

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #122: Levels of Pleasure

Hi! It's December! The last month of the year! How are you feeling? I'm feeling so good. I've accomplished a lot this year, even with all that's been going on in this good old 2020, and I'm so excited to see what 2021 is going to bring.

I'm going to help thousands of people to stop binge eating, whether it be through my podcast or in my groups and I'm so excited to have you be a part of it in whatever way you choose. Which I hope is in my group because then I get to help you directly and talk with you and help you have the most success!

And by the way, I have something really awesome coming up that you're going to want to know about so keep your ears and eyes peeled.

Alright, onto today's topic which is, levels of pleasure.

Have you ever thought about trying to not binge, trying to not eat at night for pleasure, trying to not eat for fun, and thought something like, "Nothing else is as pleasurable" or "Nothing else will be as good?"

I've had countless people say those words to me.

I don't recall myself saying those words exactly like that, maybe I did, but I do remember comparing bingeing, and eating a lot of food to other options and I'd choose bingeing. I've talked about this before on here about how I'd choose eating over making plans with friends and hanging out. It came down to my idea that eating the food would be more fun. It would be more enjoyable because I felt like I was in full control of the fun being had. It was just me, I got to choose the food I ate, I got to choose what tv show or movie I would watch while I was doing it so I knew I'd be choosing things that would make it the most fun.

If I involved someone else, it was uncertain. Maybe they'd be in a low mood or the activity we chose wouldn't be fun or we just wouldn't have anything to talk about. I had all kinds of ideas in my head about why that other person could possibly ruin the fun while I fully believed I wouldn't ruin my fun if it was just me.

It's so ridiculous though. As I was preparing for this podcast I took a moment to think back in my adult life to times when I truly would have enjoyed myself more at home alone....not with food, but just me. I can only think of two friends of mine that that may have happened with and with one it was only because sometimes she'd be kinda drunk when I wasn't and I didn't enjoy being around that. But that didn't always happen with her. And the other was a friend who I sometimes felt like zoned out and stopped paying attention to me when we'd hang out and I'd feel like I was talking to a wall, which obviously wasn't fun. But besides those two, the drinker and the spacer, I can't think of anything.

Yet I still kept telling myself I wouldn't enjoy myself as much with other people, that eating alone would be more pleasurable.

But it wasn't. At least, not the whole time.

Here's the truth about it. Anticipating eating was pleasurable. I enjoyed shopping for it and deciding what I was going to get. Starting eating was pleasurable, the food tasted really good most of the time. But as the eating continued and I felt fuller and fuller, the pleasure diminished.

I talked about this before in my episode about The Pleasure Cap, #112 if you haven't listened to it yet.

In my mind, that first part was extremely pleasurable. I enjoyed it so much. As I've shared on here before, one of my main thoughts about bingeing that kept me doing it was that it would be fun, and that first part was really fun.

On a scale of 0-10 with 10 being the most pleasurable and 0 being something I would never want to do, shopping for binge foods and eating all the deliciousness in the beginning of the binge was probably close to a 10. I loved it, and that's why I kept going back to it and thinking about it all the time.

Of all the things in my life, eating those foods were probably the most pleasurable. When I was having a great time with friends at parties, concerts, or whatever, that was for sure up there too, the best times being at a 10. But other than that, I thought of my life as kinda dull. I wasn't in a relationship, I didn't see my friends enough, which was obviously mostly because of my lack of reaching out, I didn't love my jobs during most of my binge years, I was constantly trying to lose weight, and even with my passion projects like my dance show that I produced and choreographed or my band that I was in, I put a lot of pressure on those projects to become sources of income and for them to grow so they stopped being fun.

Eating food was probably the most consistently pleasurable thing in my life, it was an easy go to pleasure, and it was a 10 out of a 10, in the beginning.

But then what. I'm talking about the beginning a lot here. But what about the end? Oh, the end. We all know about the end, that's why you're here listening to this podcast. The end is anything but pleasurable. The end is where the sick feeling, the lethargy, the sluggishness, the regret, the sadness, the guilt, the disappointment, all come in.

You started at a 10 and now you're at a 0.

The result of going for that 10, was a 0.

Let's not deny either of these. That pleasure you get from the beginning of the binge is a 10. That pleasure you get after a binge is a 0.

Stop telling yourself that this won't happen. Stop telling yourself that you can have that 10 the whole way through and that it won't end at a 0. You know that's not true, you've seen the truth over and over again. So tell yourself the truth.

You can go for the 10 but it's going to start to decline and if you don't stop before that decline gets too low then you'll end up in a 0.

You gotta pick where you want to stop the pleasure at. Do you want to stop when you're at a 0? At a 5? At an 8? What I recommend is that you end on a high note, not a low one. End on a high level of pleasure, not a low one.

That means you're not going to continue seeking more, you're going to have a reasonable amount of a joy food, love it, and stop eating before the pleasure dips too low.

Now, let's look at what happens when you choose that 10 pleasure from food all the time.

What happens to the level 5 pleasures? What happens to connecting with another person and having conversations that aren't super thrilling but just enjoyable? What happens to going for a walk on a nice day? What happens to watching a good tv show or movie? What happens to your favorite hobby?

All of that becomes not good enough.

Like I've heard so many people say before, "Nothing is as pleasurable as eating food."

Maybe that's true for you. Maybe connecting with another person, walking outside, watching a tv show or movie, doing your hobby aren't as exciting as eating food. Maybe they're not as pleasurable. Maybe they're a 5, a 7, or maybe they are a 9 or 10 but the set up isn't, so that lack of pleasure there stops you.

What I mean by that is that setting up time to talk with that person may require you to reach out to more than one person, because people are busy. Or the person you try to engage with isn't in the mood to engage. Those were always my concerns that stopped me.

