

# THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## Ep #112: The Food Pleasure Cap

Hi! I hope you're having a wonderful day. Mine has been great and I'm going to do my best to make it continue to be great.

Today's episode is all about a concept that I like to call, The Food Pleasure Cap.

For years, I've been working with people to help them stop binge eating and every now and then I'd share with clients my theory on how much pleasure we experience in one sitting.

I'd been meaning to look into this, as it was just something I'd noticed in myself and that when I'd shared it my clients always agreed so as I was preparing for this episode, I finally did my research.

Come to find out, I found two fancy sounding terms that related to this topic.

They are, The Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility and Sensory Specific Satiety.

Sounds complicated, I know, but I'm going to break them down for you, as I also had to do for myself, and they may give you not only some understanding into why you binge in the way you do but also to help you shift your mindset around eating a lot of food.

So let's start with the first one, The Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility.

It's a law of economics that states that the more you consume something, the less satisfied you will be with each successive use.

Although it is an economics concept, many places I saw it explained actually used food as an example to explain it.

What they're talking about in their subject is how people get less satisfied by something when they purchase a lot of it.

When they talked about in relation to food, they talked about how taking that first bite when you're hungry tastes so good. I think we've all experienced that. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say that the first bite is the best, and I'm not going to disagree with that. It's like the first sip of water when you're thirsty. Water never tasted so good!

But then after awhile, as you're eating or as you're drinking, it might not be so amazing. Sure it may still taste good, but not as amazing as that first sip or that first bite.

In the fancy terms, the utility diminishes, and in my more laymen terms, what you're getting from it decreases. The intensity of the pleasure decreases.

You're eating food, it starts off tasting so good, but after several bites, several pieces, or several servings, it might not taste so good anymore.

There's a point when you're eating and that same pleasure you had in the beginning just isn't there anymore.

This is what I call The Pleasure Cap.

There's a point where the pleasure will be capped. There's a limit. The food you're eating is only going to give you so much sensory pleasure in one sitting.

So what determines how long it will take to reach that limit?

There's so singular answer to that. There's different factors that go in to.

One that I will mention though is fullness.

Now, I looked for scientific proof on this, and I couldn't find it. So for this, I'm going off of what I experience for myself and what my clients have experienced.

When you feel full, eating is not as pleasurable than when you're hungry, or even when you're eating when you're not hungry or full.

This is my thought about why that is. It's hard to experience pleasure when you don't feel physically comfortable. It's like having sex when your back hurts. It's hard to get the full pleasure from that. Or it's hard getting a lot of pleasure while at a party with people you absolutely love when you have a migraine.

When you're full, and your stomach hurts, it's hard to experience the same kind of pleasure than when you're not full because you can't ignore that feeling in your stomach. It hurts. It's not pleasurable.

Other factors may be what you're focusing on, what you're thinking about, because if you're thinking about unpleasant things while you're eating you're not going to get maximum pleasure, and there's also the other fancy term I mentioned before, Sensory Specific Satiety.

This one is when you lose interest in, or stop experiencing as much pleasure from, one type of food.

Breaking down the term, Sensory Specific, so a certain taste, Satiety, is satisfied.

Your taste for sugar has been satisfied. Your taste for salty has been satisfied. As much pleasure as can come from it, you have received.

Again, there's a cap, a limit.

So what you may do in an instance like this are two things.

One, is that you may keep eating, hoping the pleasure comes back. You remember how pleasurable it was just minutes ago, or a previous time you ate it, and you think that if you eat more, then more pleasure will come.

You're equating the pleasure you feel to the food, but there's so much more to it.

Your brain and your senses, your taste buds, have a role here too.

The food may still be the same but you are not.

Your taste buds adjust. We know that this can happen over time, our tastes can change, most of us have experienced this. Maybe you've acquired a taste for something or don't really like something you used to. But this can also happen as you're eating, just not as drastically of course.

It's not just our taste sense either. This happens with all of them.

When you're in the dark and you turn on a light, it may be hard to see at first but your eyes adjust to the stimulus, the light, and it's not so bright to you anymore.

