

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #198: Feeling Pressured to Eat or Not Eat

Hi! Let's talk about feeling pressured to eat and also feeling pressured to not eat.

I see eating pressure happening with people with both eating and not eating and it happens both with other people and alone.

So today I want to talk with you about all of it so you can stop feeling pressured about eating or not eating, and therefore not experience so much stress about eating or not eating, and then ultimately feel free to do what *you* want to do.

It feels so much better to release the pressure around eating and I know because I used to experience a lot of it.

And it was mostly with myself.

I don't remember getting a lot of pressure from other people, like people pushing me to eat, I mean, I did, don't we all, right? But not a ton that I can remember. But there was for sure a good amount of pressure coming from myself.

I was trying to lose weight for years and put so much pressure on my self to eat in a certain way.

Pressure to eat certain foods for the sake of weight loss and to not eat foods for the same reason.

And then there was the pressure to eat like everyone else and eat what they're eating so I could appear normal.

Like if I knew my friends were going to order pizza, and it wasn't what I really wanted, I didn't want to be the only one not eating it and be the weirdo. So I'd eat it.

Those were probably my most common ways of pressuring myself with eating.

And I will also share with you what I have recently experienced pressure with that wasn't food.

It was with drinking alcohol.

I don't think I've shared this on the podcast yet but, in 2021 I took a break from drinking.

Right before the start of the year, I decided I wasn't going to drink for the entire year but, I would allow myself to try sips of beverages if I wanted to.

And over the course of the year, I didn't drink one entire drink and had maybe 7 sips just to try drinks if someone was drinking something I've never tried or a couple times, to experience something I have tried.

Now, I'm not going to share my entire experience with not drinking in this episode, but if it's something you're interested in hearing about, let me know and maybe I'll do an episode on it.

But anyway, during that year, I felt some pressure with other people.

And I know that a lot of you experience the same kind of pressure with other people and eating.

People wanted me to drink with them and even though I told them I wasn't drinking, they would still try to persuade me.

There was one person who knew I was taking a break that would say, "Will you have a drink with me?" and when they said it, I felt like if I said no, I'd be letting them down. It sounds so innocent what they were saying, and I can't tell you if it was or not since I wasn't in their head but, when they said it, I felt pressured.

There was another person who for awhile just wouldn't let it go when I'd say no. It seemed like they were partly joking with me but I didn't like it. I felt like they were pressuring me.

And then there was the very short period of time that I went back on a couple dating apps and I worried about what guys would think about me not drinking. I was feeling pressured before anyone even said anything, just in anticipation.

So why is all this pressure happening?

Why did I feel pressured by myself, why did I feel pressured by other people, why did I feel pressured even before anyone said anything?

All the pressure was coming from me, inside of my head.

And that's where your pressure is coming from too.

It's all self-created.

Even when people tell you to eat, and then tell you again, and then again, and again, and they're not letting up, that doesn't cause you to feel pressured.

You feel pressured because of how you're thinking about what they're doing.

Think about my example I gave a minute ago when the person would ask me if I'd have a drink with them.

They said it so nicely, and they probably only asked once, and yet I felt pressured and at the time was thinking they were pressuring me not in an incessant way but just by asking.

And I felt pressured because of how I was thinking about what they were saying.

It was a request but in my mind I was thinking thoughts like,

"They know I'm not drinking, they shouldn't be asking me," which that made me feel less pressured and more annoyed.

But then there was, "I'm ruining this relationship by not drinking with them."

That thought came from the fact that we used to drink together a lot and now I was changing that and I was afraid I was then changing what they thought about me.

And another thought, "They're going to be disappointed if I don't drink." So I was feeling pressure to drink so they wouldn't feel disappointed.

I wasn't being pressured by them, I was creating the feeling of pressured for myself by thinking, "I'm ruining this relationship" and "They're going to feel disappointed."

The pressure was coming from me, not them.

And the same is true for the other person who was repetitive with their attempts at convincing me to drink.

They were saying words. They were talking about me drinking.

You could say they were trying to coerce me into drinking.

But I only felt pressure when I created it for myself.

There were times I felt zero pressure when they'd do that. They'd go on and on about why I should drink and the whole time I felt cool and calm and just said no.

And other times I did feel the pressure.

If it was them making me feel pressured, I would have felt it every time but, I didn't.

