DR SARA GOTTFRIED

What to Do When You Fall Off the Wagon and Have a Food Meltdown
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In my new book, *The Hormone Reset Diet*, I came clean and shared my history as a food addict. While I’ve been binge-free for about 10 years, there’s an occasional moment when I can’t stop eating the truffle fries or one square of chocolate doesn’t sate my appetite. While I don’t trigger a no holds barred journey to binge-land, it shines a spotlight on my old habit of eating to soothe my emotions. I’ve got better strategies in place now, but I still come up against that raw pain. Maybe you do too.

Anne Lamott describes the pain well when she recently succumbed to an apple fritter: “I was so lost, and I couldn’t follow the bread crumbs back to the path of mental health, because I’d eaten them all. So I ended up eating junk, off and on, until bedtime. It is hard to remember that you are a cherished spiritual being when you’re burping up apple fritters and Cheetos.” She describes the next day being filled with guilt, shame, self-hatred and sentencing, promises, and punishment. It’s an aftermath so painful that it can, often, only be soothed by more eating, an irony that fuels the cycle. Oh, Annie, we get it!

How to Recover from Falling off the Wagon

Whether you slipped and had a bite of something you are trying to eliminate, ate more at dinner than you planned, or found yourself face down in sea of Mexican food and raw cookie dough it all falls under “I blew it” feeling.

What happened? You were so motivated, so determined!

You’re human. It happens. Now, graciously accept that reality and let’s move on with it.
You and I are in this for the long haul. This detox is a journey, not a sprint.

You just stepped into one the many booby traps hidden along the path to healthier you. Fortunately, booby traps aren’t bear traps—you can free yourself, forgive yourself and get back on track toward achieving your goals ... and be all the wiser for getting through it.

The Detox has been carefully designed and tried and is evidence based to make you feel nourished and free from cravings. The goal is break unhealthy food seduction by changing your biochemistry. We have previous discussed ways to avoid temptation and slippery places. 

*(insert a link about prep)* Fair enough, you say, putting out a forest fire before it starts is always best but talk to me about what can I do when the damage is already done?

**Step 1: Forgive yourself.** That’s right. Pick yourself up. Be extra gentle with yourself. Get right back on plan. The repercussions from a slip will not harm you. Beating yourself up, wallowing in guilty, and feeding into the black and white way of thinking i.e. “oh, crap, I blew it I may as well eat the whole world” THAT is what will harm you. Perfectionism and extremism can both make you fat. Negative mindset actually fuels the flames of inflammation as much or more than eating “bad” food. Studies show that feeling guilt about food can actually impair your immune system.¹

Forgiving yourself is one of the strongest tools in your personal toolbox. What’s done is done, and there’s simply no point in assigning guilt, shame or blame to your actions. We all slip up from time to time, and make choices we wish we hadn’t. You can’t change the past, but you can decide to treat yourself with kindness and compassion, which will change your future. Put a rubber band around your wrist and snap it any time you have a thought of shame or guilt or wanting to punish yourself.²
Taking a few wrong dietary turns doesn’t mean you’re a terrible person, and you haven’t utterly destroyed your health or severely impaired your physical healing. Of course all of the little choices matter, yet we also need to put things in perspective: a few days of sub-optimal eating isn’t going to make you sick when you rock the Detox diet the rest of the time.

The ultimate way to keep yourself on the wagon or give yourself a boost back on if you have fallen off is to **have a plan, do the prep work, trust the process and stay the course.**

**Step 2: Manage your false hunger:** if you have a “food hangover” your blood sugar may fluctuate wildly. This will cause false hunger and a powerful desire to eat more sugar and/or carbs.

**Step 3: Write in your food journal.** What was happening in the day and moments before the incident? Were you hungry, cranky, sleep deprived? Feeling sad or lonely? Missing a certain food?

**Step 4: Engage in exercise:** Whether your go to is sprints or dancing or yoga, go sweat it out. It will quell the toxic emotions that linger after a binge.

**Step 5: Resume normal eating habits.** Repeat after me: Do not restrict. As long as your long-term habits are strong you’ll leave the binge in the rearview. Eat breakfast. Consume nutritionally-dense meals that satisfy you that have protein, fiber, veggies and good fats.

**Step 6: Drink extra water.** Water is essential to our detoxification processes because it flushes all of the contaminants away. It helps us get rid of wastes, reduces fluid retention and bloating, regulates bowel movements and fights inflammation. Make your water bottle one of your new besties.

**Step 7: Make a meal plan.** Is your fridge and pantry stocked with what you need for the week? Sketch out your meals and snacks for the next few days after your food binge. In our Detox, we offer you both “Meal Plan Basics” (for how to plan your meals), plus omnivore and vegetarian meal plans.

**Step 8: Read it out.** I too take comfort in reading self-help and motivation books. Check out [Charles Duhigg](http://www.charlesduhigg.com) I also get a lot of insight into food addiction from writers such as [Kay Shepard](http://www.kayshepard.com) and [Geneen Roth](http://www.geneenroth.com). Other good reads are [Food: The Good Girl’s Drug](http://www.foodthegoodgirlsdrug.com) and Dr. Christopher Fairburn’s [Overcoming Binge Eating](http://www.overcomingbingeeating.com).
Learning what your triggers and obstacles are is powerful information. Sometimes, in order to keep your skills sharp you need to go back and review your source materials. Check in with yourself; be proactive about giving yourself a goal “jump start” ever so often. Now turn your so-called “failure” into something positive. In other words, take your slip and turn it into a “aha” teaching moment.

Eventually, acceptance that you’re going to mess up once in awhile and the realization that it’s not the end of the world may even take care of having to manage slip-ups. Keep in touch with me about how that works out for you.

One of my favorite quotes came from the mouth of my 4 year old who wisely once said “I want to BE a red velvet cupcake” it’s true, you don’t want a cupcake, you want to be a cupcake.

Few things are as rewarding as feeling your best. Let’s collectively climb back on and circle all of our wagons.

Onward.

Dr. Sara
About Dr. Sara

Dr. Sara Gottfried, M.D. teaches women how to balance their hormones naturally so they can rock their mission. She is a Harvard-educated physician, speaker and New York Times bestselling author of The Hormone Cure (check out the new paperback from Simon & Schuster, 2014). She is board-certified in Obstetrics and Gynecology, and is regularly featured in magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Redbook, O Magazine, and Yoga Journal. Known for effortlessly blending the seriousness of women’s health with playfulness and humor, Dr. Sara’s mission is to help women lose weight, feel great, and be vital from their cells to their soul. Work with her online by joining her semi-annual detox for 21 days! Learn more at www.saragottfriedmd.com.

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