THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #170: Breaking Out of Diet Mentality

Hello! How are you? I'm so good! Today is my first day back at work after going to Los Angeles for a week! One of my best friends got married and I was one of his best men, there were no groomsmen just 5 of us best men along with 5 maids of honor, and it was so much freakin' fun. So many laughs with so many people that I love so much, and so much dancing! There was one point during the reception that I was dancing so hard, like, completely not giving a crap and just bouncing around, enjoying myself so much that the band was laughing at me. It was during the song Semi Charmed Life and I knew I loved that song but I didn't realize how much I loved it until I was dancing to it at this wedding.

And one of the best parts about it was that I didn't drink one drop of alcohol. I've been taking a break from drinking and let me tell you, it feels amazing to have so much fun, be social, and enjoy myself without alcohol. It's very empowering and has really expanding my comfort zone. It's been nice to not rely on it to feel good like I used to, just like I don't rely on food to feel good anymore.

And with all that, I probably mentioned this way back on the podcast at some point but I used to live there and so along with going to the wedding, I got to see so many friends that I love so much and haven't seen in years. If I was going all the way to LA for the wedding there was no way I was just going to be in and out. I had to make the most of it!

So now I'm back in New Hampshire, eagerly waiting for all the trees to change colors. It's taking awhile this year! I was told it was because September was warm. Maybe by the time this episode is released it will look more autumny around here. I hope! It's one of the best parts of living in New England!

Well now enough about me and my LA vacation and foliage, let's talk about breaking diet mentality. Cause I'm sure a lot of you have some diet mentality that you've trying to break out of after being fed so many unuseful things about eating and your weight and food and all the things.

But before we go into breaking diet mentality, let's get clear about what it is.

Now, if you Google, "what is diet mentality?" you're going to get several different answers. As far as I've seen, there doesn't seem to be one single definition for it so what I'm going to do here is give you my own personal definition.

Here goes.

It's thoughts about food, eating, and your body that lead you to eat in ways you don't want to in order to lose or maintain weight.

What I first want to point out here is that this is about thoughts, not actions. This is diet mentality that we're talking about here, mentality meaning what's happening mentally with your thinking, not behaviorally.

This is important because too often people associate actions that might be helpful for them with diet mentality and therefore they don't do them.

There are behaviors and actions that people associate with dieting and that they're really resistant to doing because they worry that it will be contributing to diet mentality but that's not how it actually is.

The one I see come up most often is planning food.

I'm a big advocate for planning and deciding ahead of time. It just makes it easier for you to make a decision in the moment because you already made the decision for yourself. Now you just need to follow through on it. And, it's going to be so much easier to make decisions you'll be happy with if you're making them when you're not feeling urges, desire, cravings, or emotions. In the moment when you're feeling them, there's a good chance you'll make a decision that will satisfy the feeling but, you won't be satisfied with the decision after you're done eating. When you make your decision outside of the moment, you're more clear-headed, rational, and have your long-term goals and future self in mind.

So deciding ahead of time and planning can be super useful.

But for some people, as soon as you mention it they're like, "No, that's diet mentality."

It in itself is not. It depends on how you think about it, your motive for doing it, and your intentions behind it.

Are you planning and deciding based on what you think you have to do, should do, what someone told you to do, what you think you need to do? If so, that's diet mentality. It's pressuring, forceful, and obligation. It's not going by what you want to do, it's going by what someone else has told you to do or what you've seen someone else have success with and what you think you need to do for your body to look a certain way.

What's not diet mentality is deciding ahead of time and planning according to how and what you want

to be eating, eating for your well-being, eating according to your typical hunger and fullness, making empowered choices, and setting yourself up to feel your best. I don't see anything wrong with that nor do I see it as diet mentality. If anything, it leans more toward normal eating.

It's like when a family, or one person, is deciding meals for the week before going grocery shopping, or a person is packing their lunch to eat at work, or already knowing what they're going to eat before they go out to dinner with a friend. Binge eaters and people who've had eating and weight issues aren't the only ones who look at restaurant menus online ahead of time, or plan lunches, or make well-thought out grocery lists and meal plans.

There's nothing wrong with thinking about things ahead of time. But, make sure that as you're going through your decision making process, you're considering yourself and your body, not just what previous diets you've done and what the diet industry has told you that you need to do.

Another example is skipping meals. That in itself is not a problem and not diet mentality, it's an action, not a thought in your mind. But again, whether it aligns with diet mentality depends on the intention behind it. Are you skipping a meal because you think you have to to lose weight? Are you doing it because someone told you that it's the healthiest option? Or, are you doing it because you're genuinely not hungry?

And then there's the other side. Do you have to eat a meal even if you're not hungry for it because you're afraid that if you don't you'll overeat or ruin your metabolism?

It's gotten into our heads that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. So even if people aren't hungry, they think they should eat breakfast. But do you know where that idea came from? Well, we can credit it to a dietician who wrote an article in a magazine that was edited by Dr. John Kellogg. Yup, the cereal guy. So it's been led to believe that it was all a marketing tactic to sell more cereal.

From what I've seen from different studies, there isn't conclusive evidence to show that it's better if we all eat breakfast.

Diet mentality will tell you that you have to, that you will overeat later in the day if you don't, or that it will cause weight gain.

Diet mentality may also tell you to under eat because you binged and to not eat your next meal even if you're hungry.

But what does your body tell you?

If you're not hungry, don't eat. And that goes for any meal or snack.

