

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #32: All or Nothing Thinking

Hi! How are you? Are you amazing? Terrible? Somewhere in the middle? I'm going to assume you're somewhere in the middle and this is a good place to be.

When it comes to something like asking how you're doing, it's easy for us to say we're good, okay, or not bad. But when it comes to eating, some of you have a really hard time living in the middle.

You consider yourself an “all or nothing” person. Your eating is black and white. Either you ate what you're supposed to or you completely failed. No in between. And if you've decided that you've completely failed, then this means you're a failure, something's wrong with you, and you should just give up entirely.

As soon as you make a mistake, even just a little one, then everything you truly want for yourself long-term is out the window.

This used to happen to me with my calories back when I used to count them. Not all the time, which is interesting, but sometimes. I'd go over my goal, even just a little, and I'd declare my day as bad and keep eating more. Why did I choose to do that on some days and not others? I don't really know. But I can guess that on the days I did, I wanted to overeat or binge and was looking for an excuse to do it.

I can also remember other times when I'd be eating either at home or out at a party and I'd recognize that I had overeaten whether it was too much grazing or I had gone to town on a whole bag of popcorn, so I'd give myself a pass to just keep going since I'd already gone that far. The damage had been done so doing more wouldn't really matter.

You know you're someone who is all or nothing with your eating if you leave no room for error.

You went over your calories, you ate more than you planned, you feel too full, so your day is ruined. Might as well just keep eating and ruin it big and start over tomorrow.

You binged already this week, so you might as well keep bingeing and start over next week.

You take a situation where you ate less than ideally, and you turn it into a situation where it's way over the top. You go from making a small mistake to making a huge mistake.

It's like if you accidentally broke a plate so now if one plate is broken then you might as well go ahead and break the whole set. You'd rather just get rid of them all and buy a whole new set tomorrow instead of just being okay with having one less plate.

In the grand scheme of things, whatever you did wasn't terrible. You overdid it one time. But by the way you're looking at it, you're turning it into a huge failure. The thing is though, what you did was not a huge failure. Overeating once, going over your calorie or macro goal on one day, feeling too full at one meal, bingeing one day, are not a huge failures. What can be a huge failure is if you get down on yourself for having done it, start feeling ashamed, defeated, inadequate, powerless, and then go and eat more.

Why do this? Why give up if one thing goes wrong?

I'd question whether you, like I did, are just looking for an excuse to eat more or binge. A part of you wants to keep eating so any excuse you can find to do it will suffice.

You may also be someone who strives for perfection and considers anything less than perfection to be bad. If this is the case, then two things, or a combination of the two can happen. One is that you've again found that excuse to eat more, and two, you're now punishing yourself for having been bad. You're weren't perfect, so you feel like a failure, so you self-sabotage.

I think it's also important to recognize how your belief that you're an "all or nothing person" affects you.

When we say something like this, it seems like we're just conveying the news. We're just telling it like it is.

But you are not innately this way. You were not born as an all or nothing person because if you were then it would mean you can't change this about yourself.

You totally can. Sure you've been a person who has thought in black or white for a long time and you have created lots of evidence to prove this about yourself. But this is all learned and self-created. You were the one who started striving for perfection or labeling as good or bad and not thinking any mistakes were okay.

You being an all or nothing person is just a thought about yourself that you've thought over and over again so much that you now believe it. You've created evidence that this is how you are just by continually telling yourself that this is how you are and therefore living in that way.

It is not a fact of your personality forever and if you keep thinking it is, you will keep thinking you can't change this about yourself. So you won't try. This is just how you are. But again, it's not.

Telling yourself that this is just how you are and there's nothing you can do about it is untrue.

Also continually telling yourself that you are someone who will either eat nothing or all of the food is not helping you either. Again, I know you have a lot of evidence to prove that this is how you are, that

you don't eat just one, but if you keep believing this about yourself then you're going to continue making it happen.

You look at or eat the food, think that you're someone who can't have just one, so you feel defeated and you keep eating therefore proving it true.

I used to think that to myself all the time. But what is so interesting is that I didn't take the time to think about the times when I actually *did* eat just one. It happened sometimes! It's just so easy for us to focus on the negative stuff about ourselves sometimes so we have to make a point to find evidence that's contrary to what we've been negatively believing about ourselves.

We have to find the gray area, the place in between. The place where we make mistakes and it's okay. The place where we have two or more and it's okay. The place where we can see that sometimes we do actually land in the middle and we do only have one and remind ourselves of that to build our belief that it's possible.

You can find the gray area. There's so much of it and it's really nice to be in there.

You can mess up and not binge. You can go over your calorie goal or go off your eating plan and not binge.

You can see whatever you ate as just a thing that happened. It's neither good or bad, it just is.

You can look at your lack of goal achieving as a learning experience and nothing to get upset about and not as a reason to beat yourself up or self-sabotage.

Getting upset isn't useful, getting curious is. What happened? How can you do better next time? That's a much better way to respond to a circumstance that wasn't ideal.

If you're used to giving up so easily, and seeing your eating as only two options, good or bad, then it's going to be hard to allow yourself to make a mistake without throwing in the towel.

But don't think for a second that you can't do it.

Start by finding evidence in your life where you *don't* believe you are an all or nothing person. A simple example - if you're late to work, do you just give up and go home? Probably not. You show up late and get to work. Showing up late wasn't a complete failure, it just wasn't an ideal way to start your work day.

If something happens, don't blow it out of proportion and don't give up on all your goals. A misstep doesn't have to be devastating.

You didn't blow it and you didn't ruin everything. Just acknowledge it, learn from it, and get back to work. You made a mistake and now instead of making a huge mistake, just stick with the one you made.

You can become a person who isn't all or nothing, that can make mistakes, and that can have just one. The first step is believing it's possible, even if you just kinda believe it, and start reminding yourself of this.

When you're stuck in an all or nothing mindset, you're using one mistake as an excuse to make an even bigger mistake or multiple ones. Living in this black and white way just doesn't make sense. There's so much more available!

Be okay with mistakes. Find the grey area. Learn to experience this grey area. Look for opportunities where you can practice being in there.

Now go have a wonderful week in the gray, and the colors too of course! And I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye!