THE
STOP BINGE EATING
PODCAST
with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #31: Mindless Eating

Hi! How's it goin'? It is snowing over here and man I am loving it! I'm so glad I don't have to go out in it too. Scraping off cars after multiple inches of snow and ice is no joke! I totally forgot about all that after living in California for so long. Lucky for me, I just get to sit in my home and watch the beautifulness. So freakin' pretty!

Alright, let's get on with today's topic. Mindless eating.

Something we've all done at one point or another, right?

We sit in front of the tv while eating food and don't pay attention to what we're eating. Or we read a book, scroll through our phones, or just stand in our kitchen and stare off into space as our hand goes from bag to mouth without us even knowing.

Mindless eating is all about not paying attention to the food you're eating while you're focusing on or doing something else.

I've done this so many times where I'd be watching tv while I'm eating a bag of chips and before I know it I'm down at the bottom, left with nothing but crumbs.

Where did it all go?

I didn't even remember eating any of it, which was so disappointing because I was looking forward to enjoying those chips.

When you're eating mindlessly, you are paying no mind to your food. You are letting your mind go blank or, you are using your mind but focusing it not on the food but on something else.

If the food you're eating is a joy food and not a fuel food, then the whole reason why you're eating it is to experience some pleasure. But if you're not present with the food, if you're not paying attention to it, then you don't actually get any of the intended pleasure.

So now you're left feeling disappointed and dissatisfied and you might go eat more to try and get that pleasure you wanted. But then you don't pay attention to that either and you're back where you started.

It's like if you went to see a funny movie so you could laugh and enjoy yourself, but you were on your phone doing nothing truly enjoyable the whole time so you missed out on the pleasure of seeing a good movie and having some great belly laughs. So disappointing.

Eating mindlessly and not paying attention to that which is intended to give you pleasure is totally pointless.

Mindless eating while watching tv is the most common mindless eating combination I hear from people. They think the purpose of this is to make the experience of watching tv more enjoyable. But what actually happens if you're not paying attention to the food is that the experience doesn't actually become more enjoyable. You end up only focusing on the activity you found to be not enjoyable enough in the first place, watching tv, but now you're moving your hand, chewing and swallowing and don't even really realize it.

We have this belief that mindlessly eating is fun, it's enjoyable, relaxing, comforting, but does it really provide you with any of those things?

I would say it doesn't. You may have convinced yourself that it does, but if you take a close look at what's going on, it doesn't.

The food itself and the act of eating do not cause you to feel any emotions. Joy, relaxed, comforted, and amused, are all feelings and feelings are not caused by objects or actions. They're caused by what you're thinking when you're eating food. Eating the food is just what triggers the thoughts that cause these feelings.

But if you're not actually thinking anything, are you really having fun, feeling joy or feeling comforted? Probably not and if you are, it has nothing to do with the food since you're not even thinking about it. Remember, you're being mindless with your eating and focusing on whatever other thing it is you're doing. If you're feeling anything, it's your thoughts about that other thing that's causing the feeling.

The relaxation piece is an interesting argument as to whether mindlessly eating helps you to relax, but again, most likely the reason why you'd feel relaxed is because you're shutting off your mind and not thinking about whatever was causing you to feel unrelaxed in the first place. And that could totally happen without food even being in the equation.

Then there's of course the obvious problem which is that if you're not paying attention to what you're eating then you're likely to overeat. Stopping eating happens when you make a decision to stop eating. You think, "I'm done," "That was enough." But if there is no thinking going on, if you're not paying attention to how much you've eaten, then you will not think to stop. You're on autopilot and it takes mindfulness to stop the autopilot and take charge of what you're choosing to do.

So start paying attention so you can stop when you want to stop and actually enjoy the pleasure you were wanting.

Eat your food with a purpose. Enjoy every bite. Taste it, experience the pleasure that is intended. Slow down, chew it, let the flavors hit your tongue. If you're going to eat solely for pleasure and enjoyment, make sure you're able to actually taste it so you get that pleasure and enjoyment.

Turn your brain on and focus it on the food that you're eating. You choose your focus, and if you're eating, have it be on the food.

Now, you'll hear tricks and tips for how to eat mindfully and they usually say things like, eat without distractions, count your bites, eat with your non-dominant hand, but come on, who really wants to do that?

I say, just check in with yourself. If you're eating with other people, you can still engage with them, but pause for a moment to focus on how your food tastes and assess your fullness. If you're alone and engaging in something else, reading, watching, writing, playing, then it's still the same thing. You can make it a point to every few minutes shift your focus for a moment to check in with yourself, really savor your food, and see how full you are.

And hey, if you do want to eat undistracted and just be with you and the food, then go for it! Enjoy that time.

There is always going to be a stopping point, whether it be when the food is gone or when you decide it's time. If you want to be in charge of when stopping time is, then you gotta consciously make that decision and I definitely recommend making that decision before you even start eating and portion out that amount. Sitting on the couch with a box, bag, or container can be a slippery slope. So why not just put it on a plate or in a bowl?

I know I used to have this belief that eating from the package was more fun. But when I really questioned that, it seriously made zero sense. Like really, how is it more fun?? What I honestly now think is more fun is eating exactly what I want to eat and feeling not too full after I'm done, and honoring commitments that I make to myself. That's some awesome stuff. Not shutting off my brain so I'm doing things I'm not even enjoying.

As for that activity that you're mindlessly eating with, if you don't fully enjoy it on it's own, if it's not enjoyable enough without food added to it, if you don't actually find what you're lookin for in it, why the heck are you doing it? Have you got nothing else to do? Lies if you're saying that! Lies! Look at this world we live in. You can find *something*. Find something that engages you and that you enjoy that you don't think you need to eat while doing in order for you to like doing it. Find something else that's truly relaxing and gives you a fulfilling and enriching break from your day.

Fill your time with things that will bring enjoyment, enrichment, and will enhance your life, not things that just fill time.

Mindless eating is pointless. It's not fun. So don't check out. If you're going to eat, enjoy that food.

Eating without thought may be something to do, but is that what you want to be doing? Let's stop doing

things just to do something and start doing things on purpose that actually bring joy and pleasure into our lives and are purposeful.

So go have a purposeful, joyous, pleasure filled week and I'll talk to you next time, bye bye!