Angie

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Welcome to The Not Your Average Runner Podcast. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you're in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey runners, so I have a super special guest for you this week. Her name is Jen Madden. She's actually a close personal friend of mine but she's also a badass rock start anti-diet coach. And she's going to teach us some good shit today.

But before you panic and think, "Anti-diet, I'm not here for that," I want you to just kind of suspend your disbelief for a moment and just hang with us. We are actually going to talk about weight. This is not an anti-weight loss podcast, but we have a lot of really, really good stuff to share. So hang out and join us.

So Jen, welcome.

Jen: Hi.

Jill: I'm so glad to have you here.

Jen: This is so much fun. And that was quite the intro, thank you. I like being called a badass.

Jill: You are a badass. I've seen your badassery in action. And I realize I've never asked you this question, but are you related to Steve Madden?

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Jen: I am not. That is so funny, women always ask me that. They're like, "Hey, Madden, Steve Madden, the shoes?" And I'm like, "No." And men always ask me if I'm related to John Madden. For those of you who don't know, John Madden is like a super famous football guy. But no, unfortunately I'm not.

Jill: I'm really glad you explained that because I'm like, "Who the fuck is John Madden?" I don't know that name. So funny. Okay, so you're neither related to Steve Madden or John Madden.

Jen: Clarify things first, that's the important stuff.

Jill: Yes, you are Jen Madden. So in a few sentences, or many sentences, your choice, can you explain to everyone listening what it is that you do?

Jen: Sure, so I call myself the anti-diet coach and people do get a little like, "Oh, I don't want to hear about anti-diet," like you said in the intro. And what I just want to make sure everyone understands is I'm not the anti-weight loss or anti-health coach. I am the anti-diet coach because diets truly do not work.

If you want to lose weight, gain health, dieting is not the way to do it. And why should you listen to me? Because I literally spent my entire life dieting. My first diet was at the age of 10. Isn't that crazy? And what's sad is as I talk to women, that's not unusual. So I'm 48 years old, when I was 10 my mother who was overweight thought she was going to save me from the struggles that she had, so she put me on a diet.

What happened was she set me up for a life-long obsession with dieting my body, shaming myself, feeling hopeless, losing weight, gaining weight, losing weight, gaining weight. So I literally spent my entire life dieting and

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shockingly unsuccessful. Ultimately in 2016 I was like, “I suck at dieting so I’m just going to have weight loss surgery.”

And I felt like such a failure when I made that decision. I was embarrassed because I thought people would think like, “Oh, she really has no willpower. She does not have her shit together and she has to actually have somebody cut her open so that she can lose the weight.” I was seriously embarrassed about making that decision, but I felt like I had literally no choice.

And shockingly enough, I didn’t lose all the weight. Thin never came. I was like, “God damn it.” I was so pissed. And that was when I really woke up to myself and what the hell was I doing? I was spending so much mental energy dieting, counting calories, trying to figure out the next exercise program for me. I was ridiculous and it was a ridiculous obsession that made me feel worse rather than better.

So I literally made a decision I was no longer going to diet. And I decided that I wanted to live my life in a way that I could move with ease and age gracefully, and if that meant in a fat body, so be it. Hence started my journey and that is the way I’ve been living for the past three, almost four years.

And it has been so freeing and I want to share this work with other women because I think women, unfortunately, are socialized to believe that our value comes from our bodies and the way we look. And so we are obsessed with trying to fit into some ideal size that does not work.

Look around, everyone’s got different sizes, shapes. We’re all structure differently but yet we’re all trying to fit into this one ideal body size. It just simply doesn’t work. There is a different path to health.

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So yeah, that's a little bit about me, a little bit about my journey and how I got into this line of work. I'm super passionate about it and I can talk about it like forever, but I won't.

Jill: But we're going to talk for a little while. So I mean, I love hearing your story because I think that probably every woman can relate. Maybe not every woman, but most women can relate to hearing messages either from their mom, or their dad, or from a teacher at school, or just someone in their life kind of made them feel like you're too big or you know.

And my mom was always like, "If you keep eating like that you're going to get fat like your aunts." Like I really took that to heart at that age thinking like, "Oh my gosh, fat is a terrible thing to be."

Jen: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

Jill: And so it takes a lifetime, I think, of undoing that. And so the work that you do is kind of like undoing all of that programming.

Jen: It is undoing that. And it's hard, especially if you've been dieting for years or even decades to just really peel back all of the bullshit thinking that we have just accepted and put on replay in our brains for years and years and years. That is truly the work.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: And I want to talk a little bit about not dieting, but also wanting to lose weight, the desire to lose weight because it's like you can't win. You're fat and you can't win. So you've got the one side of society saying, "Listen, you're fat so you should lose weight." Right? So you spend your whole life trying to lose weight.

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And then while I'm a huge advocate of the body positivity movement there is a subtle message now coming from that movement on like shame on you if you actually want to lose weight. You should just accept your body as is, embrace being fat.

And there is a place for that and there are women and men who are there and can accept that. But there is this segment, and I think the segment is pretty big, in between with like I don't know how to navigate this, I'm not comfortable physically in my body, I want to lose weight. Like I've dieted over and over again and I know I should love myself, but physically it's still hard to be in my body.

So I'll say that it's not about the weight, but it's also not about the weight because living in a larger body in our society is challenging. We live in a very fat phobic society. Literally our structures, restaurants, airplanes are not equipped to handle larger bodies.

So if you have a larger body and you're trying to fit in to society, literally you can't or it's a struggle. And so then what do we do? We make it like we're the problem. Like, if I could just fix myself. Instead of like, nope, you know what, maybe that booth is actually the problem. Right? We internalize it's our fault and so then we need to be fixed.

And so there is this conflicting message that I know is out there because I've heard people say it like, "I know I should love myself, but..." So the physical aspect of having extra weight on your body is very real, so the desire to lose it is okay. To want to lose it is okay.

Now, I say that also with the overlying message of making sure you understand why you actually want to lose the weight. So a lot of times we think when we lose the weight, then my life will be amazing. There will be

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rainbows and sunshine, the birds will be singing always, like life will be wonderful. And those of you who have lost the weight know that that is not true. Am I right?

Jill: Yeah, especially if you've lost it, and gained it back, and lost it, and gained it back. I mean, I've done that numerous times in my life and I can tell you that while yes, many things were easier for me in a smaller body, I still had the same brain.

I still had the same thoughts about my worthiness as a human being and all of that. The experience the experience of being in a thinner body is often easier logistically, for sure. But mentally, like you kind of have to do a lot of work on your brain if you've spent your whole life putting all of your worth and all of your, you know, everything that's worthy about you on your appearance. Then losing the weight doesn't really change that.

Jen: It doesn't.

Jill: Because then you're going to have loose skin, or you might not be as thin as you think you should be. Or maybe like for me, I would lose weight and then suddenly I would have this like sagging neck skin and I would get so obsessed with it.

Jen: You're like, "Where the hell did that come from? That wasn't there before."

Jill: I know, and I'd like look in the mirror like, "How do people not see this? I looked so terrible." Right? It was like ridiculous. So if your brain is looking for criticism, you're going to lose the weight, it's just going to look for more things to criticize you.

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Jen: And my experience was I would lose the weight and then I'd be so panicked about gaining the weight back, I was like even more obsessed.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: Literally living in a thinner body is easier, right? Physically, like getting around it is easier. But then you're like, oh my god, I have to keep this and I have to double down. And that only just makes things worse, because now it's like another obsession. So it's not freeing, losing the weight is not freeing. Especially if you're not doing the mental work. The mental work is everything.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, I love that. So basically your message, you're anti-diet but you're not necessarily anti-weight loss. And I think that people are going to be like, it doesn't make sense, right?

Jen: It does not compute doesn't.

Jill: Right? Because I think people think diets and weight loss are the exact same thing.

Jen: Yeah.

Jill: But they're not.

Jen: They're not. And so let's talk a little bit about why diets don't work, shall we?

Jill: We shall.

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Jen: So, the number one reason why diets don't work, in my opinion, is it literally is taking you outside of yourself to figure out what's best for your body. You are literally giving your power away to somebody else to tell you what you should or shouldn't eat, how much you should eat, when you should eat, how you should move your body, how much you should move your body, right?

You're giving that power away to somebody else who does not know you, who does not know your body, right? But we are like, no, I can't trust myself so I'm going to listen to somebody else tell me what I should do. Like, just tell me what to eat.

Literally clients will come to me like, "Can you just tell me what I should be doing?" I'm like, no. You know. Your body is freaking smart, your body knows what it needs. But we have layers and layers and layers of all this diet culture and diet thinking layered on top of us that is preventing us from actually tuning into our body.

So you're literally giving your power away to someone else or some organization to tell you what your body needs. And it may or may not work for you, right? And what happens with that is now you're trying, you're focused so much on the diet rules to get it right so that you can be thin so you can finally live the life that you want that you're obsessed with the food you're eating, when you're eating, how much you're eating.

Did you count your calories? What about macros? I should track that Oh my God, I didn't exercise today, I'm going to gain weight. You're wasting so much mental energy on getting the rules right, that you're not even listening to your body.

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And we also are taught to fight our body. A lot of times diets are restrictive, right? They're super restrictive, whether it be by the amount of food that you can eat or what you can eat, that your body is like, physically hungry and you're like, "My body is failing me because it's hungry." No, your body needs energy. That is why your body is hungry. But we're like, no, I cannot listen to it right?

Or maybe you're craving chips because your body needs salt. And you're like, "Oh my God, I'm so out of control with food." No, your body just needs something. But we are taught to not listen to ourselves because we are obviously not trustworthy. We don't know what's best for us. So that really is the number one reason why diets don't work.

It's the rules that don't necessarily work for you. It's the obsessive thinking that that creates that gets you in touch with your body and what it actually needs, and it's destructive. But we think that that is the answer.

Jill: Because when we fail at a diet, right, we don't think, oh, the diet failed me, or that wasn't the right way of eating. We think I have no self-control.

Jen: 100%, because people will tell me like, "No, no, no, keto worked. I totally lost weight on keto." I'm like if you're trying to lose weight again, keto did not work. Diets will work in the short term. You can lose weight and your health measures will get better. But long-term, science says this, like long-term diets do not work.

But somebody will be like, "No, oh my God, like keto, I totally dropped weight really quick and I looked amazing." And then you gained all the weight back so it did not work. But it really screws with our thinking because we think we're the problem, not that keto was the problem or whatever diet, fill in the blank diet.

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Jill: Yeah.

Jen: So we think that, of course, again, just like moving around in the society like, oh, I don't fit into the chair, I'm the problem. Not the chair, I'm the problem. I wasn't successful on this diet, it's not the diet's fault, it's my fault. We just blame ourselves, which then layers shame on top of it, which makes us go, "We have to figure this out now." And there becomes a sense of urgency to lose the weight.

Jill: Yeah. And then it like throws us into the, oh, well, the only thing I know how to do is restrict or follow these rules or whatever. Because I think the urgency precludes us from taking the time to actually listen, right? Because we think, "I've got to lose it now. I've got to start now and I've got to get it off fast."

It's so funny, I don't have time to fuck around with listening to my body and figuring out what works for me because I got to lose this weight. And then meanwhile you're like, okay, I lose 20 pounds really fast and then I can't take it anymore and I gain it all back. And now you're even heavier than before and farther on down the road and you're like, but I don't have time to fuck around.

Jen: I don't have time for this. Or people will be like, no, no, I'll deal with that nonsense once I lose the weight. I'll work on my brain and my thoughts once I'm skinny.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: It's like that's actually not how it works.

Jill: Yeah, exactly.

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Jen: But we want it to work that way because we think that life is going to be better when we're skinny.

Jill: Yeah. So this is a myth, actually I don't know if this is a myth or not. This is something that my, I mean, because I definitely still have plenty of diet mentality in my brain. I feel like it's going to be a lifelong thing. But here's what happens in my brain when somebody says diets don't work, but it's okay to want to lose weight, just don't diet to do it.

And I'm like, if I'm not going to diet to lose the weight, how the fuck am I supposed to lose the weight, right? If I'm supposed to allow all the foods and listen to my body and blah, blah, blah, like that's not going to result in weight loss, that's going to result in weight gain. And I think a lot of people have that same reaction because they think the only way to change your body size is to follow some kind of a diet.

Jen: Totally, because that's what we've been taught.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: Oh, just move your body more and eat less and you'll lose weight. That's actually not true, right? So it does break your brain to be like, wait a minute, so I want to lose weight, but I'm going to do it without dieting? Like, that doesn't even make any sense, what kind of sham are you selling here?

Jill: It's like I want to fly, but I'm going to do it without an airplane.

Jen: Yeah. So it does, it really does cause a lot of people confusion and stress and disbelief. So one of the first things I teach people when I work with them is they have to start to allow all foods. That in and of itself is the

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hardest work for somebody to do if they've been dieting forever because diet culture teaches us that food is bad or it's good.

And the thing that's really screwed up about that is depending on what diet you're doing, it depends on if the food is good or bad. So you're like, "Wait a minute, on Atkins this was bad. I wasn't supposed to eat this, but on this diet I'm allowed." So there's like this dissonance in your brain about like, I don't even know. And you're wasting all this time thinking about this food, like should I or shouldn't I eat it.

But truly allowing all the food is hard work because you have to literally let go of all of the stupid diet rules that you have around food. So this is what happens is we label food as good or bad, right? And it depends on the diet, what's good or bad, whatever the flavor of the day is. And then when we actually choose to eat those foods, we then label ourselves as good or bad.

So for example, if you eat chocolate cake, you're like, "Oh my God, I was so bad today, do you know how many pieces of chocolate cake I ate? Like, shame on me." Right? Or, "I was so good today, I had a salad for lunch and at dinner I had a chicken and broccoli. I was so good today."

So now we're not only labeling judgment and morality to the food, but now we're taking that judgment and laying it on ourselves based on how we're eating or not. It's so screwed up. Food does not determine if you're a good or bad person, like at all. But when we're taught that it just makes sense.

And everyone, people who don't even diet will say like, "Oh, should you really eat that?" Or I have a friend who's really thin and he'll eat ice cream and he's like, "I know I shouldn't have ate that ice cream." Why?

