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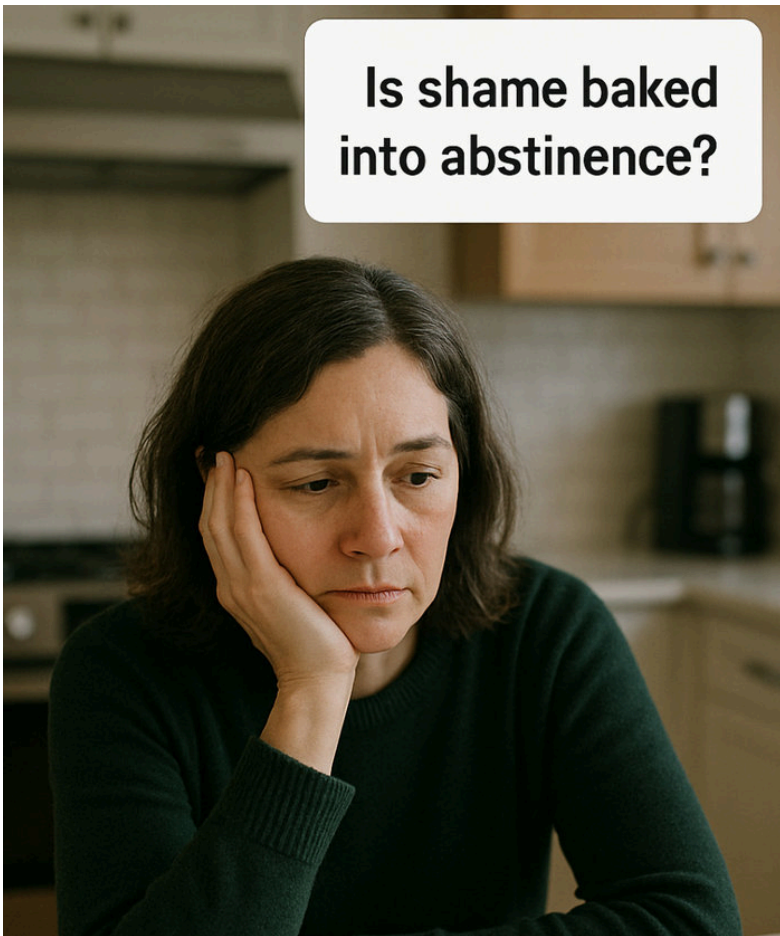
FOODADDICTIONINSTITUTE.ORG

JULY 2025

NEWS FROM

# *The Food Addiction Institute*

Is shame baked  
into abstinence?



**By Michael Prager**

*Institute Chairman*

Kudos to Zipporah Livneh, leader of the Sugar and Food Addiction Professionals Network, for the recent [roundtable](#) she conceived and hosted on Food Addiction treatment methods. Since listening to it, I've been thinking about shame.

## **Lerner, Peirce Thompson join institute's board**

Susan Peirce Thompson and Marty Lerner were recently elected as board members of the Food Addiction Institute.

Susan Peirce Thompson, Ph.D., went from a drug-addicted teenager to a Food-Addicted young woman. In a quest to reclaim her life, she got clean, stopped eating sugar and flour, and went from obese to slender decades ago. Now she is a multiple New York Times bestselling author of "Bright Line Eating," The Official Bright Line Eating Cookbook, Rezoom, and On This Bright Day.

Thompson is on the faculty of the Department

The discussion featured Bitten Jonsson, who

The discussion featured Bitten Jonsson, who spoke about the abstinence model that the Food Addiction Institute most closely aligns with; Clarissa Kennedy, who spoke about harm reduction; and David A. Wiss, who spoke about a model that incorporates elements of each.

In the questions and comments period near the end of the 90-minute session, Julie Clark commented that the abstinence model does not come with a "side of shame." We at the institute think that not only is it possible to counsel abstinence without shame, it's the only way to do it.

In service with the institute, I've encountered the opposite notion more than once, and I've been mystified by it. A couple of practitioners have balked at our tenet that abstinence is essential for Food Addiction recovery. The issue is with the word "essential," which I think some perceive as a trigger for shame. The thinking goes, if it's the requirement and I've failed again, then what's the use, and I may as well stop trying.

That's a diet response, and abstinence is so much more than a diet, even if both include food changes. Unlike dieters, people trying to be abstinent don't talk about being good or bad because of what they ate. They're trying, a day — or even a minute — at a time, to head in a new direction. Every success is a building block, and every stumble suggests no more than that one might not be a normal eater.

It's true that in some cases, inability to maintain abstinence has been used to punish, exclude, or shame, and that sucks. I haven't done it, but I apologize to anyone who's ever experienced that. The terms of abstinence are not the same for everyone, and as one's life changes over time — such as with growth,

of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the University of Rochester and publishes research on the intersection of Food Addiction and weight loss. In 2014, she founded Bright Line Eating, a worldwide movement dedicated to helping people have their Bright Transformations, a full physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual change that can bring healthy, long-term weight loss and true freedom from Food Addiction.

Marty Lerner, PhD., is the founder and CEO of Milestones in Recovery. A graduate of Nova Southeastern University, Lerner is a licensed and board-certified clinical psychologist who has appeared on numerous national television and radio programs, including The NPR Report, "20/20," Discovery Health, and ABC's "Nightline," as well as authored several publications related to eating disorders in professional literature, national magazines, and newspapers, including USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and the Miami Herald.

An active professional community member, Lerner divides his time between his home in the mountains of North Carolina and the east

pregnancy, and aging — people’s specific food and behavior needs can change.

Abstinence can be hard — at first, or after the pink cloud evaporates, or unexpectedly during a crisis. Having a Food Addiction *is* hard. Nobody ever woke up wanting to be an addict, any more than anyone ever hoped for cancer.

But just because having cancer is hard, doctors haven’t yet decided that it’s wrong to ask patients to undergo chemo or radiation. Yes, they’re hard, but they’re two of the best solutions we have. And if you feel you can’t do it, we’ll give you as much support as we can to make it doable, because that’s what you need.

Asking for less seems not to make any sense. Neither does advising that cutting down from a lot to a little is going to be enough. That can work for lots of unhealthy eaters, just as heavy drinkers can benefit from cutting down. But those with Food Addiction either have to quit their problem substances or remain subject to the well-documented phenomenon of craving. This definition of craving isn’t an idea that something looks good, and I’d like to have some. It’s a physical response triggered when certain substances enter one’s bloodstream.

That’s biochemistry, not morality. No one can shame you if you struggle, any more than anyone would shame a cancer patient for having a relapse.

the mountains of North Carolina and the east coast of South Florida.

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## The Latest in Food Addiction Research

### Ultra-Processed Food Addiction Research Project

Three additional studies have been published in a [Frontiers in Psychiatry research topic](#) titled Ultra-Processed Food Addiction: The nine studies to date are moving toward Consensus on Mechanisms, Definitions, Assessment, and Intervention.

The [most recent addition](#) provides insight into the correlation between the availability and cost of ultra-processed foods and the Food Addiction symptoms profile, according to weight status, among Brazilian adults. Silva, Jr., et al. The study from Brazil provides valuable insights into how our food environment influences what we eat, as well as how we feel and behave around food in general. The study included a survey of women living in areas with a higher number of UPF retailers, who were found to be 53% more likely to experience symptoms of Food Addiction. The study highlights the critical truth that our food environment has a significant impact on health and the ability to make healthy choices.

Another addition, by Peirce Thompson, et.al, examines the value of [abstinence-based treatment of comorbid eating disorders and ultra-processed Food Addiction](#). A recent meta-

analysis is discussed, showing that over half of people with an ED also screen positive for UPFA, yet the comorbid treatment is understudied, nuanced, and multifaceted.

The third, by Ifland & Brewerton, [examines the phenomenology, pathophysiology, and treatment implications of binge-type eating disorders and ultra-processed Food Addiction](#). It hints at the theory that since those with loss-of-control binge eating is not only a key feature of all binge-type eating disorders, considering an addiction-type treatment plan, including abstinence, can be beneficial.

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### IFACC 2025

Purchase in-person tickets for the IFACC 2025 conference in London on September 4-5 [here](#).

