THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #84: Good and Bad Foods

Hi! How are you? You good? You bad? You labeling your foods as good and bad? If you do, or some version of those labels, then you're going to like today's episode!

There are so many things in life that we label as good or bad. You could probably just brainstorm through everything that exists and most likely you'd be able to say it's good or bad, or maybe at least in the spectrum where some things might be okay, not so great, and those kinda of descriptions but overall, it's pretty easy for us to place things on the good or bad spectrum.

Food is no exception. Of course there's the judgement of taste, does it taste good, bad, or somewhere in between.

But for some, there's also the judgement of foods as being good or bad not because of how they taste, but because of our thoughts about them.

Some words I've heard as descriptions of some foods are evil, the devil, the enemy, unsafe, bad, and dangerous.

These words get used for different reasons, but overall, they just mean that it's not okay for you to eat them. They are bad and therefore shouldn't be eaten.

I don't know if I necessarily called foods bad, but I definitely called them my binge foods. It's not a super negative way of talking about them, but it definitely put them in a category that really just meant I wasn't able to control myself when I ate them. A food was a binge food which was really code for, "I have binged on that food before and if I eat it I will binge on it again."

So what does make a food good or bad? There's not a simple answer to this question because no matter what the food is, there is no food that is inherently good or bad.

And actually, with everything in the world, there is nothing that is inherently good or bad. We just judge things this way based on our own morals, not because they factually are.

I was at a conference with a room full of other life coaches and we did an exercise where we had to come up with things that we may think are bad, and that most other people would think is bad, and then debate the other side of it to show that someone else in this world may disagree and think it was good.

One example of this is 9/11. It was obviously extremely tragic, but did the people who orchestrated it think so? They thought it was good. They thought they were doing the right thing from their point of view. So no, that event was not considered bad by everyone in the world.

This really is an insightful activity to do if you want to try it out. The other two coaches I was doing this with and I came up with some really mind-blowing examples that show us how we all think differently about things in the world.

So back to the food, you may think a food is bad, and I may think it's good. Who's right?

I think the real question to ask here is not who's right but, what makes that food you think is bad, bad? In your opinion, why is it bad?

When I had my binge foods, I thought they were bad because I thought they would cause me to binge.

That's what made a food bad.

Probably the two most common reason I've heard from other people are that foods are bad if they think they'll cause weight gain or if the foods will cause strong cravings for more which will lead to a binge.

What it seems to come down to is they think that out of control eating will happen if they eat the foods and weight gain will happen if they eat the foods.

Now, are these true? Or if you have different reasons for why you call certain foods bad, is your reason legit?

Well, let's look at the two reasons I mentioned.

Will out of control eating happen if you eat a bad food?

Only if you give in to your urge to eat more.

Eating food doesn't cause you to eat more food, you do. You eat the food, feel an urge to eat more, and then decide to eat more. That's how it works.

Eating a food doesn't magically cause more of it to jump down your throat. The eating will only get out of control if you let it.

So let's not blame the food and instead take responsibility for your decision to continue eating it.

And the second one, will you gain weight if you eat those bad foods?

If you eat just a little bit, it's highly unlikely if you're also not overeating or bingeing on other foods. If you eat a bite of pasta, you're most likely not going to gain weight.

But if you overeat or binge on that food you're calling bad, then yeah, you'll probably gain weight.

Again, let's not blame the food. It's not the food that's causing you to gain, it's the amount and the frequency in which you're eating it.

It's your decision to eat more that causes any kind of undesirable consequence you may experience, not the food itself.

So when you think about why you are calling the food bad, is that reason why really a valid reason? Does the food deserve that label and that judgement? Or are you passing the buck to it and blaming it for the decisions you make?

Now, let's take a look at the effect of you labeling foods as bad.

First, when you see a food that you think is bad, how do you feel?

Probably not super calm. I know if I'm presented with something I think is bad I don't feel very good being around it....especially if it's something I'm craving and desiring.

Fear may come up. Fear of what that food will do to you. Fear of what will happen if you did eat it. Or if the feeling isn't as intense as fear, there may still be some kind of worry, anxiety, or hesitation.

The food evokes some kind of not so great feeling within you because here you are wanting something that you think is bad.

You've put yourself in quite the moral dilemma and it's all because of how you're perceiving this food.

The food itself isn't causing you to feel worry or however you're feeling, it's your thoughts about it that does.

Imagine if you were faced with a cookie that you've binged on hundreds of times in your life yet you didn't label it as bad, evil, destructive, or dangerous but instead just saw it as a cookie. It would be such a different experience because you're seeing it for what it really is and not creating all kinds of stories and drama around it.

There are a ton of foods I've binged on in the past that I used to have on my "do not buy," binge foods list but now I no longer label them as binge foods. It's not because I don't binge anymore, I could still label them that way if I wanted to, I know what they are and what I've done with them, but I don't. It's not useful to do that. I may have memories of times I binged on them, but I don't hold that against the food. I don't call it bad because of what I chose to do with it.

And second, these foods you're labeling as bad are probably foods you like, that's partly why they're bad, because you've binged on them before and so obviously it's a food you've desired to eat, otherwise you probably wouldn't have eaten it during a binge. You also probably wouldn't give it much thought either, and it wouldn't need to be labeled as bad if you didn't want to eat it.

Like if you didn't really care much for chocolate, you like it but you don't love it, and even though some people may label it as bad, you probably wouldn't even bother since it's not a problem for you. Chocolate is fine. It's not dangerous or evil, in your mind it hasn't done anything to you and it probably won't cause any negative outcomes if you did eat it since you more than likely wouldn't over do it on it.

So these bad foods are probably foods you want to eat. And as we've seen time and time again, when you restrict a food you like because you have some kind of fear tied to it, there's a strong chance you will eat it at some point.

Have you ever said a food is bad and therefore you'll never eat it again and then you find yourself eating it?

Yeah, me too.

And when you eat this bad food, you feel guilty about it because hello, you're eating something bad, you're doing something bad. So now you're bad.

It's a great way to set yourself up to feel bad about yourself, by labeling a food as bad that you're eventually going to eat, because let's be real, you want to eat it.

On top of all of that, if you consider yourself to be a perfectionist or an all or nothing person, then disaster may ensue if you make this choice to eat a bad food.

Because now you've opened the door to badness so you might as well just go eat all the bad foods today and you can go back to being good tomorrow. This will be the last time.

How many times have you said that?

What you need to be honest with yourself about is that you don't want it to be the last time. You want to eat those foods again.

But the predicament comes in when you want the food but also want to be good. How can you eat those foods and be good?

You can't if you label the foods as bad. It doesn't make sense.

I was talking about good and bad foods with a client recently and I asked her to tell me the upside to labeling foods as good or bad. She told me that when she only eats good foods, she feels good.

Now, that sounds lovely. It's a way for her to feel good.

But the question then is, do you only want to eat the supposed "good" foods?

Her answer was no and for most people the answer is no. They want to be able to eat all the foods but, less than they typically do of course.

If you're going to label foods as good so you can feel good, then you're also going to end up using bad foods to feel bad.

So what if you just didn't label them that way? What if you didn't judge them in a way that causes you to feel good or bad but instead just classified them in a way that could allow you to always feel good about your choice to eat them?

I'm a big fan of classifying foods as joy and fuel. Both serve a purpose that I would like to be fulfilled in my life.

I want to eat foods that fuel me and I want to eat foods that bring me joy and pleasure. None of that sounds bad to me, it all sounds wonderful.

There's a place for both in my life and I want both to be in my life.

If you want them all in your life too, then make space for them by not being so negatively judgmental and critical of them.

You can focus on what's good about the foods you want to eat instead of what you perceive as bad.

And as you shift your thinking around them, remind yourself that how much you eat and the weight gain that results are not because of the food. It's because of the quantity and frequency in which you are choosing to eat it.

So yeah, they may cause cravings for more, but how do you handle that? That's your responsibility. If you're willing to handle the craving, then eating that food would be no big deal at all.

That's how I look at it. I know that if I eat something sweet or a favorite salty snack then I'm probably going to feel desire for more. I expect it and I don't get all worked up or anxious about it. I just let it happen and I stop eating.

Me feeling a craving doesn't mean the foods is bad for causing it, it's just what the food does to my brain and that's okay.

So think about the foods you like in a useful way, not in a way that's going make you fearful of them or that's going to make you feel bad about eating them.

It's just food and it either fuels you or gives you pleasure, or maybe even sometimes both!

Feel good about all of it and have a great week, bye bye!