Thanks for tuning in to this episode. I do want to let you know that if you have or have had any kind of struggles with body image, weight, dieting or your relationship with food, I hope you will gain some comfort and insights from this episode – however, I would also like you to consider that the topic we're covering might not be in your best interest if it leads to anxiety or other triggering emotions.

As always, I try not to share anything too specific or triggering on the podcast, but it’s not possible to predict how different people will react to some of the information we discuss.

So just know that it's important for you to do what you need to do in order to take care of yourself.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy the episode

[00:00:00] **Melissa:** Hello, and welcome to the sound bites podcast. Today's episode is about having a better relationship with your body and with food: embracing your body, intuitive eating, and how our bodies have innate wisdom that we can tap into and learn how to take better care of ourselves. My guest today is Ilene Leshinsky.

She's a psychotherapist and a body image specialist who has been working with women for 30 years to help them find peace in mind, body and spirit. She's an author, an intuitive energy healer and the founder of find body freedom, a program for women who want to change their relationship with their bodies.

Ilene received her master of social work degree from Boston university in 1995 and graduated from an intuitive healer program in 2022.

Welcome to the show, Ilene.

[00:00:56] **Ilene:** Thank you, Melissa. I'm so happy to be here.

[00:01:00] **Melissa:** I am excited to talk with you. We chatted briefly before today's interview just to get to know each other a little bit.

And so I would love for you to share more about your background and how you got interested in this type of work, including what you shared with me about your own personal story or journey. I would love for you to share that with the listeners and have them get to know you as well.

[00:01:27] **Ilene:** Oh, thank you. So I'm going to make a long story short. I hope.

[00:01:33] **Melissa:** Take as much time as you want.

[00:01:35] **Ilene:** Well, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So I come to this experience of knowing about the innate wisdom of the body and knowing that the body is my master teacher. I come to the whole experience of psychotherapy with hundreds of clients over 30 years, because I grew up a fat girl.

Hmm. And that's very important to state right out of the gate because being considered very overweight, fat, since I was well, by the time I reached the age of five, had a significant impact on my life. I was, in my childhood, shamed for my body shape and size. My eating habits with my family at the dinner table were scrutinized.

I was asked questions like, do you really need that extra helping? And as a result I became by the time, I can't remember exactly, but I became a sneak eater. And I would hide food. I'd take quarters from the coin jar to have enough to go buy candy bars at the local store. So my mother would, she never said anything until I was an adult, but she would watch me walk home from school on the way home to lunch.

She would watch me eating, sneak eating, a candy bar before I got home for lunch. Like it was an appetizer. My goodness.

And so all through childhood, I was shamed. I felt bad about my body. I got these messages and in adolescence that didn't change. Except the messages weren't coming from anyone outside of me, the messages were coming from myself from - I had internalized all those messages.

And even though I know at a point in time, because I can see pictures that I was no longer, the very fat kid that I thought I was. I thought that I was unacceptable in the body I was in. I went to college, things changed outwardly dramatically. I was away from a chaotic family home. I was away from being scrutinized.

I was away from my having to, in many ways, take care of my parents when I was living at home. I was free. I was free. And as a result of that, my freshman year of college, some people gained 15. I lost 40 pounds. Wow. And so I came back after my freshman year of college, like a different person and wasn't that wonderful? Yeah.

It screwed with my head, not so great. But in addition to that, it did not in any way address the emotional roller coaster that I had been on for most of my life and even now more so, because for the first time in my life, I'm getting attention from boys, so the opposite sex for the first time was now interested, and I was both excited about that and extraordinarily angry about that.

So I'm going to fast forward now for my whole twenties and into my early thirties, I fluctuated back and forth from compulsive overeating, today it would be considered binge eating to highly restrictive food behaviors, today. Did I display some anorexic tendencies? Absolutely. I floated back and forth on that continuum.

I was lost and I was depressed and anxious and quite miserable actually. And so my relationship with my body was lousy. My relationship with food was chaotic and what had I learned? I learned. Nothing because I was still trying to control my eating behaviors, not in service of being healthy which is what I do now and help women do.

But in service of keeping my body acceptable in the size and shape that I thought would get me the attention that I had been deprived of when I was a child and I could go on and on and on about that. But the point being, I came to the realization one day and actually it kind of, sort of happened when I got this, now I would call it an intuitive hit. Hmm. I wanted tuna fish. Out in the park with my dog and I got this taste in my mouth and I got a vision of tuna fish salad in my mind. And I said, I want tuna. And basically what it was my body's way of saying Ilene. You no really don't eat tuna, but this is my body saying my way of saying to you, you need some protein.

Hmm. And you actually really do like tuna fish. So that was my entree into understanding that there was something else at play here that I could tap into what I now know as my innate body wisdom in order to help direct me about what to eat, how much to eat, when to eat. Back then I was clueless. All I knew was I just got this taste for tuna fish.

Okay. And I'm very thankful for that. So again, fast forward a little bit. I couldn't do this by myself. Like I said, I was lost. I couldn't figure it out. I had tried every diet on the market. Every diet known to womankind. I say that very specifically because we're the ones who still to this day fuel the diet industry.

And so I joined weight Watchers and I loved weight Watchers. I loved the community of women. I loved weight Watchers taught me to enjoy and eat regularly fruits and vegetables. I didn't know the food group existed before. I was not a vegetable eater or that much fruit eater either. Anyway, I loved it so much, I was not only a member, I became a leader and I became a trainer of other leaders in the weight Watchers community. And then something happened. I'm in a meeting in Brookline, Massachusetts on a Wednesday night. And I'm sitting in front of 90 women who are looking at me like I am the answer to all of their questions about weight loss and more importantly, actually, weight maintenance.

And they're looking at me hungrily for the information, and there is a voice screaming in my head. I, you can't see me, but I'm pointing now to the right side because that's where it was happening. Ilene, you are such a fraud and hypocrite because you just binged. So that thought is going on. And there was another thought that then started to whisper and the whisper became a little louder.

But before I tell you about that voice, I need to tell you about the binge. And this is what happens with a diet mentality. And this is what happens with someone who actually believed that if I followed “fill in the blank” south beach, Atkins, weight Watchers, if I followed it to the letter of the law, I would achieve my perfect body and I would be acceptable and find a man and get married and have the American dream, so to speak.

Okay. It sounds really silly now, and that wasn't totally true because I was still an independent woman. I had my own home that I purchased. I had my own business that I had created, but the point is underneath everything there that still lived and that kind of propelled me to operate in this certain way.

The binge was this, and please promise you won't laugh. And I can't, I can ask the listeners not to laugh. Also. Back in the day, weight Watchers had a serving size - they were called exchanges then - of three gram crackers. Okay. My binge was four, four gram crackers, not four boxes. Not for sleeves, but four gram crackers.

And I listened to that. I listened even then. And I'm saying, how ludicrous is this? I had one more than the serving size, but I was a rule follower. I still am a rule follower. And to me, that constituted a binge. So this voice is screaming over here. The other voice is saying, Ilene, really listen to yourself here, how silly. You are the only one who can know what's best for your body. No diet program, no expert external to you. This is going on while the other voice now is subsiding in my head. Thank God. You are the one who will know when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat. And it was at that time at that moment, find body freedom was born.

Hmm. Now it wasn't called find body freedom at the time - it's gone through two iterations since, but the point being right after that meeting, I started, I knew that ultimately I was going to leave weight Watchers and create my own program based on the message basically that I was being sent. That I am the expert, but I'm not alone.

If I'm the expert, then each one of us women, and we could add men to that but each one of us is the expert on our own bodies. So with a lot of reading, a lot of research, I created the program that I have been offering to women since. And this meeting that I'm talking about was in 1992.

[00:13:19] **Melissa:** Wow. Well, thank you for sharing part of your journey and your story, and, and I I'd love for you to continue to weave some stories in as we go through our conversation today, because it's very telling, it just helps us to get to know you and your struggles that so many people can relate to.

And yeah, as you said, this meeting was in 1992, and that really was the turning point for you. It was. To shift your thinking and your thoughts and your behavior. and I know some of the, like you said, the name find body freedom has changed - a couple iterations along the way. We talk about intuitive eating today and some dietitians out there tend to think that it's a new thing.

Well, maybe we didn't always call it intuitive eating, but I know myself as a dietitian, my first job out of graduate school was in 1993. I know that I talked with patients about mindfulness and intuitive eating under some other name. And then Evelyn Tribole came out with her book, intuitive eating. And it's my understanding, like you were interested in working in that space before that book came out and you also have a fun story to share with regard to Geneen Roth, who was also a pioneer in this space, not a dietitian, but certainly a pioneer in the body acceptance and like just normalizing our, our eating and our behaviors and our thoughts around that. And I attended a workshop of hers and, and have most of her books, but I understand that you worked directly with her. So tell us a little bit about that.

[00:14:59] **Ilene:** Well, I have not worked directly with her.

I think what I shared with you in our earlier talk was this woman I consider my mentor. I mean, she has been a guide for me, both personally and professionally, and I've never met the woman. However, I've read every book she's written and I have used most of her principles and you're absolutely right about the point of many of us eating in an attuned way prior to Evelyn's intuitive eating book. And this is what's really important - this was going on for probably a decade or more prior to that book coming out, there were lots of women and many of them feminists who were saying that this stuff around dieting and weight and weight loss was a feminist issue.

Very important in today's culture. I think that we're talking about a woman and how she's perceived, but Geneen calls it demand feeding We feed ourselves on demand. I used the term attuned eating or natural eating. Other people have used that as well. And this is the thing that struck me was that she was a lifetime member of weight Watchers as was I.

Mm. I mean, she had gone through the program, lost the weight, gained the weight, lost the weight, gained the weight, lost the weight. She was a lifetime member though. She tore up her membership card. And when I read that in, I'm not sure if it was her first book, but it was around that period of time. I tore up my membership card also. I said, I can't do this anymore because even though I was a member, a leader, a trainer at that point in time, I was weighing myself probably upwards to five times a day. Wow. I obsessed about every morsel of food I put in my mouth. This is not supposed to happen when you are the guru. And I remember specifically, Melissa, thinking this is the most incredible thing in the world.

I can have 10 slices of diet bread a day, according to the weight Watchers protocol. Yay. I mean, who eats 10? I mean, not a lot of people. I know eat 10 slices of bread a day, right? So Geneen gave me the courage to step into a different way of being in relationship with food and as a result, a different way of being in relationship with my body.

Because my body is not designed to be the college freshman in between freshman and sophomore year of college, 40 pounds lighter than when I entered. My body is not designed to be that thin. And I am not a thin woman. I don't know what that means though anymore, because even you said I'm an author.

I wrote a book which was a compilation of a series of articles that I had written when I was in private practice. Every month I wrote for a women's magazine in Plattsburgh, New York called Jill magazine. And one of the articles that I wrote, and this was really a question to myself, not only to my readers, if I'm not thin, does that mean I'm fat?

Because it's almost like in this culture, you are one or the other, you are fat or you're thin. Well, what happens to a lot of us who are smack dab in the middle, those, you know, medium size people. Where are we? And is that a body type that's embraced? Well, no. I mean, certainly there are organizations that applaud larger women, rounder women, women with poundage on them.

And they're clearly we know so much of our culture applauds if we're thin, bordering on at some moments in time skinny and you know what happened to the majority of women in the world who are right smack dab in the middle.

[00:19:53] **Melissa:** Right. So, so there's a lot there. We've touched on your history. I want to come back to shame in a little bit and the whole environment that you were in at home, and then you were in a completely different environment when you went off to college.

And that's interesting too. But you touched on the feminist idea. You talked about something with me when we talked before about women's bodies or weight or size related to currency. Yeah. And it really like jolted me. I would love to explore that topic a little bit with you. Over the past 30 years, you've learned a lot in your work, in your own personal journey, but also working with other women.

And you're gonna share a lot of those learnings with us today, but I thought maybe it would be interesting to talk a little bit about that diet culture history, or trends, and specifically this concept of currency.

[00:20:44] **Ilene:** I would love to do that with you. And I wanna start off with just a bit of a history lesson.

Okay? perfect. In the late 1800s skinny women, thin women were not en Vogue. They were using corsets and bustiers in order to enhance their breasts. Not that that's still not going on now, but also bustles that would be part of their undergarments in order to give them a shapely rear end. And of course that's going on now, too, but for different reason, These were thin women who did not see themselves of value.

Men did not value a thin woman, then, and a lot of the stuff around currency is attached to socio culturally and even politically men's attraction to us, women. Then we take it into the 1920s and we have the flapper body, which is the total antithesis of what in the Victorian age was a desirable body, fleshy and voluptuous, and the the thinner you were the better.

And of course, then we get into a little bit further up in history. And when I was growing up until I was probably, I wanna say 16 years old, Marilyn Monroe, and I could name other icons, but Marilyn Monroe, who was the size 12 or a size 14 and voluptuous and fleshy. She was the cultural ideal of beauty. And then along comes Twiggy, not Mary, but Twiggy along comes Twiggy and rocks the world and rocked my world because here was someone who was naturally thin at 96 pounds.

I think it was 5’7”, 5’9”, something like that. And then we have that whole Twiggy look, which was hell on earth for me because my body and many women's bodies are not designed to be sinewy, weight, lean , lean angular we’re designed with breasts and buttocks and hips and bellies And of course, Twiggy had not really any of those to speak of.

The point in all of this is whatever is the desirable body of the moment, the body du jour in French du jour, the body of the day is what is the currency is what is of value. And so now when I say there is a currency attached to, and of course even now it's changing. So I, I don't wanna pinpoint one body type, but whatever it is, if that's what you've got, you've got a lot of currency because you are desirable.

If you're a celebrity, You're going to get more endorsements. You're going to be more popular. If you are a single woman, you're gonna get more dates and more marriage possibilities. So does that answer your question or do you need more? Yeah, I

[00:24:18] **Melissa:** think so. But I was thinking to tag onto that, it seems like it, it goes beyond certainly like you said, with the celebrities and stuff and, and dating and that marriage and that sort of thing, but I wonder how far it goes.

Are you more likely to have a job offer? Are you more likely to have a higher salary? Are you, do you have a competitive edge when it comes to your field or whatever? Like, and I don't expect you to have the answer to that, but certainly, you know what you've seen in your research and the work that you've done.

Like, I mean, currency value. I mean, it. It's almost also it's unspoken, it's it's

[00:24:57] **Ilene:** insidious. Yes. And I will answer short answer. Yes, yes. And yes. To your three questions earlier. Absolutely. And these are not just the ways of the world. There have actually been a whole lot of psychological studies done over the past X amount of decades that look at how much more currency in quotation marks an attractive person has than one who is not as attractive and yes, to a job offer a better job.

Yes. To a competitive advantage. So, what does that tell us? I can go get a whole lot of plastic surgery. I can go on an extreme diet. I can do extreme forms of exercise and I can get that competitive edge, but here's the bind we put ourselves in. If that isn't our natural body type. And this is part of my understanding of the body.

And it's not just my understanding, the, the innate wisdom of the body. If that's not my body type innately inherently, then I'm not gonna land there for more than over a lifetime, a moment in time. And so that I'm back to square one, and I'm feeling even worse about myself than I did before. Right.

So this whole notion of it's just a false belief about what a body can ultimately do for us, because externally yeah, we can look great. Emotionally, psychologically, most people who are having to fight for that every day are miserable people. They're not, not nice people. They're just so unhappy with themselves, without self-esteem, without a pride of body ownership and struggling every day, struggling, struggling.

[00:27:03] **Melissa:** Yeah. That was the word that was coming to mind. Yes, for sure. Yes. Let's talk about body image and our relationship with our weight or the scale. I wanna touch on body image and food and eating and body image and exercise. Cause I think these are three different areas that you work with people on. Yes.

We can all relate to the fact that if you feel good about yourself, you're going to be more positive and have a more positive relationship with like, I'm one of those people I can weigh myself every day. It does not send me spiraling. There are other things that might, but that I'm, I'm cool with the scale.

I don't exactly like the number, but it doesn't define me and I know that that's not gonna be the same number. I, I lost the freshman 15 too. It was interesting. I did not gain the freshman. Mine was the scheduling conflict issue because I was so busy. I couldn't make it to the cafeteria and I didn't have any money.

So , well, there you go. But also not a healthy thing, but anyway I just think obviously if we feel good about ourselves, we'll have a better relationship with our body, with food, with eating, with exercise, but I'd love for you to share some insights from the work that you've done. Just starting off with body image and our relationship with, with our weight and

[00:28:11] **Ilene:** the scale.

Absolutely. Thank you. So firstly, if we have good body image, we're feeling better about ourselves. And the interesting thing is that there is a correlation between feeling good about one's body and a decent amount of self-esteem. There is not a correlation between I have good self-esteem and I feel good about my body.

Hmm. And that's part of the cultural overlay, which we've been addressing in and out here in our interview. And so that's really, really important to understand. And it's a shame because we feel shame if we don't have a body that we think is the culturally ideal body image body of the day. If I don't have the body that is thin and angular.

And I say this because when I was embroiled in my issues, it was that kind of body. Clearly it's changed. Curvier women are more En vogue these days, but they're still thin. Anyway,

[00:29:21] **Melissa:** muscles are a little bit more en Vogue too. So that's

[00:29:24] **Ilene:** yes, exactly. Interesting too. Right. I know. I know. However, how we feel about our bodies affects our lives.

And I can't tell you the number of women that I have worked with over time, who won't go on a date, won't buy a new outfit, won't look for or interview for a new job, and I could go on and on, because they feel ashamed of their bodies. And so what happens is body image can open up - good body image can open up our lives to all kinds of possibilities, which is why we strive so much for that and poor body image shuts our lives down and makes our lives smaller and smaller and smaller.

And some people stop leaving their homes. Yeah, because it becomes a mental illness or some people develop life threatening eating disorders because they are so desirous of that particular body type, whether it's anorexia or bulimia, lots of my clients over the years were embroiled in these life threatening eating disorders because they wanted to be loved and accepted and desired. Makes me so sad.

[00:30:55] **Melissa:** Yes, it is very sad. Yes. You, you mentioned eating disorders a couple times. And I do wanna mention that I did a recent episode with a dietitian who specializes in eating disorders and disordered eating. And it's called dysfunctional eating behavior. I believe is the title of the episode for anybody listening.

If you haven't checked that out yet, I, I do strongly encourage that. And that's something that I realized as a dietitian working in a clinical and outpatient setting, I did not necessarily specialize in eating disorders, but many of the people that I counseled, whether the focus was weight or heart health or diabetes, had disordered eating.

So there's a whole spectrum there. I'm sure you're, you're aware of that as well. Just even if it's not clinically defined as an eating disorder, there, there can be a lot going on there. So, absolutely. So you've touched a little bit about body image and, and how impacts the rest of our life.

Is there anything specific that you wanted to say with regard to specific weight or scale or food and eating or, or exercise?

[00:31:57] **Ilene:** I can do that I'd like to just scroll back to body image for a second. Yes. And just say to all of the wonderful parents out there who are listening to you, you heard my story about how a lot of my unhappiness resulted from being shamed in my family at the dinner tabled with specific messages about my body and my eating. I want to offer something here, but I don't want to sound like I'm chastising anyone because that's certainly not the case. I just think we have to be very mindful of the messages we send our children. And I will say even today, particularly our daughters because 80 to 90% of the people who develop eating disorders are females. And still, even though the numbers are starting to rise with males, but again, enough studies done on a comment from a dad.

Oh, you're getting a little chunky. Okay. Seven year old kid, nine year old kid. And all of a sudden we've got a kid who's going on a diet and hiding the weight loss under big baggy clothes and playing with food at the dinner table. Exercising secretively in the middle of the night, all of that. And that comes from what the dad thought was an innocuous comment. Ooh, you're getting a little chunky right at the age when girls' bodies start to change anyway. Oh my God. We just have to be careful with the messages that we send because those imprints are left very early on and it takes a long, long, long time to remove those imprints and to heal from. It is a wound.

So, right. That's what I wanted

[00:34:03] **Melissa:** to say. No, I'm glad you said that. And I've talked about that on the show before. Have had various episodes related to whether it's just child nutrition, family nutrition, or I did have a, an episode on boys and body image, which is really interesting as well. Yeah. Yeah.

But to your point, it does impact women or girls more often, but boys, I think maybe in a little bit of a different way and, and maybe they can fall through the cracks because we're not looking at them, but even I've, I've said with my own family, my daughter just graduated from college and my son just graduated from eighth grade.

And maybe it's because my son being a boy is my second child. So I kind of know what didn't work the first time around and I can adjust my, tactics or whatever, but I do feel less anxiety because he is a boy, but I, I put my dietitian slash mom hat on and I try to tell myself, okay. When I found out that my daughter was hiding food in her bedroom, that really freaked me out because I didn't know if it meant something.

And how was she feeling? And all of that. And so I sought advice from my, my dietitian colleagues, but I also knew based on my weight slash eating history, being a ballet dancer and going to a performing arts high school, like I knew that some of what was freaking me out about my daughter's behavior was kind of my stuff or whatever.

But to your point, what we say to our children as parents, whether it's about their bodies or any other thing, it carries so much weight. No pun intended. There you go. I mean, and other people are gonna say stuff and that can be hurtful as well. Again, whether it's about their body or how they do in sports or whatever, but as parents.

Yeah. Yeah. We're not gonna be perfect, but we really need to try to be careful about the messages that we're sending.

[00:35:55] **Ilene:** I totally agree with you. And it's not just, if I could add one last thing, it's not just what we say. It's the look, oh, so much. It's the look, you look them up and down and there's no smile on your face and they're getting that message loudly.

And clearly you don't like what you're seeing.

[00:36:17] **Melissa:** Yeah. And that hurts. Yeah. And also you said - not to throw my husband under the bus, but he said a lot of things that he thought were innocuous, and I would just kick him under the table going on. You can't say that or whatever. And he didn't think it was any big deal, but even something as simple, I've probably shared this on the podcast before, but when my son was a toddler and young child and getting a little bit older, we had hand downs from a family member and he must have been about seven or eight…

I was just figuring out that these hand downs are not gonna work for my son because this family member is just naturally very small boned, no body fat sinewy. Like you said before, whatever, just a complete different build than my son. And my son was always normal weight, never overweight, but he just had a different shaped body.

Even as a little, little tyke, the pants wouldn't fit around the waist. Right? Yeah. And I'm like, he's like two or three, like how come these pants won't fit? Well, it took me a few years to figure it out. But right when I started figuring out that this is ridiculous, trying to give my son these hand down pants, my son got really upset and he said, I can't wear these pants.

I'm too fat. They, they don't fit me. And I was just like, oh, I wish I had figured this out before he did. He did, because this is not,

[00:37:35] **Ilene:** it's not about.

[00:37:36] **Melissa:** Yeah. So even something is innocent as that obviously I didn't really plan on,

[00:37:41] **Ilene:** we don't realize to what degree children are sponges. Yeah.

And how they soak up everything. And they soak up all of the good stuff but they also soak up the not so good stuff and it wounds them. And it just I mean, I think like had we been in a department store and tried on proper sized stuff, but here he was trying on a skinny person's clothes like I know, I know he put two and two together and got five, but yeah.

[00:38:12] **Melissa:** So anyway, it is very important what we say and what we do, and nobody's perfect, but it's, it, it bears repeating. So,

[00:38:20] **Ilene:** so you were asking about body image and weight and the scale. I think we have a problem in this society because we have charts and graphs that tell us that we are either underweight, normal weight, overweight or obese depending on those charts and scales.

[00:38:47] **Melissa:** or morbidly obese,

[00:38:48] **Ilene:** morbidly obese.

Yes. And I take real issue with having any one of us be put into these charts. And so for example, I'm five feet tall. So I'm a short woman and I am a size eight. I'm a medium, I am medium. If you put me on the scale, I'm going to come out at the top. End of overweight. Top end of overweight.

But what it doesn't say is that this is in part my genetic heritage: one, I come from Russian peasant stock. And two, I work out all the time. I'm very muscular but yet society labels me in such a way. Now years ago I would be mortified and I would be ashamed. And I would be one of those people who didn't leave my house because of all of this, particularly with my childhood history. And now I'm able to say, I really feel it's part of my mission to help women, to help parents help their children, their daughters, to not attach how we feel about our bodies with a number on the scale or a range that we fall into on the BMI chart.

Because this is more and more and more we're realizing that these are faulty ways of predicting health. And so now this whole thing that we hear about, oh, well you have to lose weight in order to be healthy. Well, there are a ton of people out there, I’m one of them, really questioning that. Why do I have to lose weight if all of my labs come out well? I'm still working at the age productively at the age that I am I'm exercising every day. Your

[00:40:51] **Melissa:** behaviors are supporting a healthy lifestyle. Exactly,

[00:40:55] **Ilene:** exactly, exactly. And so we link though how we should feel about our bodies with - oftentimes there is a link between the number on this scale, where we are on the BMI chart with how we should feel about our bodies. And I think that if I wake up in the morning, and I am anticipating a wonderful day going out for a walk, meditating for a little bit, working with clients. I can feel good about my body, even though the numbers say that I'm hitting the, oh my God, obese mark on the chart. Or on the BMI scale. To me, we really need to redo, we have to have another look at how we talk about body image and weight.

[00:41:49] **Melissa:** And that leads me to my next question. There are some people out there, some dietitians included who think that any intentional weight loss is a bad thing. And I was curious as to your thoughts on that.

[00:42:02] **Ilene:** Well, I would respectfully and lovingly disagree with that. So, for example, I don't practice detailed, intuitive eating guidelines, but I do eat in an attuned way.

So for example, I eat when I'm hungry, I stop when I'm comfortable slash full. I eat nutritious foods. So if I am doing that and because I wasn't doing that before I lose weight, well, some might say that's a good thing. Because it's part of a natural process where I am letting my body lead me.

And then I have people who say, well, my body will lead me to chocolate chip cookies for three meals a day. And I will say no.

[00:42:59] **Melissa:** That's a big fear for a lot of people.

[00:42:59] **Ilene:** Yeah. Yes it is. But it's so not true. Our bodies will lead us to nutrition so that we can achieve health and wellbeing.

Now, can we use the science? Can we use dietitians? Can we use what we know about healthy foods to incorporate that into? Okay, so I'm gonna try these foods. I'm gonna eat the ones that I like that are healthy foods now. I also try to help people to see that there are fuel foods. These are the ones that energize us.

The chocolate chip cookies or the croissant or the cruller that I used to eat for breakfast in the morning, not nutritious. Okay. But my fruit and peanut butter toast and that kind of thing. Yes. Nutritious. So I help people see the difference between fuel foods and recreational foods. And recreational foods are our chips and our desserts.

And should we eliminate those from our lives entirely? Some people would say absolutely. Yes, because you're putting poison in your system. I'm not one of those who fall on the extreme of any continuum. And so I would say on occasion, have a recreational food. Just don't think that you're fueling your body when you do that.

So if you are experiencing true body hunger, it's time for fuel foods, you want your good protein, you want your good fats, you want your complex carbohydrates and your fruits and vegetables. Nobody can argue with that. Right? Exactly. So

[00:44:50] **Melissa:** I love how you call it recreational foods, because just the name in and of itself implies you're gonna do it.

You wouldn't take all recreation out of your life, right? No, that would be crazy. So I love that. Thank you. Fuel foods and recreation food. I really like that.

[00:45:06] **Ilene:** Yeah, I do too. Yeah. It helped the stigma for me. Right,

[00:45:11] **Melissa:** right. Take away the good and bad. Yes, exactly. Yeah. Because there's a lot of gray areas with that we might not call them good or bad foods, but we might say, oh it's free from this it's fat free.

It's organic, it's this. And we're still categorizing them as good and bad. So I, I love that fuel food, recreational foods. I really love that. I'm glad. What is it - You say that having weight as your primary focus keeps you stuck, this is a quote of yours. So I want you to speak to

[00:45:41] **Ilene:** that. So if I'm totally, I get up in the morning and I'm thinking about.

Am I the same weight that I was yesterday, do I weigh less? Do I weigh more? Am I getting on this scale? How are my clothes going to, you're laughing, I'm

[00:45:58] **Melissa:** laughing because I do think some of those

[00:46:00] **Ilene:** things. Well, okay. And to what degree are we able to shake that? Like Taylor swift shake it off, shake it off, shake it off because if we're not able to shake it off and a lot of people aren't able to shake it off.

Hence my, at one point in time as a weight watcher leader/trainer weighing myself four to five times a day. I'm not shaking anything off. No, and I am constantly fixated on my weight and it's not just my weight. It's how that translates into how my body has changed or not changed. And part of the problem is if we're fixated on our weight and we're looking through, I call them fat eyes. Okay. If I'm looking at myself in a mirror through fat eyes, I'm seeing a fatter body now is that realistic? No more often than not. It's not. Now not to say that. If I am eating three meals with chocolate chip cookies, for a week. Yeah. That scale's gonna change. My belly size is gonna change and I'm gonna feel like garbage. But most of the time, if we are fixated on weight, it keeps us from enjoying life.

It keeps us from, look, I'm looking out my window. I'm looking at Palm trees and the waterway, and there's a wonderful boat going by here. It takes me away from appreciating that for a few minutes, few seconds in time, which elevates mood. Which calms and soothes naturally, which makes me smile naturally.

If I'm fixated on my weight, I'm not paying attention to anything that can give me joy. I'm not paying attention to oh, I had a thought a few weeks ago. I really want to work on this particular project because I can feel my heart expand when I think about it. If I'm focused on my weight that ain't gonna

[00:48:11] **Melissa:** happen, it takes a lot of mental, real estate is what I like to say.

[00:48:16] **Ilene:** I love that mental real estate. It also is very emotionally depleting yeah. Brings you down. Put those two together. It's a disaster,

[00:48:26] **Melissa:** right, right, right. Now we've talked a little bit about intuitive eating and definitely do wanna give that shout out to Evelyn Tribole because that was a groundbreaking book and absolutely it's still holds current today. And I, and I've touched on this in other episodes, so we can't take a real deep dive, but in your words, what is intuitive eating? Can you give us kind of an overview beyond just like the mindfulness and, and maybe that's the bulk of it. And also like if somebody wanted to dip their toe into the intuitive eating waters, where would they start?

[00:49:03] **Ilene:** I keep it simple. For me, intuitive eating is basically four principles. Food is fuel for the body. Underneath everything, that's it. Fuel for the body. Two, eat when you are hungry. Now, are there gonna be times where we're not hungry and we need, of course, but can that be a goal?

70 80% of the time during the course of the day or week. I think that that's reasonable now. I wanna scroll it back. Okay. Food is fuel for the body. Okay. Eat whatever you want. Keeping nutrition in mind. Because it gets a little confusing for people who start out. But I want the chocolate chip cookies. Well, that's not your body speaking.

Okay. Eat whatever you want. What your body wants to eat, not what your mind wants to eat. Okay. So eat whatever you want. But as often as you can eat only when you're hungry. Okay. So that's number three. And then the last one stop when you're comfortable slash full and I give that little bit of wiggle room because there are some people who love stopping at comfortable.

I like stopping the eating experience a little beyond comfortable, not extra full, but just a little bit fuller than comfortable. It just makes me happy. Hmm. Interesting. Yeah, but that's me and not everybody is like

[00:50:47] **Melissa:** that. But I think that's so important to identify those little nuances because I'm that person, if I go past comfortable, I feel like it's Thanksgiving and I've stuffed myself and it, even if it's just a little bit, I just, I do not feel good.

So I really

[00:51:05] **Ilene:** can't. Then you can't do that. Right. But see, that's your body telling you. Exactly. That's the beauty of what you just said. Exactly. That's your body community.

[00:51:14] **Melissa:** So I love hearing how, like you like to go that one little, like, it's so interesting.

[00:51:18] **Ilene:** I do. And that's my body. Yeah. And

[00:51:22] **Melissa:** the eating only when hungry thing really works for me.

But I struggled with that. And I know that you have an opinion on this, because it's something we touched on when we talked before and I, I think it's really important. I don't get hungry at least in my belly and I have a hard time identifying those other hunger signs. So eating only when I'm hungry, you wouldn't eat. Right.

It it's like it's few and far between. So I worry, and I did a whole 10 minute outro on this and I'll link to it in your show [notes@soundbitesrd.com](mailto:notes@soundbitesrd.com) for this episode, after the menopause diet interview, I did a little outro on my menopause weight experience. And one of the fears is like, yeah, if I eat only when I'm hungry, I'm not gonna eat very often.

So will I get all my nutrition and through some trial and error I realized, yeah, I can, I do have to be really mindful that I'm getting protein and fiber when I do eat and trying to get more fruits and vegetables in, but it, I can do it. And it's not that I have to put a ton of thought into it.

It's actually easier than I thought it would be, but that's a big thing. So, and I - a lot of people are like, oh, you're so lucky you don't get hungry. I feel hungry all the time, but. This is what I want you to speak to. There's probably a lot of people out there who don't know when they're hungry.

[00:52:46] **Ilene:** Well, there are a lot of people who don't know when they're hungry and some of those people are the ones who say they're hungry all the time. Mm. Okay. Cuz it's like on a continuum. So I'm not saying that people like you don't exist in the world because obviously they do. I'm sitting, talking to you. You are probably more of an outlier than most of the population of people in the world.

Because hunger, from the time we wake up in the morning to the time we go to bed at. Hunger happens in three to five hour intervals. Hmm. If people didn't know when they're hungry. Okay. So one of the things that I teach is if you're confused, whether it's my like me, if you're confused, Melissa, when you get confused, think of the last time you ate.

Hmm. Now, if you were saying, I don't know if I'm hungry and you said, oh, okay. I just had a, I'm making up a story here, steak dinner, 45 minutes ago. Well guess what? You're probably not hungry. Right? However, if it were three hours, four hours, five hours ago. Well, woman, yeah. You’re probably hungry. Okay.

Because hunger occurs in three to five hour. Intervals. Okay. And so there's a wonderful way to test it out. So we look at the clock, we don't use the clock to decide when we eat in an ideal world, but when did I last eat? I ate at three o'clock in the afternoon. I had a little snack. It's now six Okay. Yeah. I'm probably hungry. It's time for dinner. What about, because I think this happened to you and I thought, oh, this is probably what happened to me too. You've learned to not listen to those signals.

I think we - that's start of what could be a very big problem. And we can't. All right.

Can we stop listening or is it we stop responding? Because I think it's gonna be there and it's not just listening. You're actually gonna get signals. Your body is gonna signal you. I'm hungry. Okay. And the longer that goes on the louder, the signals are gonna get, the more pronounced, I'm not talking about you now, when I say this, the more pronounced the signals are going to get. Okay. So I'm noting, for example, when we started this podcast, I was ever so slightly hungry. Okay. I decided not to eat. I prefer not to eat prior to a podcast or a speaking engagement. Anyway, long story short. I'm noting now the, the little baby hole that I experienced as a start of hunger for me has now gotten considerably larger.

I can feel it it's bigger. And it's saying to me that at some point within the next X amount of time, Ilene, you're gonna have to eat. So. I think it's more about we get the messages, but we don't respond. There are a number of studies done on girls with anorexia and they say I stopped getting hungry. And yet all they think about is food.

Now why is that? Because their bodies aren't speaking the language that they're going to pay attention to. But what has happened is they've stopped responding to the hunger messages that the body is sending. They've stopped eating. That's different than I stopped listening.

[00:56:34] **Melissa:** Okay. I hear you.

I'm listening.

[00:56:37] **Ilene:** I'm glad

[00:56:39] **Melissa:** So I love the four principles. They are very simple yet, not oversimplified, but one thing that I struggle with is how do you stay on track? Because some of the food rules do make it easy, because then you don't have to make as many decisions. So on the one hand you've got food rules that make it easy because you don't have to make decisions, but it's hard to stick with them because they're rules. On the other end of the spectrum, you've got the intuitive eating and, and these four principles. When we get tired of making decisions or being mindful or whatever, and we start kind of going back on autopilot, how do we nudge ourselves back toward intuitive eating?

[00:57:20] **Ilene:** Well, I think that any of us who have had a history of diets knows that they work to lose weight. There are abdominal failures and having us maintain weight, the weight that we've lost. And I think that that was certainly one of the things that prompted me to say, there's gotta be another way because it was just so emotionally devastating time after time after time.

Thinking that I was the failure. No, I wasn't the failure. It was the process that was faulty to begin with. And we still, as a culture, haven't quite gotten that yet. Okay. So I think back to the beginning. And I had to do a lot of learning about what it meant to eat fuel foods. And there were some times, oh, I said, okay, eat whatever you want.

So I'm having a nutritious meal and then I have five. Quite large size chocolate chip cookies afterwards, because I want them well, no, because then I'm making myself ultra full. Mm. So I guess my answer to your question is I have really come to know, not just to believe, but to know in my body that my body leads me.

If I let my body lead, my body is not gonna let me down. It's going to tell me when to eat. It's going to tell me what to eat. It's going to tell me how much to eat is going to tell me when to stop. And if I'm letting my body lead, that I'm going to know, because my body's gonna tell me, oh, I leave. You just went a little off track there

[00:59:21] **Melissa:** And not in a judgemental way.

[00:59:23] **Ilene:** No, because all I'm saying is you don't feel good. Right. Just like you were saying, if I eat more than comfortable, I don't feel good. That's not a cognitive thought. Right? That's your body leading you to a principal that works for you. So I let my body lead. My body is my master teacher and I am good.

When I veer off the path a little bit, my body's gonna tell me and that not feeling good is gonna put me right back on. Not guilt, not shame, right? Not somebody telling me, oh, you gained a pound this week. That kind of thing. Very

[01:00:10] **Melissa:** good. Well, that segues nicely into how I wanted to wrap up talking more about how our bodies have that innate wisdom and how we can listen to our bodies and, and use that to guide us.

So you've touched on that a little bit more. You're certified, intuitive energy healer. What is that? What does that mean? And you help people with emotional healing. So I think this would be a nice way to kind of, as we wrap up, kind of get back to where we started with like shame and stigma and all of these things, because this is not about what's on the scale or what size we are.

It's about all of that other stuff.

[01:00:49] **Ilene:** Yes, it is. So I think what would help is just for me to share what I've come to know about energy and the body. We know this, our bodies have energy circuits. I'm not a specialist in the biology of the body. So I'm not gonna be able to talk except to say that just like with, I guess, anything in the world, there can be times of flow when there's energy flow and we can feel it.

We are full functioning. We have energy. We have thoughts, words that come to us quickly, easily and were going with the flow and things move smoothly. And then there are oftentimes, and there are often moments when there are energy blockages. And these blockages are things that intuitive energy healers can experience when they're working with clients. So I can feel, for example, that there's an energy blockage in someone. And I say, feel, there are some people who can actually see it. Sometimes I see it, but more often than not, I sense it, I can feel it. I know it without actually having like an x-ray in front of me, for example.

And that energy blockage is not necessarily like someone has a cyst or a tumor or there's a bowel blockage or something like that. It’s about things that often keep us stuck. Fear, anger lack of self-esteem, loss, grief, shame, all of our core emotions, that if we have not processed an event in or events in our lives, those feelings that are residue that are left from that, that don't flow, that we don't release from our bodies can become blockages. Blockages in our hearts, blockages in our pelvic area, our solar plexus, blockages in the throat.

I mean, I could go on and on, but you are understanding what I'm saying about energy that needs to be released. and I help clients do that. And the interesting thing is I knew I was doing it long before I understood what I was doing.

[01:03:37] **Melissa:** Interesting. And then that's how you help people with the emotional healing.

[01:03:41] **Ilene:** The emotional healing is what I, because I'm a psychotherapist, I can offer people a combination of, we can do energy healings.

Okay. And we can talk through the events of our lives that have led to these blockages of energy in the body. And for many people being held by another while we are sharing these poignant, these painful moments in our lives - that is healing in and of itself. Let alone, then what helps when you can identify a blockage.

[01:04:26] **Melissa:** Okay. Thank you. You're welcome. So for people who want to find out more information, I would love for you to share like your website. I know you're on some social media and I know you have an online assessment that I took. There's three sections to it, body image, weight, and eating. I did great on the eating section.

I shouldn't, I shouldn't say like good or bad, but I didn't. Well, you did well. I mean, well I don't wanna like say, oh, I got zero in the eating section. But I had, I had some, I had some struggles in the body weight or the body image section and some in the weight too, as, as well. But so tell people where they can find more information, take this assessment.

And I think you're going through a website upgrade in a little bit of a, a rebrand right now.

[01:05:10] **Ilene:** I am, I'm going through a rebrand, but will deal specifically with the find body freedom website, which has so much information that's really helpful for people. So one there is that free assessment and you just go to find body freedom.com, and you will look at the products I think, and you will find the free assessment - you can download it. That's number one. Number two, my book reflections of fat girl can be purchased on the website. There's also an opportunity to join my Facebook group which you can do from the website.

You've got some videos and stuff too. I do. I have videos and I have blogs loaded, loaded, loaded with some really good information around a number of these topics we've been discussing today.

Great. And

[01:06:10] **Melissa:** yeah, people can find your social media on there. I joined your Facebook group. That's been nice. So thank you.

[01:06:16] **Ilene:** Yes, I'm so glad. Thank you.

[01:06:19] **Melissa:** Well, is there anything else you wanted to share about find body freedom or the work that you do, or any parting wisdom for us in just having a better relationship with our bodies and with

[01:06:30] **Ilene:** food?

I would, there are two things. One is you can't get water from a dry well, and you can't get zest and enthusiasm from a depleted woman. And we women often deplete ourselves because we're so focused on others instead of ourselves and compound that with focused on weight. And there's nothing left in the tank.

So that would be number one. And number two, I really truly believe we owe it to our daughters, our granddaughters, the little girl down the street, the next generation of women to stop the madness with our stuff around weight loss, because, I say this because there is still an alarming rate of life threatening eating disorders amongst young girls whose bones haven't even fully formed yet, around adolescent girls that so easily can get into the throes of an eating disorder and more and more middle-aged and beyond women.

And it's part of that menopausal fear of weight gain that oftentimes will be a trigger. We owe it to women and particularly the next generation of women to stop the madness. Absolutely. And to teach ourselves to love our own bodies. So we are models for them. Wonderful.

[01:08:10] **Melissa:** Thank you so much, Ilene. It's been great having you on the show.

Thank you. And for everybody listening as always enjoy your food with health in mind. Till next time.