

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep 13 Nighttime Binge Eating

Hi! How are you? I'm so good. Life is good you guys and I'm so excited to talk to you today. I have a question for you.

Do you find yourself mostly bingeing at night?

I know I've personally binged at all times of day, breakfast binges, afternoon, any time was a possible time, but night was by far the most common for me and I hear this same thing from so many people I talk to.

You eat so well during the day, you stay on track, you stay on your plan, and the once night comes around, BOOM, it's all over.

Maybe it's right when you get home in the evening, maybe it's after dinner. Both happened for me. I was so tired after work that I'd want to just relax with a bunch of food or I'd finish dinner and then my dessert would get really out of hand.

So let's talk about why. What are the reasons why you binge at night? Well, I've got six reasons for you, the six I find to be the most common. So I'm gonna go through each one and teach you how to handle them. Alright, here we go.

1. You come up with lots of excuses for bingeing because of how your day was. You've been good all day, or the last few days maybe, so you can have a treat, and then that treat turns into an extra meal or extra large meal. Or you deserve it after such a hard and stressful day. This is your reward. Or, this is how you want to relax, with tv and a big ole bag of chips.

These are all examples of patterns of thinking you've been repeating over the years. If something is hard or stressful then your treat, reward, or way to relax after it's done is with food. What you're really doing is justifying a binge, or justifying the eating that's going to lead to the binge.

So know what your excuses are. Know what reasons you typically come up with to binge that are reasons you don't really like when you're not in that moment. Do you want your relaxation to be with a whole bag of chips and tv? Do you want to treat and reward yourself with a lot of food? I know

sometimes it doesn't start out with you thinking it's going to be a binge, but sometimes it does. When I'd stop by the store on my way home, or leave home to go to the store, I knew exactly what I was doing. I knew I was going to buy three different things and eat them all.

I want you to take a few minutes to do a Thought Download and write them out. Really do this. Write or type them out. Any excuse you can think of that you use to justify a binge or even just eating at night when you're not hungry, write it down. Become familiar with them. Then look for them. When one pops into your head, I want you to be able to recognize it for what it is and say, "There it is! That's one of my excuse thoughts!" And know what that thought is doing for you. It's making you feel justified to eat and then you do it and the result is not going to be ideal. And then you get to decide whether you want to use that excuse to eat or come up with a better reason to not eat.

2. By the end of the day, you're mentally tired. There's been so much thinking throughout the day that you just don't want to think anymore. So you turn it off. You stop paying attention and run on autopilot. You don't want to use any extra energy to do your self-coaching, to question your thoughts, to put in effort to allow urges. Nope, you're just going to let yourself do what you do.

We use so much brain energy and make so many decisions throughout the day that the thought of using more energy to make more decisions makes our brain hurt. So we don't make purposeful decisions when we're exhausted at the end of the day, we do whatever comes to mind first. If eating or bingeing comes to mind, you don't want to question it, you just want to go with it. It's easier.

When you're tired it's harder to make rational decisions. Harder, but not impossible. Things that take effort, may take more effort. There's been so many times I've been mentally and physically tired and I don't at all want to cook a healthy meal. But I know the ability is there, and it will be worth it and I'll be happy I did it after it's done, so I do it. Sometimes you guys, you just have to power through to get what you truly want. You have to do the work even if you don't feel like it.

Being tired is just as much an excuse as the others. "I'm tired so I'm just gonna eat a bunch of crap." You probably already know this, but I have to say it anyway. Eating that crap isn't going to help your energy level. Bingeing definitely isn't. I don't know about you, but I never felt more energized after a binge. It always brought me down even more than I was before and I just wanted to curl up in a ball and sleep.

So if you're feeling tired, do what actually helps tiredness. Food isn't the solution for tiredness. Take a break, sit and relax, or sleep. If you want to give your mind a break, give it one and food doesn't have to be involved. You'll of course be much better off if food isn't and you'll be helping your future self to have more mental energy and clarity. Set yourself up to feel better, not worse.

3. You're not eating enough nutritious food during the day and I want to stress the nutritious part. Yes you should absolutely be eating until you're full at every meal, make sure you're not leaving the table still hungry, but *what* you eat is important too. Sugar, flour, and processed foods mess with our hunger and fullness signals so if you're eating a lot of them all day, then you'll find yourself being more hungry. Put it all together and if you're not eating enough at each meal and your meals consist mostly of sugar, flour, and processed foods then by the end of the day your brain will definitely be urging you to binge. It's very confused and out of whack.

I noticed for me that binges happened most often after a few days of eating this way. I'd try to stay below my calorie goals but while eating not so nutritious foods, and eventually my brain would kick

into binge mode. I felt too hungry and my brain wanted energy and it wanted it now. And what's the quickest and easiest way to get energy? By eating more of the crap I'd been eating. Things that are easily broken down into energy in our bodies. Protein and fat? Not so much, they take too long and take too much effort. Gimme those simple carbs!

And the kicker here is that the more sugar, flour, and processed foods you eat, the more you crave them and that craving can get pretty intense by the end of the day if you keep building it up.

