

# THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## Ep #124: Relaxing with Food

Hi! How are you feeling? Are you feeling super stressed? Are you relaxed? Somewhere in the middle?

Well, if you're someone who feels super stressed or is very busy and eating is your go-to method to relax then this episode is for you!

A lot of people binge eat to relax. Or maybe they're not intending to binge to relax but they sit down to eat to relax and don't stop eating after they've started and it then turns into a binge.

I used to do that quite often after work when I was binge eating. As I've talked about before, for most of my binge years I was working in restaurants as a server and as anyone who has done that job too knows, it's not usually a walk in the park. It's fast paced, can be stressful, and dealing with people and co-workers in that atmosphere can be draining. It's not always like that, but often it is.

In the first few years, I found myself going out for drinks after work with my co-workers. I thought it was a good way to feel good, enjoy myself, and wind down.

In the following years, it switched to food and it wasn't with my co-workers anymore, it was by myself. I'd take a dessert or an unhealthy comfort meal to go or stop for something on the way home or go home and then go out and get something soon after.

It was my reward, my pleasure, my enjoyment after a tiring day. It was an enjoyable way to relax and let go of the day.

I'd finish my day and think, "I just want to eat [fill in the blank, whatever I wanted that day], sit on the couch, and watch my shows.

That's all I had in mind.

Now, because I was working in restaurants, my day didn't always end at the same time. Different restaurants were different but over the years I could end at 3pm, 6pm, 10pm, or even midnight.

Those later shifts I was better about because I knew I'd be going to bed soon but I still wanted my wind down time afterward and sometimes that would involve an unnecessary tasty treat or two.

But those earlier ones, those are the ones that would get me into the most trouble and I worked those ones more often than the late ones.

Because what would happen is I'd only focus on eating and relaxing right after work. I wouldn't consider the rest of the night, or if I did, I'd just tell myself I didn't have anything to do so it didn't matter.

So what would happen is I'd get all the food, binge after work, and then feel useless for the rest of the night.

What that could mean was eating for like a half hour or so, if that, and then feeling like crap and not feeling like doing anything enjoyable for the following 3-5 hours, however many I had left before bedtime.

I'd just sit there, feeling too full, lethargic, sluggish, and tired with no motivation to do anything productive or fun.

So I'd waste the rest of my day watching tv and not really even enjoy it because of the state I was in.

And it would all happen because I wanted that relaxation by eating a lot of food at the end of the day.

I wasn't considering how I'd feel afterward, I wasn't considering that even though I had nothing planned that I could plan something, I didn't consider any of that.

I was just focused on eating because that was my favorite way to relax after work.

Or not even just after work. If I had a day where I was out running errands all day and felt drained by the end of the day that same thing may have happened.

My mind would go to "eating yummy food on the couch and watching tv."

In my mind, that was how I relaxed.

But pretty much every time, it didn't end well and I see that happen for a lot of you too.

Eating is your way to relax and so you do it and then not only end up wasting the rest of your day but maybe also feeling low energy the next day making it harder for you to enjoy yourself or be productive that day too.

But here's where it gets tricky.

Is it relaxing?

I remember coaching one of group members on this and she wanted to change her thinking so she'd think it wasn't relaxing to eat.

But is that true?

I challenged her on that and she admitted that it's not true, that eating is relaxing.

And of course that is her opinion and other people may think differently, but I'll tell you that my opinion is the same as hers.

It is relaxing to plop down and eat yummy food.

So trying to tell yourself otherwise is just going to feel like a big fat lie and I always tell my group members that we don't want to be lying to ourselves and trying to convince ourselves that enjoyable things aren't enjoyable.

Like we don't want to try to convince ourselves that cookies and pizza and french fries all don't taste good so we don't binge on them. That's not going to work because you know they taste good to you.

But what we can do is add to the truth and tell ourselves more truth about it.

Yes those foods taste good but if you binge on them you're going to feel awful.

That's all true.

Yes it's relaxing to sit and eat a bunch of food but if you eat too much you're going to feel like garbage.

There's a reason why you don't want to keep doing it the way you have.

There's a reason why I don't do that anymore.

I don't finish my workday, open up a bag of chips and zone out in front of the tv. Currently the way my schedule is, I usually have a max of about 3 hours between finishing work and reading in bed. I want to enjoy those hours.

The whole point of eating to relax is to enjoy yourself after working all day or doing whatever productive thing you were doing all day. If it's just going to create more stress and no enjoyment after however many minutes of eating then you're going to create way less relaxation than you could possibly have had if you chose something else.

Eating is not the only way to relax. There are other ways to relax that will perpetuate relaxation, calmness, and enjoyment.

Is eating a quick and easy one? Sure, but there are others.

I have a group going right now where this came up and one of my group members was stumped for ideas.

She likes doing physical things to de-stress and she likes doing things like drawing, creative writing, and reading but by the end of day she just doesn't have the mental energy for it.

I totally get that. There are times when I feel the same way. Some days I finish working and the last

thing I want to do it use my mind for one more thing or do something strenuous.

So I stop using my mind and relax my body. That may mean I just lay on my couch in my office in silence. Or I'll stretch and listen to music or an entertainment podcast, nothing educational. Those are my two go-to's if I just was to relax.

What that does is then allow me to replenish my mental energy so I can enjoy the rest of my night. For me, that rest of my night usually means going sitting at the kitchen table talking with my boyfriend for a bit and then being able to enjoy my shows, or our shows depending, all with a fresh mind that's in a more neutral to positive space and a bit more energized than I was right after working.

I give myself downtime by just simply pausing for myself instead of using food to shove down my stress and give me pleasure hits in my brain. I don't use external consumption to relax my body and mind, I relax it by actually relaxing my mind and body on my own.

And in the time I could eat to relax, I relax myself by laying down or stretching and it doesn't take a lot of time to create relaxation doing that.

Now, I know some of you have kids and responsibilities you're like, how the heck am I supposed to just pause for myself like that?

What I'll say to that is if you have time to eat you have time to pause and create relaxation.

For you it may not mean doing it immediately after work, it may mean coming home, making dinner, wrangling the kids, taking care of all that stuff and then doing it.

Or! You don't even have to wait until the end of the day. Whenever you typically binge because you're trying to relax, that's your time. If you sometimes binge midday because work is stressful, find a place to pause. Maybe it's in your office, in your car, on a walk, in a park, in an empty conference room, in your bedroom if you work from home, there is a place.

You don't need food to relax, you can do it on your own if you just give it a minute. It may not be as immediate as the feeling you get when that first bite of food enters your mouth but if you can just wait a few minutes, it will come.

And if you're someone who has a hard time calming your mind there are great mediation apps you can use like Calm or Headspace. Start with 5 minutes. Even just 5 minutes can be so helpful with relaxing you.

And also, don't get frustrated with yourself if you're not able to do it right away. Calming your mind is a skill that's developed so be patient with yourself. Even seasoned mediators have to manage their thinking while they do it. It's not about having a perfectly clear mind with zero thoughts, it's about focusing on relaxing and dismissing away thoughts that take you away from it.

So, is eating when you're not hungry after having had a stressful or busy day relaxing? It can be, but indulge too much and it's going to create worse feelings than you began with. It's going to stop you from continuing to relax in a rejuvenating and enjoyable way for the rest of your day or night.

You don't need anything outside of you to relax. You can do it from within. Take a pause for yourself,

you have the time, choose that pause instead of choosing eating.

I hope you have some wonderfully relaxing moments this week and I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye!