THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #48: Two Types of Restriction

Hi! How are you? Have I told you lately that I love you? Cuz I do, I really do!

I'm excited to do this episode today because I think there is a lot of confusion about the effects of restriction that need to be cleared up.

I've talked about this on the podcast before, and most others who talk about binge eating do too, that restricting can be a precursor to binge eating, whether it's past restriction that caused a habit of bingeing, or you're continuing to restrict and are in a binge/restrict cycle.

So then when I talk to people about limiting their food in any way they freak out and say, "But isn't that restricting??"

"Restriction" has turned into being something a lot of people think of as being bad. People think that any kind of restriction will lead to bingeing and this is simply not true. Sometimes, restricting can be a useful tool in helping someone to stop bingeing, but only if you're doing it in a useful way.

Restriction in itself isn't a problem. All it means is that you're limiting or reducing something. This is not always a bad thing. Don't you think it would be beneficial to limit or reduce your bingeing? To limit or reduce the amount of junk food you're eating? That's where people start to freak out. "You want me to limit the foods I'm eating? I'll feel so deprived and it's going to backfire into a binge!" Not necessarily. It depends on why and how you're restricting and limiting. There's a beneficial way to do it and a detrimental way.

You're probably most familiar with the detrimental way, the way that works against you.

It's restricting foods, or eating in a restricted way, that you don't genuinely want. You don't enjoy eating this way, you don't like eating this way, and you're longing to eat differently. But you think you have to eat this way. Maybe you're afraid of what will happen if you don't.

Some examples of this include eating very little food because you binged. You think you gotta balance

it all out and make up for it.

Denying yourself of foods you want to eat and telling yourself you can't ever eat them. Most likely it's because you're afraid you'll binge on them.

Following a diet plan that someone else gave to you. You're eating according to what they want you to eat, not what you want to eat.

Cutting foods out of your life because someone told you to or because you think you need to. This is most common with sugar and flour, and I sometimes hear wheat too, the foods that some say you need to cut out to stop bingeing, which is something I disagree on and you can hear about why back in episode 28.

All these things are not what you want, what you think you need to do, or maybe you just don't know what else to do.

Calorie restriction was my thing and it was all I knew. I had lost weight doing it before, it had worked for me, and I never bought into any of the other diets. I hear so many of you going on diet after diet trying to fix your eating, but for me, I was a sole believer in calorie counting....which now I believe it such a waste of time and energy.

By restricting my calories, I was denying myself of food when I was hungry. Not a great idea for someone who binges and doesn't know how to mentally deal with feeling hunger and not eating. I also restricted foods I was afraid I'd binge on, until of course I'd cave and buy them and binge just like I believed I would, all while telling myself this was a one time thing....which it wasn't.

It's the rules, limitations, and restrictions that stop you from listening to your body and listening to your true wants and that punish you if you overeat or binge.

That's the kind of restriction that needs to go.

So then what the heck does beneficial restriction look like? How is that even a thing?

Well, I'm about to tell you.

It's giving yourself restrictions that will help you create the exact eating life that you want.

To help differentiate between the two types of restriction, I actually prefer to call this beneficial way a structure.

To me, I just think it feels better to call it that and people I've introduced it to have said the same.

Maybe it's because of the association we've all made with restricting over the years, or maybe it's just because I like having structure not only with my eating, but in my life.

I like having my days planned out and being organized and knowing what's next and when I'm going to do things.

I like having all that with my eating as well. It allows me to worry less about what I'm going to eat and

set myself up to eat the exact way I want to.

Think about when you have structure in your work day vs when you don't.

When you don't, you're unrestricted and can do what you want when you want. The problem you may fall into here is that you barely do any work because you brain keeps telling you it doesn't want to. It wants to play on your phone or talk to people or do anything that's more enjoyable than paperwork. Then you're left with this build up of work and now you're stressing about it and might even have to cut into your free time at some point in order to get it all done.

But when you do have the structure, things get done. You follow the structure, your plan for the day, you have it all mapped out so you know what you're going to do and when and you just follow it until it's all done and then you get to have your free time. Sure you didn't get a a lot of super fun lazy unproductive time during your work day, but that's not what you really want! You have work to do and if you don't do it now, it will still be there later. Putting it off by wasting your time isn't going to help. You want to get your work done in your work hours so then you can have true free time in your off hours. You restrict yourself to working during working time and whatever mindless or relaxing activity you want during mindless or relaxing activity time.

The structure it good. It keeps you on task and doing what you want during the time when you want to be doing it.

Now let's look at the same idea but with eating.

You can be completely unrestricted in your eating and allow yourself to eat what you want when you want, but where will that get you? You'll be responding to urges, cravings, desires, and feelings by eating. When your brain gives you an excuse to eat or binge, you'll follow it. You'll eat more joy foods and non-fueling foods because of course that's what you're going to think you want when you're just winging it and living in the moment. You're going to be living based on your previous brain programming that leads you toward emotional and binge eating.

Or, you can put restrictions on yourself and give yourself some structure to follow, a structure that you create for yourself based on what you want your eating to look like. There's no responding to whims or sudden thoughts about food, you're eating consciously and deliberately. You're making choices you want to make and putting them in place. You get to finish your day having eaten in your ideal way.

This is all about deciding what you want your ideal eating to look like, as specifically as possible, and aiming for that each day.

When you create this structure, this way of restricting, does it mean you'll be limiting foods? Sure does, but it's foods you want to limit. Will you be telling yourself no and not eating just because your brain suddenly thinks about a food? Yes, but it will be because you want to.

I tell myself no a lot and do I feel restricted or deprived? Not at all, because it's saying no from a place of loving and caring about myself.

I have cookies on my counter right now that are okay, I don't love them. I bought a car a few weeks ago and the dealership apparently sends you cookies which is so cute. I ate some and the ones I'm not crazy about are still in the box on my counter. Sometimes, my brain tells me to eat them. "They're cookies,

who cares if they're the best ones, they'll still taste pretty good!" I'll still get some pleasure from them. But I say no. I could just throw the box away but I chose to keep it for a little bit just so I can practice saying no to them. It's actually really good practice for me because the ones left in there are m&m chocolate chip cookies and those used to be my favorite. But in the last few years, any time I've eaten one from anywhere, I haven't been so impressed. So I'm using this as an opportunity to drill it into my brain that I don't really like m&m cookies all that much anymore.

I'm not saying no to them because cookies are bad or because I shouldn't eat them or because I'm afraid I'll eat all of them in one sitting. I'm saying no because I'll physically and mentally feel better if I don't. I don't want to feel too full, since I'm already full from my last meal, I don't want to have low energy because that happens often when I eat cookies, probably especially because I don't eat foods like that often, I don't want to mess with my hunger and fullness hormones because that for sure happens, and it's also because cookies aren't part of my plan today. I've limited myself to no cookies, I've put that restriction on myself for reasons I like, and I'm going to abide by that.

It's all coming from positive, self-caring places. I care about how I feel and that matters to me more than having a few seconds of cookie pleasure.

I get it, you want freedom, you want to not have to think too much about what you're going to eat, you want to be able to eat whatever you want.

This is exactly what having a structure gives you. The freedom of knowing you're going to eat how you want and freedom from food thoughts by taking away all the questioning all day about what, when, and how often you're going to eat. It gives you a chance to design your eating life in the way you truly want it to be, not the way your lower, primitive brain urges you to eat. When that lower brain urges you, it will be so much easier to know if it's a true or a false want because the structure you give yourself is the true want and any urges outside of that are false.

Limits are a good thing. Structure is a good thing.

I put limits on my tv watching, my bedtime, my work time, my social media usage, my drinking, all to benefit me and my well-being.

I put limits on my eating and have an eating structure for myself that I love that most benefits my well-being. On most days I eat the same amount of meals, most of the time I eat foods that I like that are whole, nutritious, natural foods, I make room for joy foods that are sugar or flour based, I usually don't eat past a certain time so I'm not too full before bed because I sleep better when I'm not full, I plan ahead so I don't have to think too much about what I'm going to eat, and I could keep going on about more things that I do that define my eating structure.

I don't feel restricted in a bad way by any of this, I actually feel free to eat the way I want to. That's how I set it up, to be what I want.

This way of eating gives me the results I want in accordance to my energy and also let's be honest, my weight.

I put thought into how I want to eat and I created that for myself.

If you're seeing negative results from the way you're restricting food then there's something that needs

to change. Whatever it is that you don't like about it, whatever it is that's stopping you from getting the results you want, change it.

And do know that this thing that needs to be changed might not just be the foods, the amount of food, or the frequency of your eating, but your thinking about all of it.

You might be eating in a way that is beneficial to you, but you're hating on it, thinking it's not fair you have to eat this way, or resenting it in some way. Then it's not the way you're restricting you're eating at all that's affecting you negatively, it's you.

Someone else could eat the same way as me and be miserable because of how they're thinking about it. I feel like I used this example not long ago, I don't remember if I thought about it or if I did, but someone said to someone else a little while back who is trying to lose their baby weight, that they can either eat the way they've been eating and lose the weight slowly, or eat like Kirstin and be miserable. I thought that was so funny because I know this person would be miserable because she'd be mad about not eating flour pretty much everyday, because that's just how it's been for her. Not a ton, but I know how she eats and most of her dinners involve some type of flour and she eats cereal pretty regularly.

So here I am eating how I eat and loving it while if she did it she would feel totally restricted and confined. It's all in how we think about it.

She would think of it as punishing herself and thinking this is what she has to do even though she really wants a steak and cheese sub and french fries. I would think of it as what's best for me and my body. When I think of it this way, saying no to that sub isn't so hard.

If you're thinking about what you are getting instead of what you're not getting, that's when you feel far more abundant than scarce. Think about it, I can either say I don't really eat much flour and sugar or I can say I eat vegetables, meats, fish, nuts, yogurt, cheese, guacamole, rice, potatoes, yams, olive oil, butter, and the list goes on and on. I'm not deprived. I'm not missing out on anything. I'm getting everything I want. Limiting and restricting the flour and sugar in my life doesn't take away from anything, it actually gives me so much. So much better feelings, energy, better sleep, weight management, and a clear head, and that's what I want.

You learn to say no to yourself from a place of love, not from a punishing place. And it's so important to be able to tell yourself no. Not everything is a good idea, not everything should be done, eating whenever and whatever you feel like might just be what got you into binge eating in the first place so maybe it's not the best way to live, at least not right now.

Not all restricting is bad. It can be hugely beneficial to your quality of life and well being to limit things and say no to things. It gives you the space to bring in the things you truly want in your life.

Just make sure that when you're saying no, it's coming from love, caring, and regard for yourself. Now go figure out what you do and don't want in your life, create structure to make sure that's what's happening, and enjoy the crap out of living that way. Yes! Have a good one! Bye bye!