Jill: That's fascinating.

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Jen: It's so crazy. But it's so prevalent in our society, so of course we think that way. So that is like foundational work when you start to break up with dieting, and it is the hardest work to do. Because what happens is clients will say they're allowing food, but what they're doing is actually allowing with restriction because they still have that mentality.

This still happens to me and I freaking teach this. It's been ingrained in my brain where you'll say like, "Okay, I'm going to allow all foods." And then you'll eat, let's say, brownies were the thing. I used to never have brownies, can't have them. And now I'm like, oh, I'm going to have the brownies because Jen said I can have all the brownies.

So you start to eat the brownie and in your brain you're like, "I really shouldn't be eating this. Oh my God, what if Jen is wrong? I'm going to start to gain weight. Now I'm going to just eat sugar because I'm eating sugar and sugar is like cocaine, I'm addicted." You have this like spiral, so you're not even actually tasting the food that you're eating and you're definitely not enjoying it, right? Because you've now just put a pile of shame on top of yourself for allowing all the foods.

So I call that allowing with restriction, and that's the tricky part of this, is to be able to catch that story that you're telling yourself when you're eating something that in the past was considered a bad food or an off limit food. Does that make sense?

Jill: Yeah, it does. And like one of the things that you taught me many months ago, because we were talking about how restrictive diets don't work and I was like, "Well, I'm not on a restricted diet, I eat everything I want." And you're like, yes, but you're restricting it in your mind. And then you're beating yourself up for not complying with your own restrictions.

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And so you can be somebody who routinely eats whatever she wants and not be allowing the foods, which is exactly what you just said. But I think when I first started doing this work, I was kind of like, well, none of this applies to me because I don't restrict. And like, well, do you think that you shouldn't be eating what you're eating? And I'm like, yeah, and you're like, well, you're restricting your food.

Jen: Hello restriction.

Jill: Yeah, it's not just an act, it's a thought.

Jen: It's a thought. Shocking, it's a thought. Damn it, those thoughts. Always the freaking thoughts. Yeah, so that is the work, is to be able to catch yourself doing it. And it is true work because we do it on default, especially if you've been doing this for as long as I had been dieting, like it's just there. It literally is just there and you have to gain that awareness of what's going on in your brain when you are trying to allow the foods.

And sometimes it is, like some people will say like, "All right, I'm going to go all in and try to allow all foods." Most times people have to introduce foods in so that they can start to trust themselves with all the foods.

Now, the other thing that people will say is like, oh, okay, so if you're saying I can eat all the foods, that means I'm going to gain 600 pounds and I'm going to be sitting on the couch just eating bonbons. That is actually not true.

Jill: I'm just like, I'm sorry, sitting on the couch eating bonbons is a problem? What?

Jen: That sounds like heaven to me.

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Jill: I know, right?

Jen: Sign me up.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: But because in the past you're either like on diet or off diet, so when you're off diet you're "allowing all the foods." But you're truly not, you're just like, let me just binge on the foods, I'm going to eat it as fast as I can. I'm not going to taste it because I'm not supposed to have it, right? That's what I call off diet mentality. That is not what allowing all the foods means, right? This is not like, here's your free pass to binge.

Now, if you've been restricting for a long time and have not been eating a fair amount of calories, enough to support your body, you probably are going to be hungrier and eat more than you think that you should. But if your body is hungry, it's because your body needs the food.

And I'd say somewhat nuanced, but I don't even know if it's nuanced, allowing all the foods, truly allowing all the foods and tasting and enjoying is not off diet mentality. This is not like a free for all binge. But when you've been dieting for so long, that is exactly the first message you hear, like, woo-hoo, I get to eat all the foods, right?

Jill: And that's not necessarily a problem, right? For your brain to suddenly be like, woo-hoo, I get to eat all the foods.

Jen: It's not a problem:

Jill: Do you just indulge that and you just say fuck, yeah, let's go?

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Jen: Let's go. Because that's the other thing is, so what if you want to eat brownies for the next two weeks? I'm telling you after two weeks you'll be like, I do not need to see another brownie to save my life. Because when you actually train yourself that you can eat and allow all the foods, your body will be like, oh, okay, we can have this tomorrow.

It is the restriction that leads to the overeating. Once you say you can't have something, of course you want it. But if you truly allow yourself, not just with the restriction, truly allow yourself, you're going to be like, all right, I had a brownie, I don't need to eat the whole pan, right?

And that it does take work because you have to peel away and work at the thoughts that are preventing you from getting to that place. But yeah, and so what if initially you're like, I'm going to town and I'm literally just going to eat whatever I want without that restrictive thinking. That is the pathway to allowing all foods.

And it seems so counterintuitive, but it is literally the restriction of food that is keeping you in that binge cycle, that diet off diet.

Jill: And even if you gain 20 pounds, even if you gain 50 pounds, people are like, well, that's a problem. It's like actually, that's not a problem if your belief system is that my weight does not define my worth, right? The only time that weight gain is a problem is if you have a belief system that I need to look a certain way to feel good about myself. And so I think that needs to be peeled away as well.

Jen: It does.

Jill: Because otherwise, yeah, I can allow all the foods but if I gain weight, that's going to be a huge problem for me. It's really not. It's not, for most

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people it's not. I mean, unless you're like a police officer and you have to fit into your uniform. But also I'm pretty sure they sell bigger uniforms.

Jen: You can probably get bigger uniforms. I've seen some of our local police, it's all good. Yeah, but exactly and that is, it is a thinking problem, right? It's the thoughts that you have about your body and your body size and how it works in the world.

And I will say again that there is some limitations physically, but you can do that work on yourself and on your body. But I will tell you, and this is the space that I got to, I was so fricking exhausted from trying to fix myself and trying to lose the weight unsuccessfully time and time again, I was like, I don't even care.

And I was like, I am just going to get comfortable on this body because obviously this is the body I was given. And I was fine with that, even if that meant gaining weight. Because I was so miserable, and so hungry, and so achy from all day over exercise that I was like, I can't do this anymore. Something's got to be better.

And it is interesting how we think, like the pain, what do they say no pain, no gain? But that pain is like some sort of sign of success. I was like, that is like, super screwed up. I was not enjoying my life at all in an attempt to try to get to a place where I can enjoy my life. And I was like, I'm done.

So yeah, so to your point, like allowing yourself to gain weight is not a problem unless you make it a problem.

Jill: Yes, I think that's it, right? It's not a problem unless you make it a problem. And I think some people might do the work that you're teaching and lose weight, and other people might do the work and stay the same,

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and other people might do the work and gain weight. But the point is not to change your body, the point is to create a mental landscape that doesn't make you feel like shit all the time.

Jen: It's acceptance. It's like literally accepting and loving yourself as it is. And that's hard. I used to hear people be like, "Well, if you'd just love yourself," and like I don't even know what that means, right? Like I can love myself when I'm thin. But it really is about acceptance, right? And what story are you telling yourself about your life, your body, whatever? And can you turn it to a place where like this is me and I accept my body exactly as it is?

I've had some recent epiphanies in Alaska recently. I don't like to be places where I could die.

Jill: Alaska is always trying to kill you, this is what we learned.

Jen: Literally, like Alaska was always trying to kill us. Beautiful, amazing place. But I caught myself like in this, and this is how I spent my life, like wanting to be someone different than I am. I was like, I want to be somebody who actually loves nature and being around things that could kill me, right? Because I saw people thoroughly enjoy it.

People enjoyed it and I was like, I don't. And I was at first judging myself, and I was like, what am I judging myself? Oh, you don't want to die? Let's not judge yourself for that.

Jill: Okay, I think we need to explain to people specifically what we're talking about is walking around on a glacier next to a crevice.

Jen: On a glacier.

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Jill: Where the guide says, “We don’t know how deep that is, don’t fall in because we might not be able to get you out.” And we’re like, “What? We’re like two feet from that thing.”

Jen: And then then she’s like, “Okay, we’re going to go ahead and jump over it.”

Jill: What the fuck are you talking about?

Jen: This is not fun, I’m not having fun.

Jill: I’m sorry to interrupt, that was just funny.

Jen: No, it’s all good. It was very funny. We were also obviously sharing something deeply profound and life changing that has totally escaped my head.

Jill: You were talking about how when you were in Alaska you started to realize that...

Jen: Yeah, I was trying to be someone I wasn’t, right? Because I thought, and it was like this is literally how I spent my entire life. So the work really is lifelong work, especially when it’s so ingrained in us.

But I literally would spend my life trying to be someone I wasn’t. I was a fat woman who wanted to be thin, right? I wanted to be athletic. In Alaska I wanted to be somebody who really enjoyed being in nature and finding the excitement in that. And that’s not who I am. And I realized I’m still doing that, right?

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So it is lifelong work and it's just really owning and accepting who you are. It takes work though. It takes that untangling of the thoughts that we have built up and the messaging that we've received in a society that is still telling us that we should be different than how we are.

Jill: Yeah. Right, so like you're literally doing the work on yourself to change your thinking, and meanwhile continually getting bombarded with the same messaging that set you up to think that way in the first place. So it's not easy.

Jen: It's not easy. So of course people want to lose weight. Of course people want to diet, right? Of course they think that that's the right way, right? Like, oh, I just haven't found the right one. That's what I used to tell myself. There's nothing like the lure of a new diet too. Like, oh, this is going to be the one that finally is it.

And then you're two weeks in and you're like, this isn't it either, right? So there is constant messaging, so of course you want that. But if you are really to stop and think, especially those of you who have been dieting forever and ever, your own story tells you that diets don't work.

Jill: Oh God, that's so good. You are your own evidence.

Jen: You are.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: We can look at all the science, but you're your best self study.

Jill: Yeah, that's true. And this is not to say that there aren't some people out there who lose weight and keep it off, right?

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Jen: 100%.

Jill: It's not like, oh, you're never going to keep it off if you diet down there. But I think that the people who are successful with that have either done the mental work all the way along the way to create acceptance for themselves so that they don't, you know, that they're not in that weird spiral of like, oh, my God.

Or they are in that, for the rest of their life they're in that spiral of like they're obsessed with keeping the weight off and they're putting all this time and energy into maintaining a body that they've worked so hard to achieve. And they're terrified that they're going to lose that body. And so the only way to maintain it is to keep up that tight control.

Jen: 100%.

Jill: And what you're saying is there's a third option.

Jen: There is a third option, and it's so freeing. It's crazy, it's not an either or, there's a third option. And I always think about like now I see what I'm able to create in my own life because I have so much more mental space and much more mental energy to do other things and actually live the life now, that I thought thin was going to give me, right?

And it's so freeing. It is freeing. I mean, how many times have you gotten stressed out about a social event because you're like, "Oh, I don't know what they're serving, is that going to be on my diet?" There's so much stress that comes with living when you're dieting and you're in that mentality.

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When you can really just let go and figure out what works for your body, and it is trial and error. And it does start with doing the thought work around food. I mean, we have lots of thoughts about food, we have lots of thoughts about exercise. But when you can neutralize those things and figure out what works best for you, there's so much freedom in that.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: There's freedom to actually live your life instead of waiting to live your life.

Jill: Okay, I have a kind of weird question for you. So I also think that there's a population of people out there, because as we're talking about you lose the weight because you're obsessing over every detail, right? Like, I'm going to go to dinner and is there going to be the right food there for me? And you're counting your points, your calories, or whatever. And then to maintain the weight, you have to stay obsessed with it, right?

I think there's a population of people out there that actually find that comforting.

Jen: Oh yeah.

Jill: And can you speak to that a little bit?

Jen: I think it's control.

Jill: Yeah, right?

Jen: Yeah. And it's like especially if your life feels very out of control, you're life everywhere else, like this is one aspect that you can control. And I am

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by no means an eating disorder expert, so I'm not speaking as the expert. But having read studies, having known people who have struggled with that, an aspect of an eating disorder is that control. That aspect like this is something that I actually can control when everything else feels out of control.

Jill: Yeah, so I think that, and I don't know, I don't know if somebody who's like, "Yep, I really love just having that level of control over everything," is maybe not going to resonate with what we're talking about today. But I do feel like that there's also a level of anxiety that comes with thinking that you have to control everything.

So if this is you, if you're somebody who's like, "Listen, I actually like obsessing over the points and the calories because it just feels comforting to me, it feels like I've got things under control." You're actually always in control of what you eat whether you're eating a pan of brownies for dinner or whether you're eating a carefully measured and weighed salad with fat free dressing. You're still 100% in control.

I think there's this weird illusion we have that if we're eating a pan of brownies for dinner somehow we're out of control. Unless somebody force fed that to you, you're still in control of it.

Jen: Yeah, you're still making that decision.

Jill: So can you kind of maybe speak to that feeling of being out of control is really more of a thought than a truth.

Jen: It's 100% a thought.

Jill: Yeah.

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Jen: It always goes back to the thought. And it is because any action we take comes from our thoughts and our feelings, I know that you teach this to your runners. And it is just literally the way the world works.

So if you are thinking you're out of control with food and so you're like, "I'm going to tighten myself up and be in control with food and do X, Y, Z." That's a false sense of control, or that's a thought that I'm in control of food. Versus deciding it's a decision. It's deciding I'm going to sit and eat these brownies.

Like that is within my control because I've just made a decision, for whatever reason you're making that decision to do that. Whether it be because you need the comfort, you need to escape, that is still within your control because you're making a decision to have those. I don't know if that makes sense or answers your question.

Jill: No, it does. And it's like, you know what? I'm feeling really stressed out right now and here's what I'm going to do about it, I'm going to eat three brownies, or an entire pan of brownies, or whatever. That's like a controlled decision.

Jen: That's 100% a controlled decision. That's not like you were knocked out and somebody shoved it in your mouth, right? That literally is a decision that is within your control, right? With the same example of somebody like controlling every morsel that they eat and bringing their food to a social event, those are all decisions and all within your control.

And it is interesting because people will say like, "Oh my God, I'm so out of control with food." You're actually not. One, that is a thought which then drives your behavior. But you are literally making the decision to eat the foods that you're eating. You are making the decision to go zone out on

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Netflix because you just can't and you sit down with your pizza and your ice cream or whatever, right?