If you're not eating dinner because you're not hungry, to me that sounds like a way better idea than eating because you heard someone somewhere tell you that you shouldn't skip meals.

Should you really eat when you're not hungry just because you think you're supposed to? Because that to me doesn't sound right. To me, that sounds like you're setting yourself up to be a person who eats when they're not hungry and that's probably not a habit most of you want to have.

And one more – measuring food. If you follow a serving size on a box of food, is that diet mentality?

The action itself is not but, the mentality depends on your thoughts behind it.

There's thinking you can only eat that amount because the box says that's how much is a serving and there's thinking you want to eat that amount. It's not diet mentality if it's a decision you're making for yourself and you like your reasons.

When I buy a package of fresh chicken at the grocery store, I portion it out. If I'm going to dice it up into little cubes, which is what I do a lot of the time for my meals, I'll dice it up and portion the chicken out into small glass Tupperware and put them in the fridge and freezer.

For me, it just makes my life so much easier.

I'm doing all the dicing ahead of time so I don't have to do it when lunch time comes. I'm ready to go, I just plop it into the pan.

I'm portioning an amount that I believe it a suitable amount of protein so I'm not wasting it by cooking too much.

I'm not worried about it going bad in the fridge because I'm freezing some of it and, I'm freezing the portions rather than the whole package which makes it easier to prep and cook and defrost.

It all just makes so much sense to me and it makes cooking easier for me so I do it. It's not because I think I need to eat this certain amount because of the calories or because of my weight, I do it because it makes my life easier and because I've learned what a good amount of protein looks like for me.

That's it. I don't feel bound by it, I like it.

Some of you prefer to measure out your nuts or nut butters or to count candy.

If you love doing it, great. If you feel like it's something you have to do and you're required to do it, then let's take a look at your thoughts around it because there's some diet mentality about calories or macros or portion sizes or weight gain going on in your mind.

You don't have to be afraid of certain behaviors around food. People have all different kinds of behaviors, even normal eaters. What matters is your thoughts behind it. If you have fear, obsession, deprivation, or pressure then that's how you know there's diet mentality going on and it's your thoughts about how you're eating that need to change more so than the actual behaviors as long as the behaviors aren't harming you or undernourishing you.

So what is considered to be diet mentality? What are some thoughts that aren't going to be useful for you to be thinking about your eating, food, and your body?

Here's some examples:

Thinking certain foods are off limits, foods that you want to be a part of your life.

Thinking foods are good and bad.

Not listening to your hunger.

Thinking you have to eat how someone else tells you to rather than how you want to such as following a diet or eating plan that you don't like.

Thinking you need to exercising to make up for what you ate or as a way to earn more eating.

Being way more focused on eating to look a certain way rather than eating to feel your best.

What it comes down to is doing what you think you have to do or should do even if your body is telling you otherwise or even if it's not what you truly want.

Like I talked about in episode #169 – it's more based on what you want than what your body wants except it's not even what you want but what you think you need to do to look a certain way.

So much of it is centered around changing your body or maintaining your body in ways you don't want to be eating.

It may also be centered around a belief that this is how you're going to be happy. You may be attributing thinness with happiness and those two are not always tied together. You can have one without the other. Being thin doesn't automatically make you happy and you don't have to be thin to be happy.

You probably know or have been a person who has been thin and unhappy or a person who is bigger and happy.

So let's drop the idea that you have to be a certain weight to be happy. You can be happy no matter how your body looks.

And when you're deciding how you're going to eat and what eating behaviors you're going to engage in, consider what you want.

The first step of breaking out of the diet mentality is dropping these words : can't, need to, have to, should, or shouldn't.

Notice how often you're creating obligation and pressure and deprivation. It's all coming from those words.

And you're going to replace them with empowering words like, get to, want to, don't want to, or choose to.

Notice how different they feel.

You can measure your food, decide ahead of time, and not eat if you're not hungry and feel good about it because it's what you choose to do.

And you can stop doing them if you don't want to because you don't have to or need to.

Assess all the behaviors you have around eating and look at the reasons behind them. Do you like your reasons or not?

If you're going to not eat after a certain time at night because you'll sleep better, this is an empowered decision. If you're doing it because you think you can't eat after a certain time because you'll gain weight, that's diet mentality.

If you're not going to eat certain foods because you don't like how you feel when you eat them, that's an empowered decision. If you're doing it because you think they cause weight gain, that's diet mentality.

It's not diet mentality when you're making decisions based on hunger, fullness, your personal taste preferences, how your body feels when you eat certain foods, amounts, and at certain times.

I would say that that's how normal eaters make their eating decisions.

So notice the words you're using to determine how you decide to eat. Notice what result you're expecting.

What matters more than the actions is the reasons and intentions behind them.

Make your own decisions for reasons you like.

And I'm not saying that weight loss is a bad reason. You can eat for weight loss, after you feel confident in your ability to not binge eat of course, make sure you work on your binge eating first but, you can aim for weight loss if you want to but, you can find a balance between eating in ways you want to and engaging in behaviors that you want to and getting the result of weight loss.

What you don't want to do is completely ignore yourself, your wants, and your body's wants just for the sake of weight loss. That's for sure not going to end well or be sustainable.

Create the mentality that you want to have. Decide how you want to be thinking about food, eating, and your body, what behaviors you want to have be habits for you, and make sure your intentions and reasons align with your true self and wants.

It's time to stop letting other people dictate what's right and wrong for you and for you to make empowered decisions for yourself that you feel good about.

Alright, that's all for today, I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye!