

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #241: Self-Control

Hello! Let's talk today about self-control.

It's something I used to say I didn't have any of when it came to food and I hear other people say the same thing a lot.

"I have no self-control."

It feels terrible to believe that and it almost becomes like a personality flaw, and something they think isn't changeable.

You're just a person without self-control when it comes to food and that's that.

But I fully disagree, especially as a person who once believed I didn't have self-control with food.

And what I think is important for all of us to recognize is that we all have times when we do control ourselves in ways we genuinely want to with food. Even those of you who are struggling hard with binge eating.

I for sure had self-control sometimes and it didn't even feel like willpower and it wasn't hard. There were many times that I felt fully in control of what I did and didn't eat.

But I spent much more time focusing on the times I felt out of control than the times I didn't.

So first things first, if you believe that you have no self-control when it comes to food, look for when you have had it.

And don't discount any experience by coming up with a reason why it was different then or by saying it was a fluke.

Find evidence for yourself to prove that there are times when you do feel fully in control of how you're eating and are making and honoring eating decisions that align with your truest self and who you want to be.

So now that you can see that you have it in you to have self-control, let's get you more of it.

And let me be clear here about what I'm talking about when it comes to self-control before we move on.

I believe that we're all using our self-control constantly. We're the ones who are choosing to eat this or not eat that. No one else is deciding for us and we are not being forced to. So whether you eat or not, you're deciding to do it even if you don't recognize the moment when you make the decision to do it. It's happening. A moment of decision exists when you finally decide, "Screw it, I'm eating," or "I can't do this any more, give me the food," or "Nope, not eating that right now."

So what I'm talking about with self-control in this episode is the standard way people define it and how I'll define it here is that it is making and honoring decisions that align with what you truly want most.

When you make decisions that don't align with what you truly want most, you're still in control of making those decisions. You're still the one deciding to do what you do.

But to use the standard way of defining it, I'll talk about self-control as being something you use to do something you truly want to be doing.

This is something we all have the ability to use. But there's one very common reason why people don't use it and why it seems like some people have little or none of it when it comes to certain things.

And it's because their thoughts and feelings don't align with the actions they want to be taking.

Your feelings, which are caused by your thoughts, are the driving force behind your actions.

Your feelings don't *make* you do things but, when you feel driven, motivated, or compelled to do something it's because of how you feel in that moment.

So if you are having a hard time using your self-control, it's most likely because your thoughts and feelings are aligned with an action you don't want to be taking.

Let me give you an example of what that means to be aligned or not aligned.

Let's say you want to not eat something that's in your refrigerator.

If you're thinking that it's not what you want and are thinking about reasons you like for not eating it, then you're going to feel self-assured and easily say no to that food.

That's you having your thoughts and feelings aligned with not eating it.

But if you're just thinking that it's gonna taste soooo good and you haven't had it in such a long time that you deserve to have some, then you're going to feel desire for it and when you feel that desire, it's going to be hard to say no and not eat it.

That's you not having your thoughts and feelings aligned with not eating it. Your thoughts and feelings are actually aligned with eating it.

When you think about how good it will be and come up with reasons for why you should eat it, you're going to feel desire for it, and that desire is going to drive you to get what you're desiring.

That's what happens so often for people who think they don't have any self-control.

They are thinking all of these desire causing thoughts, they're thinking about how good it will be and they're thinking about the reasons why they should do it and therefore are making it hard to not do it.

So instead of pushing against that desire, which is willpower, they just give in and do it.

So if you're going to more easily use your self-control, your thoughts and feelings need to be more aligned.

That's what the focus needs to be on.

Most people when they're trying to have more self-control are only focused on the behavior they want to engage in.

It's like when I would just tell myself, "don't eat," or "I'm not going to binge." That wasn't very helpful because my thoughts and feelings still aligned with eating and bingeing and aligned with thoughts that would cause me to feel urges to binge.

Examples of those thoughts would be thoughts about why I shouldn't eat even though I was hungry or about the foods I wasn't going to allow myself to eat or about how fun it would be to eat a bunch of food or about not wanting to feel the discomfort of my emotions.

The focus needs to be on your thoughts because they will cause you to feel a feeling that will drive your actions.

And you have authority over what you think about.

You're not in control of every single thought that pops into your head and sometimes you might get stuck in believing something that's not helpful, and that's something I work with my group members on a lot, is helping them get out of unhelpful thoughts and beliefs.

But you can work on thinking more of the thoughts you want to be thinking and a lot of the time you can simply dismiss thoughts and replace them with new ones. You can tell yourself what you want to be thinking and have that be it.

But that will only work if you are not stuck in believing the opposite, which again, is something that you can work on getting unstuck with.

When you're not stuck, sometimes it's as simple as just telling yourself what is true and what you truly want and deciding what you're going to do what's aligned with that.

So when you're working on self-control, spend more time focusing on what you need to be thinking in order to behave how you want to behave instead of only focusing on how you want to behave.

And here's something else that will help too.

Like I said, sometimes we get stuck in believing those thoughts and sometimes you will need an outside perspective to change that, and that's what coaching is for.

But sometimes your stuckness is just temporary and you'll be able to get to where you want to be mentally on your own.

Even as an experienced coach, I experience both of these and sometimes I get coaching to help me shift what I'm thinking.

But sometimes, I don't need that, I just need space to feel how I'm feeling.

Even when your thoughts and feelings are driving you to eat, you can not eat and still make a decision that's aligned with your true self.

And you do that by feeling what you're feeling without reacting to it.

You allow the feeling to be there without eating to make it go away, or without doing whatever it is that you're feeling driven to do.

Basically, you're interrupting the think – feel – act process.

You're pausing before you act and when you do, you address the feeling, focus on it, and consciously choose to feel it in your body.

Instead of taking the action of eating, you take the action of feeling.

Now, if you're someone who doesn't have a lot of recent experience feeling feelings you might want to know what that looks like.

And I'll tell that it doesn't look like anything. You're literally doing nothing.

Now, you can of course do things like breathing, meditating, journaling, moving your body but the actual act of feeling requires no action except to allow yourself to be with the feeling instead of doing something to make it go away.

Then once you allow that feeling to move through you, it will ease up and you won't feel as driven as you did before.

Now, what you're thinking while feeling that feeling matters and I have talked about this on the podcast before and will talk about it again but I don't want to get too far off topic for this episode here so I'll just leave it there for now.

But just know that taking a pause and being with your feeling without reacting to it and without trying to force it away is an option and it will help you to use your self-control.

And managing your thinking by choosing different thoughts, by thinking on purpose, and by working on the thoughts you habitually think, will help you to use your self-control as well.

You don't have to agree with or follow along with every thought your brain presents to you. You can choose your own path.

So here's a quick break down of what you're going to do to have more self-control.

You're going to notice what it is that you're wanting to do and remind yourself that it's not what you truly want to be doing.

So to prepare for that, make sure you're clear with yourself about who you want to be, what you want to do, and what your goals are so you can more easily recognize when your actions aren't aligned with that.

Then, you're going to tell yourself why you don't want to do it and make sure you have reasons that are important to you.

When your brain tells you why it's a good idea, tell your brain why it's not.

Then, allow yourself to feel the desire for the action you don't want to take. Take a moment, pause, and let yourself feel it, even if it's uncomfortable.

And then repeat if you need to.

You can take control of what's happening in your mind and that will greatly affect what happens with your behavior.

Your self-talk matters, a lot.

And you don't have to say yes to and agree with every thought that comes into your mind.

You don't have to succumb to all your thoughts.

You can talk back, you can have discussions, you can make different decisions.

And when you do, it will be so much easier to do what you truly want to be doing.

Think about what you truly want. Think about what you want for your future self. Think about who you want to be.

And when your brain tries to tell you something else, bring yourself back to what you really want most.

That is how you will use more self-control.

And with that, you have to believe in yourself and stop telling yourself lies about how you're incapable of doing what you want to be doing.

You're not too weak. This isn't just how you are. You're not broken. You do have it in you.

You've proven it before, remember what I talked about at the start of this episode.

Think about even one time when you did what you wanted to do. You can do it again, repeatedly, and become a different person than you were.

You're going to do what I taught you here to start using more of the self-control that you have.

And don't forget to feel any discomfort that comes up too. Don't run from the discomfort because when you do, you're also running from your ideal and truest self.

To use more self-control, manage your thoughts, manage your feelings.

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