

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #23: Cheat Days

Hi! How's it goin'? Great? Good. Then let's jump right into today's topic. Cheat days.

Should you have cheat days? What a big question and it's one I get asked often.

I guess it depends on what you consider a cheat day to look like, how you structure your cheat days, and how you plan for them.

There are lots of different opinions about them, a quick Google search will show you lots of them, whether you should, how often, what you should eat, etc, and today I'm giving you my opinion.

So I want to start with saying that I'm not completely anti-cheat days. I think they can be useful. But there's some things about them that I think can throw you off and make your binge eating worse.

Starting with the fact that they're called cheat days.

What a terrible name, isn't it?

I mean really, if you think about it.

Cheating has a bad connotation. It means you're doing something wrong. It means you're being bad.

You're cheating on yourself which is not a nice thing to do.

So many people who binge eat get stuck in labeling foods as good or bad as well as labeling their behaviors that way so adding another label like cheating might not be so useful.

And then the other part of the term. Day.

We make the cheating on ourselves and our eating plan last for an entire day.

We can do whatever we want for an entire day.

Now, that's kinda a lot, don't you think? And really unnecessary.

There's quite a bit of damage that can be done in a day and I don't just mean for your weight, but for your brain.

A whole day of cheat eating might set you up for really strong cravings and urges the next day, or for the next few days. Have you ever noticed that the more sugar and flour you eat the more you crave it? It's a real thing that happens.

Or, it may set you up for a day of restriction the next day or two to make up for your cheat day.

And most likely, it will set you up to feel super crappy. Ever had a food hangover? I know I have many many times and they're not at all fun to experience. But that's what might happen if you just eat a bunch of processed and sugar and flour foods all day. And we know how hard it is to not give in to urges when we're feeling tired and crappy....pretty hard if you're not skilled at it yet.

But maybe your cheat days don't really look like that. Maybe you have cheat meals but just say they fall on your cheat day. Okay, well that could be better. But, what does that cheat meal look like? Is it an absolutely ridiculously indulgent meal, apps, drinks, and dessert included that leaves you wanting to curl up in a ball and not move for a few hours? Doesn't sound like such a great idea to me. You might think the eating part does, it sounds super pleasurable and fun, but let's not forget about how the aftermath sounds. Will you feel good after, both physically and emotionally? Like I talked about in episode 20 about eating what you want, when you make decisions about how much you're going to eat, the consequences of what you're eating have to be considered. It's part of it whether you like it or not.

And what usually happens to you in your brain after you eat a huge indulgent meal? It might be quite similar to what I said about doing the whole day. Feeling guilty, feeling regretful, feeling kinda sick, low energy, tiredness, and feeling intense cravings for more.

Cheat days are supposed to set you up for success because they ease the pressure of a strict or restrictive diet. But I don't think splurging all day sets you up for success especially if you're prone to bingeing.

And one more thing. Do you actually plan and adhere to your cheat days?

So often I see people justify responding to an urge or craving by declaring today as their cheat day....even though it was supposed to be tomorrow....but they want that food they see right now.

This is not an effective way to get your eating under control. You're using your cheat day option as a way to respond to cravings, urges, and desires and the work you need to be doing in order to stop binge eating is to stop doing exactly that.

Otherwise then you can just declare any day you want to be a cheat day. Your whole life can be a cheat day!

So that all there is my take on the downside of cheat days.

Calling them “cheats” makes you feel like you're doing something wrong. Doing a whole day of it is going to make you feel like crap and possibly make it harder for you to get back on track tomorrow, and maybe the day after that too. And if you don't have a clear plan in place that you're going to commit to for your cheat day, then it's too easy to just say today is it.

So what should you do? You want to indulge and eat treats from time to time and hey, so do I! This world is filled with too many delicious pleasurable foods that it's not fair if we can't eat them sometimes.

So first things first.

Let's drop the cheating. No more cheating! There's a term I was introduced to by my teacher Brooke Castillo that I love which you might have heard me talk about in previous episodes and it's called Joy Eating.

Joy is so much better than cheating, isn't it?

You're eating these foods purely for enjoyment, not so you can cheat on yourself.

So one of the things you must do when eating joy foods is enjoy them. Slow down and savor them. Feel the joy, experience the pleasure you are intended to receive from these foods, and feel good about your decision to eat them.

And that decision to eat them is one that should be made ahead of time. Plan them. The number one thing you need to be working on right now is not responding to every urge, craving, or desire you feel and not changing your mind on the spot about what's going to be your joy eat is practicing doing exactly that.

No switching your plan because something else looks good. You say no to that something else because you already have a plan that you're committing to. No negotiations and you always have the option of planning to eat that something else as a future joy eat.

I got a message from one of my clients earlier today who started planning her joy eats this week and she said, “Planning is definitely the way to go” because she's seeing the power in it and is doing way less picking and snacking because of it. She really likes the foods she's choosing for her joy eats so she's not missing out on getting pleasure from eating something yummy, she'll get it later, just not with that thing that might not even be that good but it's there and available. And even better, she also gets the pleasure of feeling accomplished and proud of herself for having not given into an urge, desire, or craving just because something was in front of her.

How often you have joy eats is completely up to you. Be realistic about it too. If you've been having them everyday or bingeing every day, then don't just jump into saying you're only going to have one once a week. Start where you are and maybe even just plan to have one serving of something every day for now. You can always cut back later if you want to, or not! Decide how often you want to have joy eats and what they're going to be and no changing your mind on the spot.

Now, if you want to have a Joy Eat to be a whole meal instead of just one serving of something, you're welcome to do that as well. It's your eating life. But again, consider how you want to feel after. You don't have to go all out. You can choose a couple things, maybe french fries and a dessert but you don't

have to do that and have a double bacon cheeseburger and nachos and 3 beers. Oh man, I'm feeling grossly full just thinking about doing that!

The goal is always to feel as good as possible during *and* after.

So when you're deciding what you're going to do, know that the more joy foods you eat, the less joy you'll feel. The fuller you feel, the less joy you'll feel.

Now, here's another important piece. Like I said earlier, cheat days are a way to ease the pressure of strict or restrictive eating. So take a look to see how strict or restrictive your eating is and if you genuinely like eating the way that you do. This is important to know because if it's too restrictive or strict and you don't like it, then you'll be dying to take a day off and relax your eating....maybe a little too much. Maybe so much that you start resenting the way you've chosen to eat and you rebel against yourself by going big on your joy eat or having it on before the day you've planned to do it because you just can't wait any longer.

I know that if you're bingeing and not happy with your weight then easing up on the restrictiveness or strictness may seem like a terrible idea and that you're going to end up gaining more weight. But you gotta know that being too strict and restrictive is much more likely to cause that to happen. Reference episode 4 if you haven't listened to it yet or don't know why this is.

If you are more relaxed with your eating, then maybe there wouldn't be such a need to spend an entire day eating everything you don't allow yourself to eat on a typical day.

So what if daily you were eating fueling foods that you want to eat, that you like and enjoy eating, and in amounts that fill you up, and then once a week, or a few times a week, or every day you had one serving of non-nutritious food, processed food, or something filled with sugar or flour as a joy eat?

Doesn't that sound nice?

You're tired of feeling awful after you binge. You're tired of feeling awful after you overeat. You're tired of eating so much crap food that makes you feel awful. Feeling awful sucks. You want to do less of it and doing it this way eliminates the feeling awful while still allowing yourself to have some pleasure from food. You get pleasure from the fuel foods you like and you get pleasure from joy foods sometimes too.

If you're willing to commit to only eating one and honor that commitment, and if you're willing to feel desire for more and allow that desire to be there without you answering it and eating just because you're feeling it then one serving isn't going to completely throw you off.

So let's wrap it all up here.

Stop cheating on yourself and bring joy into your life instead.

In your day to day eating, eat fuel foods that you like and eat enough of them to feel full so you're not dying to eat something different and insanely pleasurable and you're not feeling ravenous.

When it comes to joy foods, plan for smaller amounts of them that you're going to slow down and enjoy however many times during the week you want to, instead of dedicating a whole day to going

nuts with food.

And after you make your plan, there's no changing it last minute just because something else came along that looks good. Become a person who does what you said you were going to do, one joy food at a time.

Before I go, I want to let you know that as of the time I'm recording this, I do still have spots available to work with me one on one right now so if you've been thinking about doing it, then do it! Sign up for your free mini session where you can get some free coaching and all the details about my current program offering at coachkir.com/mini. Can't wait to talk to you! Have a fantastic week and remember that you're just one decision away...bye bye!