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## New Tests Reveal Hidden Ultra-Processed Food Intake

New research shows how blood and urine tests can accurately measure how much ultra-processed food we really consume, often more than we think. This breakthrough could offer powerful tools for identifying patterns that fuel food addiction and poor health. Learn [more...](#)

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### Follow Us on Social







# Offers Food Addiction Course

The [American Psychiatric Association](#) — owner, overseer, and editor of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders — is offering an online course for continuing credit titled, "[Food Addiction: A New Substance Use Disorder.](#)"

It is available for a fee through March 2027. It is based on a 2023 presentation at the APA's annual meeting. Panelists were:

- **George F. Koob, Ph.D.**, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
- **Nora Volkow, M.D.**, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse
- **Gene-Jack Wang, M.D.**, senior clinician and lab director, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
- **Ashley Gearhardt, Ph.D.**, associate professor of psychology from the University of Michigan and author of the Yale Food Addiction Scale

The course is significant, considering that the institute and others support the inclusion of food in the DSM's section on substance use disorders.

## This Month on Our Social Media

### Welcome to the Month of Food Freedom

This month at the Food Addiction Institute, we're exploring what it truly means to be free — not just from the obsession with food, but free to live with dignity, choice, and peace.

- ✨ Freedom from compulsive cravings.
- ✨ Freedom from guilt, shame, and secret eating.
- ✨ Freedom to nourish your body — not numb your feelings.
- ✨ Freedom to reclaim your life from the grips of ultra-processed, addictive substances.

Throughout July, we'll be sharing stories, professional insights, and daily encouragement — all rooted in our mission to support recovery from Food Addiction through evidence-based, abstinent approaches.

Welcome to **Food Freedom**.

**This Independence Day, we're celebrating a different kind of freedom.**

The freedom from food obsession.

The freedom from shame, secrecy, and the cycle of "just one more bite."



The freedom to live in integrity with your body, your spirit, and your truth.

For many recovering from Food Addiction, this kind of independence wasn't won overnight — it came through surrender, structure, and support.

And every day, Food Addicts in recovery choose freedom again.

Today, we honor those who are breaking free — from binge cycles, from diet culture lies, from the grip of Ultra-Processed Food Addiction — and finding peace in recovery. Happy 4th of July from all of us at the Food Addiction Institute!

We have quotes from Dr. Vera Tarman, World-Renowned Food Addiction Expert, Medical Director of Renascent, Author of *Food Junkies*, and *Food Junkies Podcast*.

### **Be a Part of Our Recovery Community**

If you're interested in sharing your Food Addiction recovery journey in an interview, please contact us at

[info@foodaddictioninstitute.org](mailto:info@foodaddictioninstitute.org)

Another option is a three-minute share about how you came to know you are a Food Addict and what impact that had on your life. Please contact us at [info@foodaddictioninstitute.org](mailto:info@foodaddictioninstitute.org). Your story could provide hope for others on their recovery journey.

If you're interested in joining our Social Media Committee, we'd love to hear from you. Our committee is always looking for passionate individuals who want to make a difference in the lives of those struggling with Food Addiction.

Please know that we appreciate your donations—large and small

### **Take the Next Step Towards Freedom**

Follow us on [Facebook](#), Instagram, [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Food Addiction Institute](#)



## **Food Addiction Professionals Invited to Join the FAI Partnership Program**

We invite researchers, educators, treatment providers, nutritionists, and others who help Food Addicts to join our FAI Partnership Program. Your information will be shared in detail on our website and in the newsletter, reaching thousands of people interested in Food Addiction.

For a fee, our partnership program offers additional benefits, including exposure on our website homepage, social media, and newsletters, plus discounted advertising rates. We will highlight your events, create a profile story, and promote books. This partnership benefits FAI and you as we expand the resources for Food Addiction support.

Email [info@foodaddictioninstitute.org](mailto:info@foodaddictioninstitute.org) for more information about this program.

## **We are “Food Addiction Informed”**

What do we mean when we talk about Food Addiction? We start with these three tenets:

1. Food Addiction is a substance use disorder.

[YouTube.](#)

2. Abstinence from binge and trigger foods and behaviors is essential for recovery.

3. An action plan that includes substantial support is highly recommended.

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The **Food Addiction Institute** proudly acknowledges the generous support of the **Carl and Cassandra Segal Charitable Trust.**

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