

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #61: Perfectionism

Hi! You ready? You excited to talk about perfectionism?

Are you a perfectionist?

A lot of you that I've talked to have self-proclaimed yourselves as one.

You want your eating to be perfect, and maybe your weight to be your perfect weight, and also everything outside of your eating, you want to be perfect too.

They say that how we do one thing is how we do everything so if you notice yourself trying to be perfect with your eating then it's likely it's showing up in other areas of your life too...and it might not be working out so well for you.

Perfectionism may not seem like such a bad thing. You want to do your best and get everything right, you have high standards, and if something is done perfectly, isn't that a good thing?

Sure, but how often is perfection an attainable goal?

Once in a while, it's attainable. You can follow your plan exactly, you can have a perfect week of no binges and no overeating, it's all possible, but how likely is it that it will always be this way?

Every once in awhile I ask a client how their week was and they tell me it wasn't perfect....as if that's what I was hoping it would have been. But I never do. I never expect their week to be perfect, they're working on a big goal! With big goals come big fails along the way. It's just how it goes most of the time. And my question for them is, were they expecting perfection? Is that what they were striving for? And if so, how do they feel about it not being perfect?

Now, before I go any further, I want you to think about what eating perfectly means to you. Does it mean eating healthy, whole, natural foods all the time and never having a joy food and never overeating? Does it mean all that except you allow yourself a joy food once a week? Does it mean

eating according to your plan, whatever it may be, and never veering off of it? Does it just mean no bingeing? No overeating?

Really think about this, if you're going to strive for perfection, what is it that you're striving for?

Most importantly, is it what you really want and is it attainable?

If you're bingeing everyday and you're now expecting yourself to not binge at all for the next month, I think that's unrealistic expectation. Is it possible? Sure, anything is, but it's unlikely.

There's nothing wrong with wanting things to go a certain way and trying to eat perfectly, whatever that means to you, but what matters most is how you react when things don't go that way.

Do you fail with grace, forgiveness, and curiosity? Or with self-loathing, guilt, shame, and regret?

There's three moments when perfectionism show up – before you do something, while you're doing it, and after you're done.

If all goes perfectly, then we don't have an issue. If not, well then, let's talk about what happens.

Let's start with before. Here, you don't even know how it's going to go at all, but you may fear that it won't get done perfectly. You may fear that you're going to mess up, that it's not going to be a success, that you're not going to be able to eat perfectly.

So much fear about what's going to happen and fear of failure and what do you do here when you feel that fear? You freeze.

You don't do it, you procrastinate it, you put off starting.

It's so crazy because in your attempt to not fail, you still end up failing.

Instead failing at doing, you fail at starting and with either you're failing at finishing.

This is one place where the all or nothing thinking shows up. If you think you can't do it all perfectly, then you don't do it at all.

Your options are perfection or complete failure. That's it. There's nothing in between so if it's not perfect, it's a failure. And to you, failure is a bad thing. You make it mean bad things about yourself as a person and your capabilities instead of just seeing it as a bump in the road, an obstacle that needs a strategy to be overcome.

This is something I see happen often when people have an event, a party, or a vacation that's coming up. They figure that that thing will mess up their perfect eating streak so they decide that instead of starting today, they'll start after. Ever decided to begin a diet after vacation instead of the week before?

Any kind of progress is progress. So why not make some progress in the few days you have before the thing happens? And also, how do you know that the thing will be such a disaster? What if you decided to eat well at the event, party, or on vacation and you actually did it?

I went away for a few days with my family a few weeks ago and the whole time I was there, I ate pretty much the same way I eat when I'm at home. I didn't go crazy with bread and desserts and alcohol and snacks. I said no to cornbread at breakfast when everyone else was eating it and said no to beer when everyone else was drinking and it was all because I had decided that my eating on that mini vacation would be no different than my regular life. Did I feel some desire and little urges to eat off my plan? I sure did. But I allowed them and honored my commitment.

These things don't have to lead to eating poorly. They don't cause you to eat poorly, you do. You make that decision to do it. So you can decide not to.

Also, things come up all the time. There's always going to be something going on. So you have to learn to not only go through these experiences without letting go of your goals and ideal eating habits, but also, to be okay with yourself if you do happen to make the choice to overeat or binge. If you are ok with it and don't make it mean that all your previous work was for nothing, then you can start working on yourself and your habits at anytime. No waiting necessary.

Perfectionism can be paralyzing when you're not willing to be imperfect, when it's not ok to make mistakes and mess up or not have it turn out exactly as you'd wanted it to.

Then there's the moment when you're in it, you have started, you're doing it, and something happens. That something means that the end result isn't going to be perfect.

Here's the other place where the all or nothing thinking shows up.

You set a goal, made a plan, and you refuse to accept anything short of perfection, so if perfection isn't possible, then you just choose a complete failure instead. Give up and start again tomorrow.

You think if you can't do it perfectly, then there's no point in continuing to try.

You ate two extra cookies. Now your eating won't be perfect for the day. So eat the rest of the cookies and get back on plan tomorrow. Tomorrow will be perfect.

You binged. Now your week won't be perfectly binge-free so you might as well just let yourself binge again whenever you feel like it and get back to work next week. Next week will be perfect.

You feel dissatisfied by what you did so you give up on trying. You self-sabotage and again, choose complete failure over doing something somewhat imperfectly. When your goal becomes unattainable and you have the option of finishing somewhere in the gray between your black and white thinking, you just go to black.

And the third moment of perfectionism, the end. You finished but it wasn't perfect.

You think it wasn't good enough.

You feel inadequate. You're not happy with it.

You finished your day and you didn't eat perfectly. Now you feel down and disappointed.

You beat yourself up for it.

You're not good enough.

You believe less in your capabilities and your confidence drops and why? All because nothing but perfection is good enough.

You think if it's not perfect, it's not good enough and if you're not doing perfectly, then you're not good enough.

Whether your perfectionism is showing before you do things, while, after, or all three, the result usually isn't very good if things don't turn out as you'd like them to.

Even if it does turn out well, there's a good chance you're feeling some stress or anxiety throughout the process as you're concerned about everything turning out perfectly. You need it to be perfect.

When it comes to your binge eating, you may not start doing the work because you're anticipating it all not going to plan and that you're not going to be able to eat perfectly.

You may give up because you ate off plan, ate extra food, or binged once and then you just throw in the towel and start over tomorrow instead of right now.

You may beat yourself up and put yourself down and tell yourself you're not good enough and lose confidence.

Being a perfectionist may not be working out in your favor.

I remember working at a job and I was so concerned about my boss thinking I was a perfect employee. I wanted her to think highly of me. I didn't want to make any mistakes.

And one day I realized something. I was trying to be something that I wasn't. I was trying to be perfect, and I'm not.

I've made countless mistakes in my life, in all my jobs, in creative projects I've worked on, with my eating, with friends and family, all over the place. I am clearly not perfect.

Yet there I was, trying to be, and I wasn't. I'm not.

So from that day, I decided to believe that I'm imperfect.

That's the truth and I wanted it to be what I thought any time I was concerned about not doing something perfectly, or right, or exactly how I'd planned.

Many people say, "You're perfect just the way you are" and I'm not a fan of that one.

It feels so much better to me to just think I'm imperfect.

So when something doesn't go perfectly, right, or as I planned, I don't have to freak out. It's exactly how it's supposed to go because that's how imperfect people do things.

Imperfectly.

Imperfect is okay, it's normal, it's human, it's all people.

It's okay if your eating isn't perfect.

Mine isn't perfect. I eat really well most of the time because I've done the work to get myself here. But still, there are times when I eat more than I planned, or I eat off my plan, or I eat extra joy foods.

It's because I'm human, and it's fine because I believe it's fine.

Mistakes, failures, and setbacks don't have to be the end of the world.

They are neutral things that happen. They don't mean anything about you or your capabilities until you give them meaning.

It doesn't have to be a bad thing. Go back and listen to my episode about failing, number 18. Failures are opportunities to learn and grow and become better.

So what if you fail? So what if it's not perfect? Why does it have to be? You can still see results even if it's not.

At least you tried and at least it's done.

It doesn't always have to be A+ work. B- is good enough.

Wouldn't you rather finish something that's imperfect rather than not finishing at all?

Wouldn't you rather finish your day having eaten pretty well instead of eating poorly?

Wouldn't you rather have a week where you binged once instead of 3 times?

B- work. It's acceptable and you, you are acceptable no matter what.

Don't put conditions on yourself that if you're not perfect and if you don't do perfectly then you're not good enough, unacceptable and unlovable.

You are good enough, acceptable, and lovable no matter what. No conditions are to be put on those.

It's so interesting how we think it's okay if other people mess up because we know they're humans and they make mistakes. If they overeat or binge we feel so much compassion for them. But not for ourselves. We expect too much of ourselves. We don't expect perfection from them, but we do for ourselves.

Well, perfection forever isn't going to happen. You're going to mess up and be imperfect so I highly recommend you get used to it and accept it and be okay with it.

Forgive yourself. Be understanding. Be willing to allow mistakes to happen without them meaning anything negative about you as a person.

Be curious about why it wasn't perfect and try better next time.

Everything you do with your eating is an experiment. There's no one right way to eat or one right way to think so your thoughts and actions are not going to be exactly what they need to be right away or every time. It's a trial and with trials come errors.

When you aim for an unattainable goal, being perfect all the time, you're setting yourself up for a lot of disappointment.

You can absolutely set high standards for yourself, but don't let your perfectionism stall you, defeat you, or ruin you.

Let yourself just be who you are.

You're an imperfect human just like the rest of us.

Now you go have a wonderfully, imperfect week! Bye bye!