

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #28: Sugar and Flour

Hi! How are you today? I'm so good. So good!

Are you ready to talk about sugar and flour? Did you even now this was a relevant topic?

Back when I was bingeing, I had never seen any talk about these two. But now I see it all over the place.

Many people are saying that if you want to stop bingeing, then eliminating sugar and flour is a must.

But I honestly believe otherwise, that it is not a requirement. I personally do sometimes eat sugar and flour without bingeing and I've also had many clients who still eat sugar and flour and don't binge and stopped bingeing without ever totally giving it up.

But that being said, can giving up sugar and flour make stopping binge eating easier? Well, yes and no, and I want to explore why in this episode today.

I've learned a lot about sugar and flour's effects on our brains and bodies and I want to share with you what I've learned so you can make an informed decision about whether you think cutting these foods out is the right path for you.

But before I even go into it, I want to say two things, One is that if you have never even considered giving them up or have no desire to give them up, then you don't have to. Like I said, I don't believe it's a requirement. But, you may want to continue listening anyway because you might learn a little something that may help you anyway. You never know!

The other is that giving up sugar and flour is not a magic cure for all. Especially, and kind of obviously, for people don't even binge on sugar and flour. They're out there, I've talked to them, and I was sometimes one of them too. They'll binge on nuts, cheese, or popcorn and I for sure binged on those things myself. Well, not cheese, cheese ain't my thing, but popcorn and nuts yes and natural sugarless peanuts butter that's just peanuts and salt? Absolutely. When you get that urge to binge, sometimes

you'll just go for any food available. So to say that no sugar and no flour is the answer doesn't make sense if sugar and flour aren't the problem. It's the urges to binge on food no matter what the food is.

Ok, now let's start with why cutting out sugar and flour might make stopping binge eating harder.

If you are someone who already struggles with restriction, then this may seem like yet another restriction that you're putting on yourself.

It's more stuff you "can't" eat. It's more "bad foods."

As I've talked about before, a big piece of the work you need to do is to stop restricting and stop labeling foods as good and bad.

When you're really stuck in a restriction mindset and are told that now you can't eat any sugar and flour ever, then what happens? You feel completely deprived and rebel against what you're being told....even if it's just you telling yourself what you can and can't have. I also know that a lot of you, my former self included, when you're feeling an urge to binge, it's those quote, "bad foods" that you can't eat that you want to binge on the most.

So once you start taking those foods away solely for the purpose of trying to stop binge eating, it may actually backfire and cause more bingeing.

Then kind of on the same track, if you've been dieting for a long time, then cutting out sugar and flour can seem like another diet. Dieting is also something we want to get rid of. Dieting is associated with restricting foods and following plans you don't want to follow but think you have to.

You guys, there is no plan you *have* to follow. There is no one right way to eat. Diet plans say their way is the best way and it may be for the person who created it and lots of people who follow it, but there are also so many other people for whom it's not the best way.

Now let's take a look at what happens if you decide to stop eating sugar and flour but then you do eat them because you reacted to a binge urge for them. How do you respond? If you're someone who beats themselves up if they make a mistake, then you're in for some trouble.

Binge eating is something that usually comes along with a feeling of being out of control or not present which can accidentally lead you to go against that commitment you made to no sugar and no flour. It can happen. You're working on not bingeing anymore and in the process of doing that, binges might happen. Let's not forget that sometimes we make mistakes. All of us make mistakes. But if you make one, if you broke your commitment, and you are someone who typically feels disappointed, guilty, or upset, when this happens, then this can lead you to make it all worse. Maybe you'll go eat more, you already messed it up so let's just go eat all the foods you don't allow yourself, or maybe you'll go into restriction mode. Either way, it's not good.

So if when you think about stopping eating sugar and flour your mind immediately associates that to mean you can't have them, they are bad foods, and you're going on a diet, then this might not be the best choice for you, at least not right now. Or same thing if you beat yourself up every time you make an eating mistake.

If you don't manage your mind around what these foods mean, what it means to not eat them, and what

it means if you eat them, then removing them will most likely be a struggle.

If you don't know how to process your feelings and urges that you may feel when you're faced with these foods, and how to change how you think about these foods, then you're going to be using willpower to get you through, which as I talked about last week in episode 27, will only help you gain short term success, if any.

Now, like I said in the beginning, not everyone who has stopped bingeing has also stopped eating these foods so if you decide it's not the right method for you based on what I've just told you, or again, whether it be just for now or ever, or if you just don't want to, then know that it's still possible to stop bingeing.

But now I want to go over the reasons why it might make it easier, if and only if you are able to manage your mind around the drama of not eating them.

I'm going to give you some scientific explanations here but I'm going to be overly simplifying them because I don't think you really need to know all the nitty gritty details about what's going on to understand this, but hey, if you really want to know, there's always Google!

First there's the cravings. You've probably noticed this in yourself, that the more sugar and flour you eat, the more often and intensely you crave it. And vice versa, if you don't eat sugar and flour for awhile, you crave it less.

This craving effect isn't exactly the same when you eat most whole, natural foods. Like, you're not going to have intense cravings for broccoli after eating it or after eating a grilled chicken breast. You may crave more, but the difference between the intensity of a craving after eating sugar and flour vs after eating a whole, natural food is very different.

The reason why this is, is because of how differently our brains react to those foods. In both instances, our brains have chemical reactions that involve pleasure, which is mostly in response to dopamine and endorphins, that then create desire for the food.

But the amount of pleasure experienced, dopamine and endorphins released, and desire created is different.

Now, before I go into why the reaction is different, let me just touch on why this reaction happens in the first place. It is really about survival. We are designed to find pleasure in food in general because we will then be motivated to eat it. If we didn't desire food, if we didn't find pleasure in eating it, then we wouldn't eat it and we'd die. So when you eat foods that were naturally designed for our bodies, like vegetables, we experience some pleasure, some dopamine is released, and some endorphins are released which basically tells our brain, "hey, this stuff is good and important and we should do this again." The food is a pleasurable reward in our brain and we are motivated by pleasurable rewards. We are motivated to repeat the behavior that gave us the reward.

But the problem with sugar and flour is that they are concentrated forms of natural food. We took a natural sugar cane, got rid of the fiber, and we're left with just concentrated sugar. We took wheat, removed the fiber and fat and processed it down to just a concentrated powder.

What we're left with is these powders that our bodies were not designed to consume and that are

absorbed very quickly. Instead of just chewing on a sugar cane and getting a little sugar, we get this concentrated surge of it really fast which makes our brain say, "Whoa! What is all THIS??" And it thinks it's amazing. We're not just getting that level 5 pleasure we get from natural foods, we get a level 10. Since the pleasure, dopamine, and endorphins are then so high, our brain starts to think that this stuff is really important. If the level 5 is important then this level 10 stuff must be EXTREMELY important. Therefore, it encourages you to eat more asap.

These foods create an unnatural reaction because what we're eating is unnatural. They are not in their natural state of a whole sugar cane or the whole wheat plant with all the nutrition, and because of this intense reaction they cause, they falsely cause our brains to think they're really important and necessary even though they're not.

We then end up with an unnatural amount of desire, this strong, urging desire to eat them again.

So then if you stop eating sugar and flour, and stop responding to your desire for it, then your brain will basically get used to only getting the natural pleasures of natural foods and forget about the highly concentrated, unnatural pleasure as it realizes you don't actually need it for survival. You're doing just fine without it.

And just a side note here, this is how you stop getting urges to binge as well. You teach your brain that bingeing isn't necessary anymore, and you do this by not responding to urges and still surviving, and eventually your brain learns that it doesn't need to send urges anymore.

So, if you choose to stop eating sugar and flour, then your brain will send out less cravings and you will feel less desire for them...but, the desire also depends on your mind drama as well, thinking thoughts like, "I really want it" and "It's to die for," so that needs to be cleaned up to really make the desire fade away. I'll talk more about that piece of desire in a future episode.

What also will happen if you choose to stop eating sugar and flour is that your hunger and fullness signals will become more reliable.

These foods mess with your hormonal balance and our hormones are what signal our hunger and fullness.

The most simplest explanation for what happens is that the hormones ghrelin, which tells you when you're hungry, and leptin, which tells you when you're full, are greatly affected by how much insulin your pancreas produces. When we eat sugar and flour, our bodies produce high levels of insulin, which overtime leads to an imbalance in all these hormones. Amongst other effects on the body, if you have consistently high insulin, then ghrelin starts telling you you're hungry too often and leptin doesn't reliably tell you when you're full.

Eat too much flour and sugar and you start losing the dependability of your body's natural wisdom and this is what can lead you not trust your body anymore.

So then if you don't eat these foods, then your hormones will balance and work as they are meant to. You'll have steadier, less intense hunger, less often, and more reliable fullness signals.

So in summary, the reasons why it might be beneficial for you to cut out sugar and flour is that it can greatly reduce your cravings and desire for those foods as well as regulate your hunger and fullness.

That is why it's recommended.

Now that you know all this, you get to make your decision for what you want to do. If you choose to keep eating them because you haven't done the thought work necessary, or because you just simply want to, then know that it's still possible to stop binge eating. If you choose to cut out sugar and flour, or eat way less of it than you do now, know that you will still have to manage your mind around it even if you're feeling good about your restriction mentality and urge management. I think that if you do choose elimination, then you have to be very clear with yourself that you're choosing this and you want to do this rather than thinking you need to do it. Tell yourself you need to and you will start feeling restricted and rebellious. Tell yourself you choose and want to and you get all the power. It's your decision.

Whether or not you give up sugar and flour to help you stop binge eating is up to you. It's not necessary and depending on where you are in your process of thought, urge, and emotional management, it could be beneficial or detrimental. But either way, there will be mental work to do. If you give it up, there will still be times when you'll feel desire for it and you'll have to do the work to process through and allow unanswered desire.

Alright, there it is. Like I said, the science is all much more complicated than what I've explained here and I think that if this is all new to you it's much easier to digest it in this simplistic explanation. But, if you want to know more, you can ask me in the comments on the show notes page at coachkir.com/28, you can email me at info@coachkir.com, or you can hop on Google and take in all the fantastic information that the world has shared with us. That's all I have for you today, have a wonderful week, bye bye.