Because it wasn't them making me feel how I felt, it was me.

And when it was just me talking with me and I felt pressure that was obviously all me.

And it wasn't my weight loss goals or society that made me feel the pressure.

It was me thinking I "had to," eat in certain ways.

I had to not eat for the rest of the day.

I had to eat light during the day so I could eat more when I went out to dinner.

I had to eat these certain foods.

I had to not eat these certain foods.

I had to eat to appear normal and so people wouldn't ask me questions about me not eating. I didn't want to experience that discomfort of being questioned.

So much of pressure comes from us thinking we have to do things or that we should do things.

I should eat.

I shouldn't eat.

I have to eat.

I have to not eat.

So much pressure is coming from each of those thoughts and we think them with ourselves and with other people.

Think about peer pressure. So much of that stems from worrying about what your peers will think about you if you don't do it. You think you should do it so they'll accept you or think you have to do it to be accepted.

You're a teenager and if you want to be cool, you should or have to smoke the cigarette or drink the drink.

It basically comes down to the idea that if you don't do this thing, something bad will happen.

You'll gain weight, you won't be accepted, you'll make someone else feel bad. Those are probably the most common fears when it comes to eating pressure.

So you tell yourself you have to not eat so you don't gain weight, you have to eat to be accepted, you have to eat to make them feel good.

Or maybe those “have to’s” are “should’s.”

You put this pressure on yourself to not gain weight, to be accepted, or to make someone else feel good.

Now, I don’t think it’s wrong to want those things.

I understand why you don’t want to gain weight. I understand why you want to be accepted, I mean, don’t we all? And to make someone else feel good, of course we don’t want to see people we care about feel bad.

But at the same time, these things are going to happen sometimes.

Even if you pressure yourself to do the things you think will stop them from happening.

Even if you eat exactly how you think you have to or should eat, you could still gain weight.

Think about what happens when you feel pressured to eat in a certain way. Eventually, you’ll probably eat in a completely different way to release that pressure.

It’s the backlash of being overly restrictive. You finally allow yourself to eat how you want to eat when you remove the pressure.

You may eat for someone else to accept you or for them to feel good and they might still not accept you or feel good.

And a caveat of that is that if you eat when you don’t want to, *you* might not be accepting of you or feel good.

So here’s how you can relieve the pressure you feel.

You get clear on what you want.

You drop the “should’s” and “have to’s” and decide what you *want* and *don’t want*.

When you’re making decisions based on what you want and what you choose, there’s way less pressure, if any.

There’s no obligation, it’s your choice, it’s what you want.

I felt so much freer when I stopped making my eating decisions based on what I think I should eat and when I stopped thinking I had to eat certain foods and in a certain way.

There is no right way to eat.

The best way for me to eat is the way I want to eat.

And I don’t eat for other people anymore.

I eat for me.

And sure they may have thoughts and feelings about it and I allow them to have their thoughts and feelings.

I stopped trying to manipulate their thoughts about me and let them think what they want to think.

And that's another thing you can do to relieve the pressure you feel.

Allow other people to think and feel what they think and feel.

They might think you're weird but so what?

Sometimes people think how I eat is weird and that's fine. It's normal for me and that's what matters to me.

And with my drinking, there were people who had thoughts about me not drinking and that's okay.

They can have their thoughts. They can feel how they feel.

And when I allow that, I don't feel pressure to act in a certain way.

We can all be ourselves and it's lovely.

And honestly, for me, if people are going to not accept me because of what I do and don't eat or drink, then those are not my people.

I can choose to not be around them.

For the most part of course.

And if I do have to be around them for whatever reason, I can own what I want, what I choose, and allow them to think and feel and say what they do.

Maybe they'll feel disappointed. And that's okay. It's okay to feel disappointed. It's just a feeling and it will pass.

And maybe they'll be unaccepting and that's okay. I will be accepted by plenty of other people. I'm not going to be left entirely alone.

So that's how you're going to stop feeling so pressured with yourself and with other people.

Know what your wants are and make decisions based on them.

Drop the "should's" and "have to's."

And let other people think, feel, and say what they do.

They'll be okay and you're going to be okay and you'll be the most okay when you are doing things that align with what you want.

Alright, that's what I have for you today. I'll talk to you again soon, bye bye.