

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #30: Fearing Hunger

Hi! I'm so glad to have you here and I'm so glad to be here. How are you feeling? Are you feeling hungry? Are you afraid to feel hungry? If yes, then this episode is for you!

For a long time, I did not want to feel hungry. I associated it with feeling tired and cranky or as what we now refer to as hangry, the mix of hungry and angry.

I didn't like who I was when I was hungry. I just wasn't me. So I'd often try to avoid it. Or as soon as I felt an inkling of hunger I'd want to eat asap so it wouldn't get any worse.

This meant that I'd eat when I wasn't hungry just to stave off any hunger that may come in the future during a time that I didn't think I'd be able to eat. I'd eat in anticipation of being hungry later, even though I wasn't at all hungry then. I wanted to avoid what I thought would be an agonizing experience.

It just seemed like my hunger was never mild. I'd go from zero to starving. I'd go from being just fine to "I need to eat or I'm going to die." I wanted to avoid this at all costs and eating when I wasn't hungry was the solution for me.

I had a client who would call what she did pre-eating and I loved that term. Eat before eating so the hunger never arrives.

So many of us have experienced fear about hunger.

There was my big fear that I would feel terrible and I hated how I felt when I was too hungry.

Then there's just the discomfort that it causes. Feeling hungry isn't comfortable.

We also get afraid that if we let ourselves get too hungry then we will feel ravenous and eat too fast. And if your hunger is like mine used to be, then too hungry comes real fast.

And of course we get afraid that if we let ourselves get too hungry then we will binge.

So we don't allow ourselves to get hungry at all.

We try to stay full and comfortable. One of the biggest problems with this though is that it leads to creating a habit of eating when we're not hungry.

We stop listening to our hunger in order to determine when we should eat and just decide based on our fear and what we want and don't want. We lose touch with and disconnect from our hunger and maybe even forget what it feels like. We haven't felt hungry in years, we just have this memory of not liking it.

We also end up thinking about eating more often because we want to make sure we don't stop feeling full or feeling neutral between hungry and full. We spend our days calculating how long it's been since we ate and when we'll be able to eat again and make sure it's not too long, and if it is then we have to figure out what we can find to eat in the middle. And then later when we're going out with friends, how long will it be before we actually eat? Am I going to get too hungry? Maybe I should eat something before I go. But not too much because I still want to have room for dinner. Okay, I'll eat...uh oh, I ate too much, dang it. Then later, I overate at dinner because I was already full when I got there. Full turned into way fuller. Now what do I do about my busy day tomorrow? I gotta make sure I'll be okay and have enough food so maybe I should just go buy a bunch of stuff to have on hand just in case. But I'm scared I might binge if I have all that available, so maybe I shouldn't, or maybe I should just buy stuff I don't usually binge on. But what if I binge on it anyway?

So much unwanted and unnecessary brain chatter going on just because you're putting so much time and effort into trying to avoid feeling hungry.

It's time to stop avoiding.

Hunger is normal, it's natural, and it's a good thing.

Yes it can be uncomfortable. But I can't stress enough how important it is for you to learn to be uncomfortable sometimes. Discomfort is a part of life. It happens. Hunger happens. Urges happen. Embarrassment, frustration, stress, all the uncomfortable feelings happen. And if when they show up, you're willing to experience them, then what you'll find on the other side is exactly what you're looking for. Less eating, less thinking about food, and less food obsession.

If you just let your hunger come and are okay with feeling the discomfort that comes along with it, then there's no rush to make it go away.

If you're concerned about hunger leading to fast eating and binge eating, and you think it's the intensity of the hunger that determines what happens, it doesn't. Yes your brain may urge you to eat a lot and quickly, but you, up in your higher brain, your pre-frontal cortex, have the ability to slow yourself down, the same way you have the ability to say no to your binge urges that your brain sends out. No matter how hungry you feel, no matter how fast your primitive, lower brain is telling you to eat, you can create a calmer feeling that will slow you down. Your actions are determined by how you feel so if you feel calm because you're thinking you don't need to eat so fast or so much, then you will eat more slowly than if you're feeling ravenous thinking you need to eat a lot asap.

Watch your thinking when you're feeling hungry and make sure to direct it in a calm direction so you don't end up wolfing your food down. Yes, you can feel super hungry and not devour your food in

seconds if you eat mindfully, and purposefully think that you can eat slowly.

Now, I want to talk about one of the main problems I fell into that I mentioned earlier, and I'm sure it happens to a lot of you too, the excruciating, cramping, hangry hunger.

It's one thing to allow yourself to feel the discomfort of mild hunger, but when you feel that intense, energy draining, mood changing hunger it's a whole different story.

I always thought my body was just designed for this to happen. That I was just a person who gets hangry if I get hungry. Thankfully, this is not true and since I've made some changes in what and how often I typically eat, I rarely feel it anymore if I let myself feel hungry for awhile.

There are lots of theories about what contributes to hangriness, but the one that helped me the most was about hormones. Hormones regulate our hunger signals so it makes sense that if the foods we're eating are affecting our hormones negatively then our hunger will be off. I talked about this in more detail in episode 28 about flour and sugar.

Highly processed foods, sugar, and flour cause an increase in insulin production which causes an increase in ghrelin, the hunger hormone. Increase in ghrelin causes an increase in hunger.

Once I greatly cut back on those foods, my hunger became much more manageable. I can feel hunger for extended times and it's not a big deal at all and I don't get annoyed or moody like I used to. The hunger just comes and goes, requests food and then moves along if it doesn't get it. Asks again and moves along. It's not an emergency if I'm not able to eat something right away.

It's important to remember that our bodies have fuel storage in our liver and fat cells. If we're not able to eat, everything will be fine. We're not going to run out of fuel and die.

But here's the thing you need to know about that. If you're consistently eating all day, grazing, or eating small meals every couple of hours, your body will get used to using the food you're eating for immediate energy. It doesn't go to the storage to get energy because it doesn't have to. You're making it easy to get instant energy and your body likes easy and, it's especially easy when you eat foods that are quickly absorbed like simple carbohydrates like sugar and processed foods.

But, if you spread out your eating and only eat 3 meals without snacks and aren't eating insulin raising foods, those simple carbs, then your body gets into a groove where it uses the immediate fuel you're feeding it and then goes into storage when that's gone.

The differences between how our bodies use immediate fuel vs stored fuel are sometimes referred to as sugar burning vs fat adapted. Either you're always just burning the food you're eating, which gives your body immediate sugar, or glucose actually, to use as fuel, or your body has adapted to using storage and fat as fuel when food isn't available.

Sugar burning is like if you consistently order take out instead of defrosting and cooking what's already in your freezer and you get so used to not putting in extra effort to use what you already have, that when the times comes to eat, you don't even think to go to the freezer. You do take out, that's what you're used to. But when you're fat adapted, putting in that extra effort to use the food from the freezer is just the way it is and this is just how you've been accustomed to get meals.

If you are a consistent sugar burner, when your body doesn't get its immediate fuel in the form of food intake, then it's going to demand it with strong hunger. It's also going to decrease its energy output since it's not getting any energy in, therefore you start feeling more tired and your mood changes for the worse.

But if you are fat adapted and your body is used to not getting food all the time and not used to getting quick and easy energy, then when it doesn't get food for awhile then it's totally chill and will look elsewhere to get energy, which is over in the storage. It will use that energy to keep everything running smoothly.

So eating less often and eating higher quality foods will help you feel less hangry. I do it now and it's wonderful and I love not having to worry about feeling that way if I'm not able to eat right away. I'm actually hungry right now and it really isn't a big deal at all. I feel like me.

If you decide to change how you're eating in this same way, know that it's not going to be a picnic in the beginning. You're going to have to handle the hangry until it subsides. You can absolutely change how your body responds, but it's not going to like it at first. Eventually though, it gets used to doing more work to get the stored energy.

This is something that can be useful on your day to day eating, but bingeing will of course cause hangry and feeling excess hunger in the days to come pretty much every time depending on the amount of food you binged on. But don't fret or freak out. It just goes back to being willing to feel discomfort. Be willing to feel the extra hunger for however many days it lasts. You're going to be fine.

From time to time if I overeat on some sweets or flour heavy foods at a party or night out then I'll feel that over hunger the next day, maybe two, but I just accept it for what it is. I don't eat excessively to make it go away or eat in anticipation of it, I just eat as I normally would or maybe have a healthy little something extra to dull it down. Again, it's not a big deal.

So just know this. Hunger isn't urgent. You'll be fine. You're not going to starve to death if you can't eat for a couple hours. Your body is designed to go long periods without eating, it's how we survived back before grocery stores and restaurants existed. You'll just need to retrain your body to go get that stored energy instead of sitting there waiting for food.

It's okay to feel hungry. It's normal and natural.

It may be uncomfortable, but you can handle some discomfort. It may urge you to eat a lot and quickly, but you can intentionally slow yourself down. It may make you hangry, but you can make some changes to your day to day eating that will decrease that feeling.

Don't be afraid, be willing to feel it.

And don't be afraid to subscribe to this podcast if you haven't already! Every episode has amazing bits of goodness and I don't want you to miss out on any of them! Alright you, go feel some hunger. It's going to be alright. Have a great week, bye bye!