Or let's say your hobby is painting. Setting up your easel and canvas and your paint takes some time and it may not be pleasurable.

Finding something good to watch may take some time and you don't want to go through that.

What could end up being an amazing conversation, an amazing hobby session, and amazing movie, you miss out on because you're not focusing on the pleasure you'd get from doing it, you're too focused on the pleasureless effort it would take to get there.

But with food, that's all easy and the set up itself is very pleasurable, so you go for that.

But all those things that aren't as pleasurable as food, the 5s, the 7s, the ones that have set ups that are 3s that turn into 10s when you're doing them, those aren't going to result in 0s.

Those are going to be the steady ones, the ones that stay on that steady level and after you're finished, the decline in pleasure is slow. Sure you'll go back to neutral if you don't engage in something else that's highly pleasurable, but neutral is better than extremely negative and miserable.

There's nothing wrong with having level 10s of pleasure. It can happen when you eat an amazing joy food, just a serving or maybe two, it can happen when you're in love, when you have fantastic sex, when you hit a big goal at work, when you win something, when you're at your favorite band's concert, but what needs to be looked at is the net consequence. When all is said and done, where's the pleasure? Is it still there or slowly declining? Or did it plummet to a 0?

Choose your pleasures wisely.

Choose the ones that will be steady, not extreme. Think about the net consequence, which is the final, overall consequence, like your paycheck after taxes, your net income.

Now, what's going to be important here as you choose your pleasures is that you're not always going to for the 10.

I think when some of us are wanting pleasure, we're expecting it to always be a 10 and if it's not then it's not good enough.

There you are, experiencing a 6, it's lovely, but you're not appreciating it. You're thinking about how eating would make it better.

I know a lot of you do this with tv. You think tv by itself isn't good enough and it's only enjoyable if you're eating while watching.

Now, if that's true, either you need to find better things to watch or stop watching tv. Why would you do something that's only enjoyable if you're eating while doing it? It makes no sense.

But I'd question a lot of you on this and you might see that you're just telling yourself tv alone isn't good enough when it actually could be.

Why do you really need to eat popcorn while watching a movie? Does it REALLY make the movie better? To be honest, from my perspective, it actually takes away from the movie. You can't focus on both the food and the movie at the same time. Your attention is always on one or the other. So if you're focusing on the food then you're not absorbing the movie and if you're focusing on the movie you're not experiencing the food.

Our brains don't have the capability to focus on two things at once. If you feel like you can, like when you're multi-tasking, what's really happening is your brain keeps quickly jumping back and forth between the two things.

This is why I don't eat while I'm watching things I really want to pay attention to. If I'm watching something while eating, I'm watching something I've seen before or something that's an easy watch

because I want to focus on what I'm eating and savor it.

Anyway, I kinda went off on a tangent there. Back to pleasure levels.

Your life isn't going to be full of level 10 pleasures and if you try to make it that way by bingeing everyday, you're also going to end up with a lot of 0s.

And also, if you use food as your source of pleasure every day, and you're getting that level 10 everyday with just a single joy food, then something not so great might happen.

You may lose interest in the lower level pleasures. You're so caught up in having those 10s every day and you're not diversifying your pleasure so you get used to the 10. So then 5s and 6s are unappealing to you.

This is what happens to people who get hooked up alcohol and drugs. Connecting soberly with a friend or being outside, walking or relaxing on a warm day, is nothing in comparison to what they experience when they're drunk or high. So they don't seek out those lower level pleasures. They just stick with that 10, even though their net consequence is going to be 0 because they're only focusing on that 10 they'll get before they start coming down.

Imagine what your life would look like if day to day you incorporated level 5-7 pleasures and once in a while sprinkled in a 9 or 10?

Those 9s and 10s wouldn't be your expectation for your day to day, they'd be a bonus.

I don't have joy foods or super fun times with friends, family, or my boyfriend every single day. Some times it's just chill. He and I have a nice conversation about our day and we connect, or I watch a tv show or movie I really enjoy, I also find a lot of enjoyment scrolling Instagram because I've curated it so most of what I see is funny memes and videos or really cute animals, I find moderate pleasure in experimenting with cooking new recipes, in playing games, in listening to good music. There's so many things. And that's what my day to day pleasure time looks like.

Then once or twice a week, there's big fun. I'll eat a really amazing joy food, just a serving or two. I'll spend time with friends or family and we'll have an amazing time, or Mike and I will do something super fun.

Life isn't meant to be all 9s and 10s.

Moderate is good enough but you have to let go of the idea that it's always got to be 9s and 10s if you want to believe that.

Don't lose sight of your long-term pleasures, the ones that enhance your life and last longer. The ones that aren't super exciting but that bring even a bit of joy into your life.

Don't sacrifice your moderate pleasures by going for the extreme ones all the time.

And just know that giving up binge eating and excessive overeating isn't you sacrificing your pleasure. It's making room for better pleasure, true pleasure that feels good before, during, and after. Pleasure that doesn't end in regret or feeling gross. Pleasure that gives you energy rather than depleting you.

The long-term, moderate pleasures are the ones that enhance your relationship with yourself. So that's actually a good question to ask yourself. Will this pleasure enhance or hinder my relationship with myself?

Diversify your pleasure. Choose mostly moderate with the higher level ones sprinkled in. Create a full life and one where you don't create results of negative net consequences.

All levels of pleasure are great, so enjoy them all. But always make sure you're aware of how you're feeling so you know when the pleasure is decreasing, and how fast. End on a high note. Do things that are going to leave you with continued pleasure even after you've finished.

Think before choosing your pleasure.

Have a wonderfully pleasurable week, I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye.