

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #218: Health as a Motivator

Hi! How are you doing? I'm good.

Let's talk about wanting to be healthy and using that as motivation to stop binge eating.

In my Stop Binge Eating Program, one of the first things we talk about is having a compelling reason to stop binge eating.

That compelling reason is what keeps you doing the work, even when you don't feel like it, even when it's hard, and even when you're not entirely sure you'll be able to do it.

You look to your compelling reason, your "why" to remind yourself of why doing this work is so important to you, why not doing it isn't an option, and why you will be so much better off if you do the work.

It's either going to make you feel motivated or it's going to get your butt in gear when you're not feeling motivated.

So your "why" has to be compelling, something you really, really want so you'll work to get it no matter what.

In all my years working with people to help them stop binge eating, I've heard countless compelling reasons.

And one I hear a lot, is health.

People want to stop binge eating for their health. They want to be healthy.

I know I for sure wanted that.

I can't tell you how many times I had the thought, "I just want to be healthy."

I wanted to feel healthy, I wanted my body to be healthy, I wanted to be a healthy person.

I'd say most people who binge eat want the same.

But, just saying that you want to be healthy isn't always a great compelling reason.

It might be but, I think you could have a better one if you dig a little deeper.

Being healthy is kinda vague.

There are tons of things that can contribute to being healthy and what is considered important as far as health to one person might not be important to another.

So if better health or being healthy is a reason for why you want to stop binge eating, what specifically does that mean for you?

When I ask that question, some of the common answers are to decrease risk of diabetes or heart disease, lower their A1C, alleviate joint or back pain, and sometimes it's to feel healthier so things like having more energy, decreasing stress, have more focus, and then there's just the identity of being a healthy person where they want to be someone who most of the time eats nutritious, fueling food and sometimes eats for pleasure but not so much that it negatively affects how they feel physically.

Now, already, just by saying those things I just did, we're getting more specific and less vague, the reasons are getting more personal. They start to hit home a little more. You start to feel a little more compelled to work for them.

And they can be even better than that.

All you have to do is ask "why?"

It sounds like such a silly thing to ask. "Why do you want to alleviate your joint pain?" I mean, who wouldn't, right? Or, "why do you want to have more energy?"

I remember when I was working at a weight loss center and we had to ask all the new clients why they wanted to lose weight so we could get clear on their "why."

There was this one guy who I asked that question to and he laughed and thought I was asking the most ridiculous question ever. It was like it was so obvious why he would want to lose weight, as if everyone wants to and everyone wants to for the same reason.

But they don't. And it wasn't obvious to me why he wanted to lose weight at all. Sure he wanted to be thinner, just like you may want to stop bingeing for your health, but why? Why did he want to be thinner? What was his personal reason? Why do you want to have more focus and less stress?

That's how we're going to get to something that's even more motivating than just saying, "health."

You want to decrease your risk of diabetes or heart disease so you can be around to watch your kids grow up, and their kids, and experience life with them as long as possible.

You might want to alleviate your joint and back pain so you can be more active with your friends and family rather than sitting on the sidelines. You want to be able to do the fun things and live your life to the fullest.

You might want to have more energy and focus so you can excel in your career while also having an amazing social life and amazing relationships and feel successful, connected, and fulfilled.

Notice how different those answers feel compared to the answer, "I want to be healthy."

Those first two reasons aren't really compelling for me personally, they don't hit home for me, but I get excited just thinking about the people for who they are and thinking that they're gonna get all that.

And that third reason is for sure one for me and exactly what I want. I want as much energy and focus as I can get so I can have the best career, life, and relationships I can. Now, I'm realistic that I'm not going to feel amazing 100% of the time and my career, life, and relationships aren't always going to be amazing but I want to do what I can to make them the best I can. So I think about that when I'm making so many of my decisions, decisions about how much I work, about when I go to sleep and get out of bed, what I eat, how much I eat, how I spend my free time, so many things.

And having that specific reason, which is so much more compelling than just saying, "I want to be a healthy person," makes it so much easier for me to make decisions that align with what's important to me.

So if you've been saying that health is your motivator, get as specific as you can about why it's your motivator.

What about "health" is important to you? And why is that specific health issue important to you?

And this is a helpful exercise that you can do with any compelling reasons why if it's not feeling like it's a 10 out of 10 important to you or if it's not lighting a fire under your butt like you want it to.

Now, let's be clear about the purpose of having a compelling reason is because sometimes people expect it to do more than it does and then think there's something wrong with it when it doesn't do what they expect.

Your compelling reason is there to keep you in the game. It keeps you moving even when it's hard, when you don't feel like it, or when you're tired.

The compellingness of it makes stopping trying not an option.

But, it might not stop you from giving in to an urge to binge.

Sometimes it does work for some people but this reason that we're talking about in this episode, is not usually one of the tools that is most helpful for not giving in to urges.

So often people tell me that they thought about their compelling reason, their "why" and it didn't stop them from eating.

And that's totally normal because that's not it's main purpose.

And other people think that if they're still binge eating, their "why" isn't compelling enough yet when they tell me what it is, they're super passionate about it.

That's because having a compelling, important "why" isn't enough to stop your binge eating.

There's more to it. If there wasn't, I would have only one episode for this podcast and it would be about that.

That's obviously not how it is.

You have a compelling reason to stop binge eating so you have a good reason to do the work to stop binge eating and to not give up on yourself and this is very important. Necessary actually.

But so is believing you can do it, not overly restricting your eating, allowing yourself to feel feelings, having neutral to positive self-talk, being more accepting of your body, and all the things that are involved in making stopping binge eating happen.

So don't expect that having a fantastic "why" is all you need and don't think it's not good enough if you are continuing to binge.

If you're continuing to not give up on yourself and aren't quitting forever, then it's probably a good one.

Now, I do want to talk about one more thing when it comes to using health as a motivator.

It's using the word "healthy" to disguise "thinner."

This is for those of you saying you want to be healthy but what you're really saying is you want to be thinner.

Now, there's nothing wrong with wanting to be thinner.

But if losing weight is at the top of your priority list when you're working on stopping binge eating, you might end up doing things to lose weight that will actually perpetuate your binge eating.

One of my group members was doing this. She said she wanted to be healthy but really meant that she wanted to lose weight and be thinner.

So instead of giving herself permission to eat the foods she liked, she would deny herself and choose something that was lower in calories. Then she wouldn't be satisfied with what she ate and would then go eat what she had really wanted. Then she felt guilty about eating both of them and would then say screw it and keep eating.

Her desire to be healthy, aka to lose weight and be thinner, was driving her to make decisions with her eating that were putting her on a path of restriction that wasn't helpful for her, being where she was in her process of stopping binge eating.

Other people will also go for a long time without eating to try and lose weight, even if they're hungry, and that can cause urges to binge if their brain is still wired to send binge urges.

Most people when they're trying to lose weight, unknowingly do things that are hindering their progress with stopping binge eating.

So to make sure you don't do those things, make sure you're not saying, "I want to be healthy" when you really mean, "I want to lose weight and be thinner."

At this point, your focus need to be on fulfilling you and your body's wants and needs.

That means you can of course choose to eat nutritious, fueling foods but also give yourself the joy foods you want to eat. And eat to physically satisfy your body. Don't force yourself to be overly hungry because that's not healthy anyway.

Alright, so if you've been saying you want to stop binge eating so you can be healthy, know what that means for you, as specifically as possible. Make it personal, make it matter to you, a lot, make it so important to you that not stopping binge eating is not an option.

Then get to work and do everything you can to make it happen.

Bye bye.