When you step into a cold lake, pool, or ocean, it may be hard to bear, but you get used to it and then it doesn't feel as cold.

When you walk into a room with a scent, you may notice it as first but get used to it after a little while and not even notice it anymore.

Our senses adjust and your sense of taste may not be as affected by sugar after eating a lot of it or salt after eating a lot of it.

And this is where the change up might come in.

Have you ever had a binge where you kept switching between sweet and savory? I did that so much of the time and often when I was buying food to binge on I'd purposefully buy both because I knew I liked to switch back and forth. That and sometimes I didn't know what I was in the mood for so I'd buy both and see what happened when I ate one. I wanted to have both available.

So what would happen is I'd start with one, my taste buds would stop being so stimulated by it and I'd switch to the other. Then I'd go back and repeat.

When one pleasure would cap, I'd go to find pleasure in the other.

Now, this would work for some time but eventually, it was all capped out. Eventually, there would be no pleasure coming from either because I was experiencing the Sensory Specific Satiety for both sweet and salty or, or and, I was so full it was hard to experience any pleasure from anything.

Pleasure from eating isn't going to be endless and a problem we fall into when we're binge eating is that we think it will.

We think more is better but obviously it's not. You've seen this to be true every time you've eaten way past fullness and felt anything but pleasure.

There's an amount that is best and I'd say the best amount is enough to bring you to the start of the decline in pleasure.

You notice the pleasure diminishing and you end it there.

It's ending on a high note and pure satisfaction instead of ending on a low note and feeling awful.

There's two examples of this that I love giving here. The first one is with vacations and the other with television shows.

Have you ever had a vacation where you were so ready to go home? It was great, but you're just ready to get back to normal and be home. In a case like this, more isn't better. More wouldn't make the vacation more enjoyable. It was awesome being the length it was and doing the things you did, but what would be more enjoyable now is going home, getting back to work, and living your awesome life that you better be creating for yourself day to day.

And have you ever watched a television show that you love that just kept going on for way too long? This was me with a certain *Zombie* show that I thought was so awesome for the first few seasons and as it went on it felt like a chore for me to watch it. In my opinion, I would have been so satisfied if they'd just ended around season 6. It just wasn't pleasurable anymore yet I kept watching hoping it would be. I eventually gave up.

One of my clients used to always say she didn't want the party to end. She got so much enjoyment out of eating and she didn't want it to end.

I think that's such a great way to put it.

Think about being at a really fun party with your favorite people and it's getting late and you have things you want to get done the next day. You want to be responsible and leave at a reasonable time so you can get enough sleep but it just feels so good to be at the party. Leaving the party means you don't get to feel good anymore.

But here's the thing. Do you want to squeeze out as much pleasure as you can in these next moments? If you do, then you're not going to get enough sleep, you're going to be tired and maybe a little cranky the next day, if you have another drink at the party you might feel a little hungover, and there's also a chance you may give up on getting that stuff done.

Or, do you want to leave now, get enough sleep, feel awake and energized the next day, and be productive getting all the things done?

These are your options.

What's so interesting to see here is that if you extend your pleasure at the party, you miss out on the pleasure of accomplishment and feeling good the next day.

If you let go of the party pleasure, then you get the pleasure of accomplishment and feeling good the next day.

If you keep eating and try to extend the pleasure you're getting from eating, you're going to miss out on the pleasure of feeling good, living your life, behaving how you want to behave, and doing what you want to do.

If you stop eating and let the pleasure go, then you will continue getting more pleasure in other ways, by feeling good, living your life, behaving how you want to behave, and doing what you want to do.

More isn't always better.

Pleasure comes in quality, not quantity.

I know we all like pleasure. We all like to feel good and when you're eating, at least in the beginning, you probably feel good.

It makes sense that you wouldn't want those good feelings to end but here's the thing. They will. You're not going to be able to have consistent pleasure at all times in your life. That's just not going to happen.

Whether you want the pleasure to end or not, it's going to.

You can either let it happen while you still feel good, or you can keep trying to hold on to it and end up making yourself feel terrible.

Choose to stop when the pleasure stops.

Pay attention to what you're experiencing and choose what will truly give you more pleasure.

Bye bye.