So I recommend you eat mostly, or only if you want, whole, natural foods throughout the day and eat until you're full. Don't worry about how many calories you're eating. If you're eating foods in their natural state, you're going to get more bang for your buck and feel fuller longer. Protein and fat are much more filling than bread and pasta and you'll feel better overall.

Pay attention to what it feels like to start feeling full and to be full. Get used to looking for that feeling as you're eating. And feed yourself well.

4. You're not eating foods you like. Now, not everything you eat needs to be the most amazing thing you've ever tasted. But it should all at least taste good to you because if it doesn't, then by the end of the day, all you'll want is something that actually tastes good. Sometimes when people try to eat healthfully they sacrifice flavor and variety. This is so unnecessary and if you're someone who consistently looks for pleasure from food then this will leave you feeling very deprived.

Eat what you like. If you don't like kale, then don't eat it. And get rid of the diet foods. They don't taste as good as real foods. Eat full fat, eat full calorie. If you're going to eat ice cream, eat the real stuff. I know so many people are obsessed with Halo Top and I tried it once and I just don't get it. It was not creamy, it was kinda chalky and if I'm going to eat sugar, that's not at all what I want. It was not nearly as satisfying as real, full fat ice cream.

Don't eat substitutes of what you actually really like. But hey, if you genuinely like Halo Top and it doesn't leave you yearning for the real stuff, then go for it. Eat what you really like and you'll be more satisfied and less likely to go searching for something else.

5. You've simply made a habit of it. You may notice that there are external triggers for your urges. Just like with people who smoke. They get in the car and want a cigarette. They have a drink and want a cigarette. They have sex and want a cigarette.

You get home from work and want to eat. You sit down to watch tv and you want to eat. You've conditioned yourself to think about eating when you're in these circumstances.

It's like I talked about in Ep 2 when I'd go to the mall and immediately think, "Mrs. Field's cookies." I just repeated it enough that the circumstance of me being at that mall triggered that thought.

You've just thought about eating when you're not hungry, or bingeing, at nighttime so many times that a thought about it just automatically and habitually pops up.

Habit breaking is not going to happen overnight. You have to go through the discomfort of not doing the thing you're feeling compelled to do many times. Just like someone who smokes, they have to feel desire for the cigarette and not smoke it over and over before not smoking becomes their new normal. You have to feel your urges to binge, feel the urge or desire to eat when you get home or after dinner,

and not answer that desire or urge with food.

A thought about eating or bingeing is going to pop up and you can either do what you've always done, or you can think differently. You can create a new thought for that time that you can condition over time.

I hear a lot of people say their current, regular thought is as simple as, "I need something sweet." Now we all know you never *need* something sweet, it's just a wanting, a desire, it's just a thought you've thought so many times that now it feels very true. But it's not true and you don't have to believe it or follow through on it. You can decide to work on believing that you no longer need something sweet and you'll be just fine without it. And you will be fine.

But it is going to feel uncomfortable as you do this work. You have to be willing to experience some discomfort in order to break the habit. Your brain wants to be automatic and you're saying, nope, we're going to do something different. You have to be aware of what your brain is automatically thinking and consciously decide that you're going to think and do something different than you have been. It's totally possible.

6. The final reason I want to mention is actually the big, main, real reason. It's because of how you feel. How you feel is what drives you to eat or not. Do you feel bored, deprived, stressed, compelled, overwhelmed, justified, sad, apathetic, ravenous? Then you might eat. Do you feel calm, at peace, at ease, content, motivated, confident? Then you might not eat.

How do you usually feel at night before you binge? It's probably a feeling you don't want to be feeling and you think the feeling you desire is on the other side of eating.

But you need to understand that food will not change how you feel. Yes there may be some brain chemicals that give you pleasure as you eat the food, and food may be a distraction from your current feelings, but the only way to really change how you feel is to change how you think. Your thoughts are the cause of your feelings and that's it.

You want calmness, peacefulness, contentment, motivation, or confidence? Food will not give you any of those. Bingeing definitely won't. What will is changing how you're thinking about your current circumstances. If your circumstance is that you feel an urge, you can either think you have to eat immediately because of it or think you can totally handle this urge without eating. If your circumstance is that you have cookies in the cabinet you can either think about all the reasons why you want them or all the reasons why you don't. There's always another way to look at them.

And if you're having trouble seeing another way, then that's your time to just feel what you're feeling. This is another habit you want to incorporate into your life. Instead of just trying to avoid feeling, which is what you've been doing with food, and what a lot of us have been taught to do, it's time to feel the feelings. Become a feeling feeler instead of a feeling eater.

So those are six reasons why – because you're making excuses to do it, you're mentally tired, you're not eating enough in quantity or nutritious food throughout the day, you're not eating foods you like, you've made a habit of it, and you want to feel differently.

Which ones apply to you? I can honestly say that I experienced all of them, hence why I know about them so well.

You may be bingeing at night for any or all of them too.

So your homework for this week is to pick one and focus on it. At first, you may only have the awareness after you binged of what you did during the day or right before you binged, and that's okay. For now, just figure out what's causing your nighttime eating. Then you can work on implementing a solution.

And if you know anyone else who struggles with nighttime binge eating, or overeating, you should totally share this episode with them. I'm sure they'd really appreciate it! Have a great week and I'll talk to you next time, bye bye!