That is still a decision. That is still within your control. No one is forcing you to do anything. That's a hard reality for people to accept too, because it's like we want to blame everything else, like life and all of that. It's still within your power and within your control. And recognizing that, I actually think, gives your power back.

Jill: Yeah. Oh, I love that so much. Okay, so I have one more question for you. And this may come a little bit out of left field, but you're good at left field. And part of this is coming from a comment that I got, a series of comments I got on my Instagram today about how the whole point of life, which is kind of a broad statement, we should always be trying to optimize our health.

And I'm kind of like, okay, well, I'm pretty sure it doesn't say that in the constitution, or the 10 commandments, like there's nothing. There's like, don't murder, you can carry a gun, but there's nothing about like you shouldn't ever eat a pan of brownies because that's really bad for your health. Like there's nothing along those lines.

But I think a lot of us have been fed this sort of line of bullshit that it's morally superior, you know, like the fat thing aside, it's morally superior to always be working on your health. And then they're just like, okay, well, maybe I can allow a pan of brownies. I'm okay with the gaining weight, but what about my health? What about what it's doing to my health?

Can you speak a little bit to that, like about the kind of misguided belief that health is morality? I know that's a big can of worms, but I'd love your thoughts.

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Jen: I would love to share my thoughts on that because I do get messages on my Instagram that's like, you're encouraging obesity and people to be unhealthy. And what about setting an example for your kid? I'm like, my mom set an example for me by putting me on a diet and it was actually a really bad example.

So first of all, there's no such thing as like health, like what good health is. Literally all of this is just man-made bullshit. That's what pisses me off, there is no one definition of what is healthy. What is healthy for you, Jill, is not what is healthy for me. It depends on who you are as a person.

So let's just start there. There is no like, you have achieved health, boom, boom, boom, boom. And people have been like, well, your markers and blah, blah, blah. It is so individualized. So I just want to start with that, that there is no such thing as health.

Health is also not, like you don't actually need to be going after perfection with your health or optimizing your health, as you said. Morality is not linked to any of that, right? It's the same thing with food, like good foods and bad foods. We assign moral judgment around foods, which then assigns more moral judgment around us and we think that we are better.

Like literally, I just heard this term and I can't believe I just heard it. It was thinsplaining, it's like mansplaining but thin.

Jill: Oh my God, that's the best.

Jen: Isn't that like the best?

Jill: I had somebody thinsplain to me today, they were like, "I weighed 270 pounds and now I weigh 140, and this is all the reasons why you're wrong

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about fat people.” I'm like, just because you used to be a fat person doesn't mean, it doesn't make you a doctor, a nutritionist.

Jen: No.

Jill: Like you're just somebody who lost 130 pounds and quite frankly you're probably going to gain it back.

Jen: Right, now you're not the expert. You are not morally superior because you did it. That is exactly it.

Jill: Yes.

Jen: But that person now thinks they're morally superior because our society teaches us that if you, one, because obviously if you're able to lose the weight and keep it off, you're a better person than everyone else, right? So this is the messaging that we get.

So that person is like, “Listen, I did it. So I'm going to tell you.” But I was like that is such a good word. Thinsplaining, I don't know why, I literally just heard that. I was like that's fantastic.

Jill: Thinsplaining, boom.

Jen: Yeah, so there is no morality, like you are not a better person if you are trying to achieve optimal health. You are not a worse person if you just want to lay around and not do anything. You get to decide what's best for you.

And I think that's the biggest thing, like people get tripped up when I say you literally are the only one who knows what's best for you. Kind of like me

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with like using Alaska as a trip. Like I was like, no, no, I've got to be a neutral number. That is not what's best for me. It created a lot of anxiety for me and it wasn't good.

So I don't know if that answered your question. But literally, there is no such thing as good health. There is not like this is this and you have achieved all things, right? And there is also you're not a better person, you're not a great character, your moral compass isn't higher or greater if you achieve such and such. There's literally no such thing. You are literally the only one who knows what's best for you.

You know, I'll use sleep as an example. Some people are like, oh, you need seven to eight hours of sleep every night. And if you don't get it, that's not good for your health. There are literally people who are fine with five hours of sleep, I am not one of them. But I don't think I'm a better person because I get my seven to eight hours of sleep every night and somebody else gets their five, right? That's what works best for them.

Jill: Yeah, I think that's it. I mean the whole concept of good health, like, yes, you can go to the doctor's office and they can do blood work and they can say, well, statistically when your numbers are within these sets of ranges, we consider that optimum body operating parameters or whatever.

But it's like being a slow runner, you don't go to the dictionary and say, like there's no definition of pace when you look up running in the dictionary. It's like literally just a different way of moving your body. There's no definition of blood markers or any other data when you look up good health in the dictionary. Because it's individual and what means healthy to one person is something different for somebody else.

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One person might be like, listen, I have to keep my cholesterol under 150 or my health is out of control. And another person might be like, hey, I'm fine with my total cholesterol being 200. I'm good, I feel great, my heart is good. So it's just like this belief that we should all be like striving to this standard of good health that even the doctors can't agree on what is best.

Jen: Right.

Jill: Like, fuck that. I get so sick and tired.

Jen: It's exhausting.

Jill: Yeah. And then also it's like, also, what if I just don't care about my health and I don't give a fuck and I just want to be unhealthy? Like, that's also my right.

Jen: Your choice because it's your fucking life.

Jill: Exactly. Yeah, I think that's one of the biggest issues I have with the diet and fitness industry, is that we're constantly being told and it's implied that you are a better person if you are working towards these goals, and it's just not true. You just get to be an amazing person.

Jen: No matter what.

Jill: Yeah, no matter what.

Jen: No matter what.

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Jill: Okay, this has been an amazing conversation. Before we wrap and tell everybody how they can follow you, how they can work with you, is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't cover?

Jen: So I think one of the messages I like to say is, and especially this is kind of like full circle to what we started with. And I just want people to know it is literally up to you how you live your life. So you do not need to give up the desire to lose weight, you do not need to give up your desire to be healthy.

You can embrace your body at the size that it is and not want to lose weight. You can be open to gaining weight. You can be open to starting to run, right, and in any way. It is literally up to you to decide what's best for you. The only thing I will say that you don't, you should never ever do is diet to achieve those things.

So I think that is like the biggest message and the biggest takeaway, is really just taking your power back and deciding what is best for you, not based on what somebody else thinks is what is best for you. Like you can take the information, you can look at all the stuff, but you are literally the only person who knows what's best for you. And this is your one life, live it the way you want to fucking live it.

Jill: Yeah. Oh my God, so good. And also if you want to lose weight, have at.

Jen: Have at it.

Jill: Right?

Jen: 100%.

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Jill: I feel like what we've learned on this show is that stopping the diet mentality doesn't preclude you losing weight, it just might not happen in the timeline that you're looking for, right? You're not going to have that big 20 pound drop of weight that everybody gets so excited about, right?

Jen: Until they gain it back.

Jill: Yeah, it's just a whole different way. You have to drop everything you've ever believed about health and diet and all of that and recreate it from the ground up.

Jen: Yes, for yourself.

Jill: Yeah.

Jen: Based on your needs.

Jill: Which leads me to how can people find you? Because that's kind of what you do, is help people rebuild their whole...

Jen: That is kind of what I do, the whole thing.

Jill: Yeah. So tell us what you do. How can people work with you? What have you got out there for folks?

Jen: So I do literally work with people in helping them drop the diet mentality and determine what health is for them. And it is individual, so I work one on one with clients. And we figure out, we set what the goal and the intention of time together is going to be. And from that we work on unraveling, right?

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And it is work. There's a lot of unraveling, so that is the work I do. And like I said, I work one on one with women who want to break up with diet culture, but still don't want to give up their health. So that is the aspect that I work with. Some people that I work with want to lose weight, some people don't, some people just want to figure out how to move around and live the life that they want now. So that is the work that I can do.

And you can find how to work with me on my website at jenmadden.com. I have a fun little work with me tab so it's nice and easy to find. And you can also follow me on Instagram, Jen Madden Coaching. I'm learning how to do all the fun things, thanks to my friend Jill Angie on Instagram.

Jill: I think they need to look up the Instagram reel that we did together dancing to Lizzo.

Jen: Oh my God, that was so fun in Alaska.

Jill: Yeah, that was fun.

Jen: She made me dance, and I did it. And I had fun.

Jill: You were really good at it. It was fun. That was fun. But also I think people can, if they want to book like a free call with you, right, like that's a thing.

Jen: 100%, yes. You can 100% set up a free call with me. And literally on that call we coach. We talk about where you're at in your journey. We do a little coaching together and you will walk away from that, I really do promise you will walk away with a shift in your thinking just from that call. That is the power of coaching.

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And it gives you a taste of what it's like to work with me. So you can make a decision right from there. So yes, you can book a free call with me. Literally, it's called Chat with Jen. And you can find that on jenmadden.com.

Jill: I love this. All right.

Jen: Thank you.

Jill: All right, everyone, thank you for joining us. And, Jen, thank you for sharing yourself.

Jen: This was fun, thanks for having me on.

Jill: I know, it's always fun. It's always fun. And yeah, we'll have all of Jen's links in the show notes, but also Jen Madden Coaching on Instagram, jenmadden.com, that's two Ds, M-A-D-D-E-N, one N, two Ds. And go sign up for a free call with Jen because she really is pretty life changing to speak with her. I cannot speak highly enough of you.

Jen: Thank you.

Jill: My friend, thank you so much for being here.

Jen: You're welcome.

Hey, real quick before you go, if you enjoyed listening to this episode you have got to check out Up And Running. It's my 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to

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notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrunning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.