

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #108: Changing Circumstances to Stop Binge Eating

Hi! Did you know that this week that this episode is being released is The Stop Binge Eating Podcast's 2 year anniversary?? I'm so excited! For two years, I've released a podcast every week, I've helped thousands of people to stop binge eating, and I've met some of the most amazing people who found me through the podcast. Yay for two years! I just love milestones so much, I think I mentioned that on episode 100 too, but I just love having any reason to celebrate.

What's also really cool that I have two other personal milestones to celebrate that I thought I'd share with you since one of them is actually kinda relevant to this episode today.

So, I released the first three episodes of this podcast on August 21, 2018, and what also happened on August 21st, one year later, was that my boyfriend Mike and I had our first date! Awww! I'm actually recording this a few weeks ahead of time, so it hasn't come yet. But it will have passed once you hear this! The night of our first date we went to two places and we had planned to go to the first one this year to celebrate our meeting but so sad, it closed down! I was so bummed when I found out. It seems like they were a victim of the coronavirus. So I don't know what we're going to do but it doesn't really matter. I'm just happy to be with him.

And in other news, as I mentioned in the last episode, I'm moving again! Two years ago, I moved back to my hometown in Massachusetts after living in California for 13 years, and now I'm moving to New Hampshire to the city I lived in after college, before I moved out to California. It's so crazy to me. Never did I ever think I'd move back to my hometown but I really never thought I'd move back to that city in New Hampshire. But it's happening! All because Mike lives there and I'm moving into his house with him.

We're doing it! It's happening! And I'm really excited about it.

Like I said, I'm recording this weeks before it is released so by the time you hear this we'll have been living together for a few weeks. But as of now, I'm officially moving in a few days, most of my stuff we've already moved to his house, and we painted my new office which I'm so excited about too.

So many exciting things! Podcast two year anniversary! Our first date anniversary! And I'm moving in with my man!

So how is living with him going to affect my eating?

If this were years ago I would probably have lots of thoughts about it. But today of course, I don't have many.

It's going to be very close to the same as it has been. We're just going to have to figure out details about meals and grocery shopping and such, but when it comes to my eating habits, I have no worries.

This is because I don't blame my circumstances for how I eat, like I used to.

I used to think that where I lived and who I lived with was a huge factor in whether or not I binged.

Here's where my mind would go.

I thought living alone would make it easier to not binge because I wouldn't be tempted by other people's foods. I also thought I'd be happier living alone and therefore wouldn't feel the need to binge as much since I didn't typically binge when I was happy.

However, living alone also made it easier to binge since I didn't have to hide from anyone. It was just me and I could binge whenever I wanted to. Also, I wasn't happy all the time living alone. I still had all kinds of different feelings that I'd eat to push away and two of them were boredom and loneliness. Two emotions I'd be more likely to feel when living alone. Not always, you can still feel bored and lonely living with other people, I definitely have, but for me personally, and I've talked about this on the podcast before, I was prone to those feelings mostly because I'd choose eating over socializing sometimes. I made it easy for myself to feel those feelings when I lived alone.

So then, there's living with other people, whether it be family, roommates, or a significant other. When I was going into those situations, I'd think that living with other people would make it easier to not binge. I thought I'd have less opportunities to eat alone since people would be around and I wouldn't binge in front of anyone. I thought I'd be more occupied and have more fun living with people and therefore wouldn't feel the need to binge.

However, then I would do it when they weren't there, or eat alone in my car, or I'd also sneak into their food and eat the stuff they'd buy that I wouldn't buy for myself. And I didn't always have fun with the people I lived with. Just like I said about living alone, there wasn't any good feeling that I felt 100% of the time, enjoyment and happiness included.

Either way, whether I was living alone or with other people, I would always be able to find a way to binge and I would always experience feelings that I'd want to eat to make go away.

Neither situation was easier really.

Because the thing is, no matter where you are, no matter what food is available to you, you can always find something to binge on, even if that means you leave and go buy it somewhere, and you can always find time to be alone somewhere or you can find a way to binge while nearby someone while being strategic and making it not look like a binge.

If there's an urge, there's way. You can make it happen no matter what the circumstance.

I had a client recently who was questioning whether or not she should buy junk food for her home. This came up because she has had experiences where she wouldn't buy it and then she'd end up bingeing on healthier foods at home. So she wondered if it happened because she felt deprived from not buying junk food and maybe she wouldn't have binged if she'd bought it because then she wouldn't have felt deprived.

Here's the thing about that though. Does the circumstance of having junk food at home really matter here? A binge can happen either way, whether it's there or not. Also, the only reason she felt deprived was because of how she was thinking about not having bought the junk food, not simply because she didn't buy it. We can not buy junk food and not feel deprived if we're not being overly restrictive on ourselves and not telling ourselves we can't have it but instead being clear about why we genuinely don't want it. So it wasn't the lack of junk food that caused the deprivation, it was her thoughts.

The moral of the story here is that the circumstances don't cause you to binge. Your thoughts and your reaction to your urges and feelings are what do.

My circumstance could be living alone or living with another person and neither of these circumstances cause me to binge or not. I always cause myself to binge by deciding to give in to my urge.

My client could have junk food in the house or not and neither of these circumstances cause her to binge. She can binge either way, or not binge.

The circumstance really doesn't matter, so don't blame it.

Let's take it back to the Thought Model. You have circumstances in your life, facts of your life that we can all agree on, such as I am alone or I have chips and cookies in the house, and then you have thoughts about these circumstances. Those thoughts cause your feelings, your feelings drive your actions.

So between your circumstances and your actions, you have thoughts and feelings.

It's not just that you have a circumstance in your life and that causes you to eat. You think about that circumstance, and you feel a feeling that drives you to eat.

And what's really cool about this is that you get to think whatever you want about your circumstances.

I get to think whatever I want about how my eating is related to living alone or living with someone else.

My client gets to think whatever she wants about not buying the junk food.

So that means we get to create our experience of those circumstances. We get to choose how we think

and therefore how we feel and what we do.

Now, are some circumstances easier to do this with? Absolutely.

Sometimes it's easier to think in more useful ways that will help us not run to food and binge.

But there is no circumstance that you are controlled by. There is no circumstance that determines how you're going to behave.

I hear people who think that there are but I promise you there's not.

People say, "If there's ice cream in the house, I'm going to eat it all."

No. If there's ice cream in the house, you get to decide how much of it you're going to eat. And let me tell you, if you think you're going to eat it all then you will. The problem here isn't the ice cream being in the house, the problem is how you make your decisions for how much you're going to eat. Why would you decide that you're going to eat it all if that's not what you really, truly want? That doesn't make sense. The problem isn't the ice cream being there, it's you thinking you don't have control around it, which in fact you absolutely do.

People also say, "If I have one I won't be able to stop."

Also no. If you have one, you get to decide whether you stop at one or keep going. You've probably just been deciding to keep going because it tastes so good. You can stop, you can literally just put the food down, but you're choosing to continue. Each piece of food you put into your mouth is a decision you're making to eat more food. The problem isn't eating one, the problem is that you're thinking you want more and then eating more.

Two circumstances here – there's ice cream in the house and you ate one of something. Those are facts. What you do is not determined by these facts, these circumstances, it's determined by your thoughts, which are yours to choose. Thinking you will eat it all or you won't be able to stop is completely optional.

So let's not blame the food or who is around you. Take responsibility for your decision to eat and to eat more.

So now let's take this in a different direction.

What if it's not the circumstance of the food's availability or of who is and isn't around you making it easy or not to binge?

What if your circumstances are just not ideal and you eat to deal with them, distract from them, or avoid them?

This could mean you don't like your living situation, your job, your relationship, your family drama or you have things going on in your world like money stress, health issues, or other people's problems that you're involved in.

You may have one or more of these things, or something else I didn't mention, and eating is your

temporary escape away from them.

So you blame these circumstances of your life for your eating.

You imagine that if you had a different job, if your family wasn't so drama-filled, if your husband acted differently, if you had more money, or whatever, that you wouldn't eat so much.

Now, maybe that's true. Maybe you wouldn't.

And if your circumstances are changeable then that's great.

I had a client who reached out to me after we'd finished working together telling me about how, along with all the insight and tools I gave her, changing her environment helped her to stop binge eating. She had been living in a shared house with roommates and she felt a lot of stress and like she couldn't get away. She chose to eat to feel better and to give herself that comfort and sanctuary she felt like she was lacking.

She was able to change her circumstances and felt better because of it which is so great for her. I've definitely been in her shoes with different circumstances of my life and been fortunate enough to be able to change them.

But for most of us in most of our circumstances, that's just not an option. Or, it's just not an option that we want to choose. For example, you could just cut contact with drama-filled family members, but maybe you don't want to. You could just leave your relationship, but maybe you love them and want to make it work more than you want to leave. You could just leave your job, but maybe you have good reasons why you don't want to.

Or like I said, maybe it's just not an option and your circumstances are not changeable right now in this moment, like if you have a health issue, you're in debt, or you're involved in some other problem. What do you do then?

Does that mean you have no choice but to eat until you finally can change your circumstance or until the circumstance just changes on it's own?

Honestly, that's a very passive way to live and living passively doesn't create awesome results in your life.

If you want massive change, you have to take massive action.

And if you're going to take massive action, then you're going to have to stop being a victim to your circumstances. You have to see your circumstances for what they are, which is just neutral facts in your life and in the world, and decide how you want to think about them in a useful way.

Here's an example. My client lived in a shared house with roommates. That was her circumstance. Was this circumstance stressful? She may have thought it was, but it wasn't. Circumstances are never stressful, never emotional. It didn't become emotional and stressful until she had thoughts about her living situation, the people around her, and how much time she spent alone. One person may think it was awesome and having the people around was great and they had just the right amount of alone time so they feel excited about the house. One person may not love the environment but looks at it very

neutrally, that this is how they're living now and this is just how it is for them right now, and they're going to change it when they can so they feel rather neutral and chill about the house. Another person may think her roommates are annoying, that she never gets to do what she wants, that the house is always a mess, that it's too chaotic, these kinds of stressful thoughts, so she feels stressed about the house.

These three people think differently about it, and therefore feel differently and experience it differently. This here shows that it's not the circumstance itself, it's not the living situation that is stressful and causes stress, it's each person's individual thought about it that does.

So, do you need to change your circumstances to feel better? No, you don't. You just need to find a new way of thinking about it.

You need to change your thoughts about it so you can feel a feeling that you won't feel so determined to numb away with food.

If you want to feel better, changing your circumstance isn't your only option. You can change you.

And this is great news because again, we can't always change our circumstances immediately, or ever, and we also sometimes don't want to.

And that's totally fine because you don't have to. You can feel better right now without changing anything around you. The only change that needs to happen is in your mind.

I do also just want to give a side note here that although I'm sharing with you the option of thinking differently about your circumstances, there might be some that you don't want to change your thoughts about and that's okay too. As an example, if you or someone you know is in a relationship where there is physical contact or where you or they get spoken to in a way you don't approve of and you think the relationship is abusive, you might not want to change how you're thinking about that relationship. You don't have to. You can think it's abusive and not feel good about the relationship. But in a case like that, what you can do is decide to not eat because of it. Yes you think it's abusive, yes you will feel awful because of this, but you can choose to not eat to numb away and avoid how you're feeling. You can keep your circumstance and keep your thought and feel how you feel, but decide to feel instead of eat. That's an option.

So, no matter who you live with, no matter how much time you spend alone, and no matter what food is in your home, you still get to decide what you do. These circumstances do not determine what you do, you do.

And no matter what the circumstances of your life are, no matter how undesirable they are, you get to choose how you think about them which will determine how you feel and how you behave.

If you can change your circumstances to make it easier for you to not binge, then that's great. But you can't always do that. So manage how you think about them.

The thing about life circumstances is that something will always come up. Life is going to hand you circumstances that aren't easy to handle or that you don't like.

This doesn't mean eating is inevitably going to happen. You always have a choice for how you want to

handle it.

You can't spend your life running and trying to change everything around you. That's exhausting and a lot of the time, not even possible.

So change what's within you, change what you do have control over, which is yourself, what you think, how you feel, and how you respond, and then it won't matter what your circumstances look like.

So go enjoy your week, and live with the circumstances you have without eating to distract yourself from them. And if you binge, don't blame your circumstances. Look to yourself to understand why you did it. Take responsibility for your actions and know that you chose to do it. Nothing outside of you caused you to do anything.

Alright, talk to you next time, bye bye.