

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #211: The Process of Habit Creation

Hello! You, are changing. You're always changing. In some ways unintentionally and in some ways intentionally.

And when you're working on changing something intentionally, something like your eating habits, there's something you can for sure expect to happen.

That you're not going to create new habits overnight.

That's not how habits work.

They're created with consistent repetition and over time, whatever it is that you're turning into a habit becomes more automatic and you use less energy and mental effort to do it.

It would be awesome if we started doing new things and habits were created quickly and we could stop putting so much mental energy into them but, that's just not how it is.

So it's important to know what you can expect and to be patient.

Something I've seen happen to people which is so counterintuitive but it happens, is that they expect habits to form quickly and when they don't, they quit. Maybe it's a little quit or maybe it's a forever quit.

It's like if it's not happening fast for them then they don't want to wait.

They'd rather not have it than wait.

There is someone that I've been working with in my program that comes to mind when I talk about this.

She told me that she thought she'd come into the program, do everything she's supposed to do, and stop bingeing and have her ideal eating habits pretty quickly.

But that's not how it went for her.

What she expected was not what she experienced and it was discouraging for her.

So what did she do when she felt discouraged about this? She pulled back. She stopped putting in as much effort.

That's what discouragement can drive you to do. To quit.

Now luckily for her it was a little quit. She didn't disappear, she came back. We continued to coach but for a bit there, she wasn't really engaged.

And this kind of thing happens to so many people so often, and unfortunately when they're doing this on their own, it's so much easier to quit for longer.

Things aren't always going to go as you expect them to.

And that includes your habit creation.

It might take longer than you think it will and I'll talk in a moment about why it might take longer.

But first, why do you think it will happen quickly?

Is it just hopeful thinking or is it because you heard somewhere, maybe in several places, that it takes 21 days to form a habit?

I know I've heard that so many times.

So, that number was referenced in a book from the 1960s called "Psycho-Cybernetics." But the problem is that the author didn't say it takes 21 days, he said it takes a minimum of about 21 days.

But as time went on, the message got misconstrued and it stopped being a minimum of 21 days and became just 21 days to break a habit.

So now all these people who aren't breaking and creating new habits in 21 days are getting all frustrated because they think that's how it's supposed to be.

But it's not.

So if you're not creating new habits within 21 days, there is nothing wrong with you.

Now, I'd love to tell you how long it actually will take but, I can't.

Doing my research I found a study that said it takes anywhere from 18 days to 254 days to form a new habit.

And, that's a pretty big difference. And I did the math for you, 254 days is a little less than 8 and a half months.

So there's a huge range, so huge that I personally don't even think it's useful to consider that data when you're trying to set your expectations.

All it's basically saying is that it can happen in a short period of time or a long period of time.

So, cool. Good to know.

Now, going back to why it might take longer to break and create new habits, here's one reason why it might take longer.

It's because a lot of the time a habit is not just one habit.

So many of our habits have sub habits that create the habit we're wanting to change.

Consider your ideal eating habits and what you'd want them to look like.

In order for you to get from how you are eating now to how you want to be eating, you're not going to be changing just one thing. There's probably going to be several things.

Let's say you want to eat more meals instead of grazing all day. There might be one or several reasons why you're grazing all day and in order for you to break the habit of grazing and create the habit of eating meals, you'll have to work on each of the habits that's leading you to graze.

Do you have a habit of eating in response to your emotions?

Do you have a habit of overeating to avoid feeling hungry?

Do you have a habit of eating to procrastinate?

Do you have a habit of saying yes to any food someone offers you?

Do you have a habit of not being aware of what you're doing?

Do you have a habit of excusing your grazing?

There could be so many things that are contributing to this habit of grazing and the more habits there are that are contributing, the longer it will take for you to drop the habit that is the culmination of those other habits.

And this is one reason why it takes some people longer to stop binge eating than other people.

For some people, there's just a few habits they have that are contributing to their binge eating and for some other people, there's several.

And this is not a problem and you're not wrong for having more habits.

You're just going to spend more time and effort on breaking them and creating new ones. That's all.

And it will take as long as it takes.

This is such an important mindset to have as you go through the process of breaking and creating habits.

You might want to think it was supposed to have clicked already, or that you should be doing better already but, it's just not useful to think that way.

You may have thought that change would have happened more quickly but, it didn't.

And accepting where you are in the process is crucial.

You are where you are.

Now keep going.

This is a process and just because you haven't achieved the formation of a habit yet, just because it's not automatic and super easy yet, doesn't mean you aren't on your way there.

You might be close to it becoming easier or more automatic, or you might even be really close to it being a solid habit.

Or maybe you're not there but, you might be just about to cross the 50/50 mark. If you keep going a little bit longer, you might get over the hump where on the other side, you're doing what you want to be a habit more than you're doing what you don't want to be a habit.

When you start, you're going to be doing your current habits most of the time with speckles of your desired habits.

But as you keep going, you start doing more of your desired habit and less of your current habit.

Keep going longer, while being consistent, and you end up doing more of your desired habit and less of what is now your old habit.

Now, I do want to say that even when you get to the point where your desired habit is your habit, that doesn't mean it's going to be perfectly easy and automatic 100% of the time.

It's like people who are in the habit of working out regularly but there are still days when they have a little resistance to doing it. Maybe days when they choose to not do it.

This is normal. We're not going to be doing our desired habits perfectly 100% of the time.

So even when you're in the habit of eating how you want to be eating, that doesn't mean you're never going to have desire to eat differently or to overeat.

You most likely will and that's okay.

But it will be easier for you to say no when your habit is no longer eating how you *don't* really want to be eating and your habit is overeating.

And when you have created the habit of not eating to feel better, there may still be times you desire to eat to feel better, and maybe some times when you actually do it.

And that's normal. Because again, even though you have a habit, that doesn't mean you're going to be perfect at doing it or are never going to think about not following the habit.

I say all this so you don't think something has gone wrong once you feel like you've created a habit and aren't perfect with it.

Lack of perfection doesn't mean something has gone wrong.

It means you're being a human.

It also means you're a human when it takes longer than you think it will for you to create a habit.

Just accept where you are and know that if you continue putting in effort consistently, you will create it.

And don't forget to celebrate yourself along the way as you notice yourself doing what you want to be doing more often and not doing what you don't want to be doing more often.

In the beginning, that may mean you're doing what you want to be doing 10% of the time. That's more progress than 0%. Be proud of that. Then watch yourself move to 15%, and 20%, in whatever time frame you move in.

You will get there.

Be patient, celebrate yourself along the way, and accept where ever you are in the process at every point in the process.

Alright, I'll talk to you next time.

Bye bye.