

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #141: Food Rules

Hello! How are you feeling? I'm feeling very good thank you. I just took some much needed time off from work and I'm back, refreshed, and ready to get down to business!

So here we go. Food rules.

Throughout my years of bingeing, I had lots of food rules but not the same ones for all ten years, they changed from time to time and they were all over the place.

I of course had my calories rules. No eating more than 1200, 1500, 1800, 2,000, I tried all those different numbers thinking that one was the magic one that would stop me from bingeing.

I had rules around eating at work and those always changed – like, during my shift I could have a piece of bread one time, two times, zero times.

Rules around joy foods– eat them every day, eat them once a week, eat them only when I'm with other people.

I'd set cut off times for eating.

I had off-limit foods.

I had rules about what I would eat the day after a binge.

And so many more little rules here and there, that I would set for myself, hoping they would help me to stop binge eating and to lose weight.

I know a lot of you set yourself food rules as well, I hear about them all the time.

You set them because you fear bingeing, because you fear weight gain, or because you think that there is a combination of rules around eating that will stop you from bingeing.

But those rules don't exist.

Now, what I will say is that sometimes there are people who start eating a certain way and they stop binge eating. They stop under eating and the bingeing stops or they stop excluding foods they like from their life and the bingeing stops.

It happens. But it doesn't happen for everyone, myself included.

I did those things and the bingeing continued. It may have even gotten worse at times.

And it was because my brain was still wired to binge. Changing the food didn't stop my brain from sending out urges to binge and it didn't help me deal with my urges when I did feel them.

Eating enough and allowing yourself to eat what you want is important, but so is rewiring your brain.

But today's episode is not about rewiring your brain, many of my other episodes are though, so let's get back to your rules.

You set them with good intentions. You think they will help you. But sometimes, they end up making things worse.

Now, you may have heard people tell you to stop having food rules, that food rules are bad.

But I don't think they are, if you're setting them in a useful way.

What's not useful is setting rules that leave you feeling way too hungry or deprived.

What's also not useful is setting rules that you don't want to live by.

Those are going to leave you feeling resentful, dread, or obligated. And who wants to feel those day after day, since day after day we're abiding by the rules we set with our food? Or we're not abiding by them because we really don't want to and then feeling guilty about it.

That was me with calorie counting. Part of me did like it because I felt a sense of control and certainty but another part of me, a bigger part of me, didn't like the process of doing it.

I didn't like worrying when calories weren't clearly displayed like if I was at someone's house or at a restaurant that didn't have calories in their menus, and for most of my binge years that wasn't even a thing at chain restaurants like it is now.

I didn't like doing math in my head. That was not how I wanted to use my mental energy and my focus.

I didn't like taking the time, a few times a day, to enter in my food to a calorie counting website or app, especially when it got confusing and took longer than I wanted it to.

I couldn't find a match. Or I'd type in a food or a meal and get several different calorie amounts. Which

one is it? And the one I'd choose depended on the day honestly. And I didn't always know how much my food weighed or how many cups I was eating and I didn't like not knowing that because then I couldn't be accurate.

So now, I don't do it anymore. The cons of having calorie rules outweighed the pros for me. Plus, I now feel in control and certain without doing it and that's the beauty of all of this.

Whatever you think you get from having your food rules, you can have without them.

Counting calories didn't make me feel in control and certain, my thoughts about the calorie counting did. Now my thoughts about how I'm choosing to eat now makes me feel those ways.

Let's look at another food rule I had, that I know a lot of you have too.

Making rules around foods you can't have in the house.

I remember making a lists of foods I did not allow myself to buy.

Every now and then I'd get fed up with myself and make yet another "off-limits" food list.

I thought it was me setting a useful boundary for myself so that I wouldn't binge since I blamed those foods for making binges happen.

But doing this set me up to feel deprived since I really wanted to be able to eat those foods. I liked them and didn't want to eliminate them from my life. It also set me up to have a "one last time" mentality where I'd break my rule and go all out eating it since I'd go back to following my rule tomorrow indefinitely. And it also didn't make me not want the food, I still wanted it and felt desire for it and had to use willpower to say no to myself.

And, it kept me in fear of the food.

I made these "off limits" rules so I wouldn't binge but those rules didn't make me not binge. There are endless foods available to me and I'd just find something else if I was feeling the urges and then add whatever I binged on to the list. Had I kept that list going, I can't imagine how many foods would be on it. Probably dozens, dozens of foods that I wanted to eat but I told myself I couldn't.

So take a look at all the food and eating rules you have for yourself. Are they rules that benefit you and that you want to follow?

If not, it's time to let them go.

I know this can be scary because you may think that they keep you safe and make you feel in control but you can feel safe and in control without them.

And the only way you'll get there is if you can see why they're not useful for you, why you don't want to follow them, and see that those reasons outweigh anything good you think you get from them. That's when you'll be able to let them go because why would you continue to keep them?

Now, like I said, not all food rules are bad. I'm not telling you to let go of all the rules and be impulsive

and not put any rational thought into what you're eating.

I think food rules can be good for you. Like with any rules in life, they can be helpful guidelines and help guide your actions toward your desired result. They are boundaries you put in place because you believe they're what's best for you.

It's like when I was a lifeguard and we had a rule about no running on the pool deck. It was to help kids to not slip, fall, and get hurt. Sure the kids may not have liked them but the pros of the rule outweighed the cons.

Or as I've talked about many times, my bedtime rule. The pros of going to bed at the time I've set for myself outweigh the cons. It's what I want to do and it's what's best for me.

I still to this day have food rules and I would actually say that pretty much everyone you know does too.

If you asked someone about how they eat, they'll probably have some general answer about their meals, maybe the timing of them, the foods they eat and don't eat, the foods they don't like to eat too often, or maybe they just do eat whenever they feel like it. And that's their own personal rule. "I eat when I feel like it."

I have rules for myself for all of those things and they're not hindering my life. If anything, they're enhancing it because I've set these rules in a way that fuel me well and help me feel my best.

I do want to say though, I don't actually refer to them as my rules. Because of the topic of this podcast, I am here but, for myself, and in my group program, I actually refer to our general guideline of how we choose to eat as an eating structure.

I have a structure that I follow, that has become my natural way of eating since I've followed it consistently for quite some time, and it involves rules that I've set for myself, that I wanted to set for myself.

And it doesn't leave me feeling way too hungry, I don't under eat when I'm hungry if I overate the day before, and it doesn't make any foods off limits.

But there are foods that I choose to eat less frequently because of the effect they have on my body. I make these rules for those foods because I want to, not because I think I have to.

Eating in a way that you choose for yourself and setting rules you want to follow is an important part of healing your relationship with food and an important part of the process of stopping binge eating.

Right from the start of my group program I help my members design their ideal way of eating and make their own rules, ones that will support them in stopping binge eating.

I encourage you to do that for yourself too.

Figure out what rules you have that you don't want and that aren't useful.

And figure out what rules you want to have and start implementing them right away.

And I've said it before and I'll say it again, the goal is to stop binge eating, not to lose weight, for now. So make sure your rules are incorporating enough food so that you're not starving all day.

They can be whatever you want.

They're your boundaries, your guidelines, your decisions based on what you want for yourself.

They can be that you eat whatever whenever if that's what you want. But just make sure you're getting the results you want from doing that.

They can be that you only eat when you're hungry except for a certain number of joy foods each week.

They can be that you eat 6 times a day, or 3 times a day, or 3 meals and 2 snacks, whatever you want.

You get to decide what you eat and when and how much.

Like your reasons for making those decisions and like the results you get from those decisions.

And if you don't, you can tweak your rules. They're your rules.

Design your own ideal way of eating and let go of anything that isn't serving you well.

Alright, I'll talk to you next time, bye bye.