

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #116: Working Against Your Brain

Hi! How are you today? I'm really good. I had a really fun weekend, I'm excited for some plans I have for the next two weekends, as well as just having some good times in between. Gotta make those good times happen often, right? Right. Even on the weekdays, don't just wait for the weekends!

Alright, that's enough about making good times, let's talk about working against your brain.

You want to change some habits you have around eating and all the habits you have begin in your brain.

All actions begin with a thought so all your action or behavior habits begin with thought habits.

You eat because you think about eating and then act on that thought.

So if you want different behavior habits, you have to create different thought habits.

Easier said than done but 100% possible. You know it's possible because you do it all the time. You change how you think about things all the time. You have also changed what you believe about things. It's just that sometimes we need to be more methodical and systematic about making it happen.

In order to change what's happening in your thoughts in your mind, you have to work against your brain but also work as a team with it.

If you're wondering what the heck that means, don't worry, I'm going to be explaining it in this episode and the next episode, so this is kind of a two-parter.

So in this episode we'll talk about working against it and then next week I'll go into how you'll work as a team with it.

Your brain likes its habits. Habits make life easier. You don't have to put much energy or effort into things that are habitual and your brain loves doing easier, less effortful things.

So when you try to change a habit, your brain is going to resist. It may resist hard or it may just lightly resist. It may try to argue for the old habit and it may produce discomfort in your body.

You see this happen when you're used to eating at a certain time or when a certain thing happens, or when one of your triggers happens.

Your brain may fight for you to eat because that's what it knows best. In order for you to not eat, you have to work against your habitual thinking and think in a new way, in a way that will lead you to the action of not eating.

Your brain isn't going to like that. It sees nothing wrong with eating in the way you have been because the thing is, your brain doesn't know how detrimental it is to your well-being.

All your brain knows is that you're still alive and when you eat it brings pleasure and removes the pain of any discomfort you're feeling. As long as it has all that, your brain is satisfied.

So it's going to keep urging you to live that way.

Left to its own devices, it would just tell you to indulge in whatever you find to be the most pleasurable activities as often as possible. Our brains love pleasure.

But unfortunately, our brains are also not long-term thinkers. Our brains just focus on the now. They want pleasure now and to avoid pain now and to do the easy thing now.

They don't want to wait for pleasure, ride out the pain, and do the hard thing.

But you do.

Now, here's the thing. The "you" I'm talking about here also exists in your brain. But it's a more conscious, higher part of your brain, that is capable of long-term thinking and making decisions based on your well-being and goals.

We could separate them into the higher brain and lower brain as I have before and as many others do, but instead, for the sake of this episode, I'm going to refer to the higher brain as you and the lower brain as just your brain.

By the way, if you have no idea what I'm talking about when I say higher and lower brain and all that, go listen to episode #2, Binge Eating Urges and Your Brain.

So back to you. You want new habits, you want new thinking, your brain does not.

So if you want to get what you want, you have to work against your brain's programming.

You have to retrain your brain.

Previously, you have trained your brain to be how it is now.

You weren't born binge eating, you taught your brain that eating a lot of food is something you do.

Either you learned to eat a lot of food by doing it and experiencing how pleasurable it is or someone in your life taught you that eating a lot of food is a good idea by example, or by encouraging you to do it, or by just allowing you to do it when you did.

Then you kept doing it and kept reinforcing the idea that eating a lot of food is good.

Your brain learned this, has gotten really good at thinking this way, is now programmed to think this way, and doesn't see any reason to change.

It works. You eat a lot of food and it makes the pain, the discomfort go away. Plus, it gets pleasure, it's easy, and you're still alive. So in its reasoning for what's important, there's no problem.

It's going to keep this programming.

But you don't want to, so you have to be the authority here.

You have to manage your brain. You have to tell your brain what you want now, which is different from what you wanted before, when you trained it to function in the way it does now.

You have to set the goal, the expectations, and you also have to manage how the goal is achieved and make sure the expectations are met.

You are the manager of your brain which means you watch it, listen to its suggestions, and make executive decisions.

Your brain is going to suggest you binge, it's going to suggest you eat food when you feel an urge to eat, it's going to suggest you eat when you're feeling anxious or stressed, it's going to suggest you eat when other people are eating.

This is what you trained it to do because at one time you found it to be a useful way of dealing with situations.

But you have a new goal now and these actions do not line up with what you want now.

You have to teach your brain that you don't binge anymore, that you don't eat when you feel urges to eat, that you don't eat when you feel anxious or stressed, that you don't eat just because other people are eating.

And then your brain is gonna be like, "no, that's now how we do things."

But you have to stand your ground. You have to be the authority over your life and how it's run and what results you get.

I think about how it used to be for me as an employee. I've worked in many restaurants, but I remember working in one specifically where policies and things would change from time to time and my co-workers and I would always be against them. We thought things were just fine as they were and they shouldn't be changed. They changed scheduling stuff, they changed menu stuff, they changed how our server sections were set up, and so many other things in my 5 years working there. Every time, we were resistant.

But the management didn't back down. It was their restaurant, they wanted certain results, and they set these new policies and made these changes thinking it would be more beneficial to them than the old way. So even though we fought back and shared our opinions, they moved forward anyway. I will say, on a side note, that rarely they would go back to doing it the old way, but most of the new things they enforced, stuck.

The truth is, it's their restaurant so their rules. As an employee, I could either follow along with what they say, complain about it, or leave.

When it comes to your life, it's your rules too. Your brain can't leave, but it can follow along or complain and most likely, at least at first, it's going to complain, just like we did.

You have to hold your ground, for what you think is best, no matter what your brain says. Don't just hear your brain complain and then go back to how things were. Your brain doesn't know everything going on in your life, just like as an employee, I didn't know everything going on in the restaurant...even though us servers all thought we knew everything.

Like I said before, your brain isn't aware of the long-term, what's going to happen after you get that quick and easy pleasure, what happens if you allow yourself to go through pain and discomfort.

But you can teach all of that to it.

If the management at the restaurant had sat us down and given us all the reasons why they're making the changes, how they expect it to better the restaurant as a whole, share their whole thought process with us, and address our concerns, then maybe we would have been more understanding. But they usually didn't. It was just, "these are the changes, now go implement them." Since we didn't know the logic behind it, we came up with our logic against it and how it won't work.

If you sit down with your brain and give it all the reasons why you want to make your changes, how it will better your life as a whole, and share your thought process, as well as hear it's reasons against it and address them, then most likely, your brain will be less resistant. Still resistant because it doesn't like change, but less than if you just said, "We're not bingeing anymore," or "We're not eating that" without any explanation.

Changing your brain's habits can be a challenge but it's a challenge worth facing.

It's worth taking charge and designing your life instead of just living with what your past self created for you.

Left to it's own devices without you taking charge, your brain is going to do some good work. It's going to keep you alive and do what you trained it to do.

But, you may not want to work with some of the same processes as you once did.

Don't be idle and just let your brain run the show, run your own show.

It may be frustrating and uncomfortable at first as you're trying to teach and learn all the different tools and techniques and thoughts that work best for you, but it's work worth doing.

It can take some time for your brain to catch on and for it to become more natural, but with patience and consistency and you not giving up, it will happen.

We got used to all those changes that happened at the restaurant. Management stayed consistent with enforcement and didn't back down and eventually we all accepted the changes and just kept on working as if the new way was the way it had always been.

Be the manager of your brain, your mind, your life.

It's yours so take charge and do what you think is truly best for you.

And when your brain complains or tries to do things the old way, it's your job to enforce the new way, no matter how uncomfortable it is to stand up to your brain.

Do it, and have a great week. I'll talk to you next time when we look at working with your brain.

Bye bye!