

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #259: Describing Urges and Emotions

Hi! One thing that you need to know about binge eating is that it's driven by urges to binge.

You feel an urge to binge, for whatever reason, and if you respond to that urge by giving it what it's urging for, which is a lot of food, then you're going to eat and binge.

This is why the main goal here is to stop feeling those urges.

And if you're like most people who binge, part of the reason why you feel urges to binge is because you're not willing to feel emotional discomfort and have been using food to deal with your emotions.

You've trained your brain to believe that eating food is what you're supposed to do in order to feel better if you're feeling an uncomfortable emotion.

So if your emotions get intense, you'll feel an intense urge to eat so you can make the feeling go away and feel better.

So when you feel an uncomfortable emotion, your brain will urge you to eat. And usually, the more intense the emotion, the stronger the urge will be.

So if you're one of these people, then learning how to feel instead of eat is going to be crucial for you.

But even if you're not, learning how to feel discomfort is still going to be crucial because urges in themselves are uncomfortable and although when you're feeling one it might seem like you have to give in to it, like you have no choice, you don't have to give in and you do have a choice.

You could choose to feel it out and feel it until it passes instead.

And if you do, then you won't binge.

All of this is why it's so important for you to be willing to feel discomfort.

If you're willing to feel the discomfort of an urge, then you will feel it all the way through until it passes, not eat to make it go away, and you won't binge.

If you're willing to feel the discomfort of your emotions, and you practice feeling them all the way through until they pass instead of eating to make them go away, then you'll retrain your brain so it won't urge you to binge if you feel an intense uncomfortable emotion. You're teaching your brain that eating isn't the solution and that it's okay to feel.

Now, as I said, you have to be willing to feel your urges and emotions and a lot of people are not willing to do this.

And part of the reason why they're not willing is because of the way they are talking about them and describing them.

The way they are describing urges and emotions is making feeling them sound not only unappealing but unbearable, intolerable, painful, or scary.

If something sounds unbearable, intolerable, painful, or scary, and you have the option of doing something much easier instead that's also more pleasurable, like eating food, then you're most likely going to choose eating food and not be willing to do the unbearable, intolerable, painful, or scary thing.

Now, yes, urges and some emotions are uncomfortable. We of course would rather not feel them at all. We're not going to deny that.

But we're going to feel them and if you're going to stop binge eating, you have to be willing to feel them.

And the way you describe that discomfort is either going to make it easier or harder for you to feel it.

It will make you more willing or less willing to feel it.

Imagine if I had just walked indoors in the middle of winter and I told you it was unbearably freezing outside or it's miserably cold.

You would probably not want to go out there if you didn't have to.

But if I told you it's not that bad. It's uncomfortable but tolerable. You'd be more willing to go out there, right?

Now, these are just descriptions, they're not facts. The only fact is that it's x degrees or maybe with a wind chill it feels like x degrees.

My descriptions of how cold it is are just my opinion about the temperature outside.

You may go out there and totally disagree with me. You may think it's not that bad when I think it's painfully bad. Or vice versa.

And the same thing can happen with our emotions and urges.

Now, of course we can't both experience the same feeling because yours is in your body and mine is in my body.

So we're not going to feel the exact same feeling and have our own opinions about it.

But we're going to have opinions about our own feelings that we're feeling.

And they are just our opinions, not facts.

I've heard some interesting opinions about feelings throughout the years.

People have told me their feelings feel like they're drowning, like they can't breathe, like they're dying, or like they've been poisoned.

When I felt urges to binge I'd think it was like I was going to explode.

But I wasn't going to explode. That was never going to happen. An urge can't make that happen.

And those people who felt like they were drowning, dying, poisoned, or not able to breathe were not.

These were just the stories we were telling and they were stories that made our urges and emotions scary and maybe even seem impossible to feel.

And if we make them scary or seemingly impossible to feel, we're not going to feel them.

We're going to look for a way out and since eating food is a quick and easy way out, we go for it.

What's also going to happen is that when you describe your urges and emotions this way, using metaphors like this, is that you're going to compound more uncomfortable emotion on top of it.

You're feeling an emotion or urge and then how you're thinking about it causes you to feel panic, fear, annoyance, emotions like that that you add to the feeling or urge you were originally feeling.

You're creating more discomfort for yourself and more emotions that you'll then have to work through.

You're making it harder on yourself by describing your emotions and urges this way.

And you can make it easier by seeing them for what they really are, not the exaggerated, metaphor stories we tell about them.

Your emotions and urges are sensations in your body.

When you feel an emotion or urge, you're *feeling* something.

There is a sensation in a body part like tightness in your chest, energy in your body, fluttering in your stomach, or your heart racing.

That's it.

These sensations are not going to physically harm you.

Sure they can be uncomfortable but, you are capable of feeling them. There is no feeling that you will feel that you are not capable of feeling. You were designed to feel all of them.

And when you're telling this story, the story of harmless sensations in your body that you are capable of feeling, then it will be so much easier for you to be willing to feel them.

That's the shift in my thinking that I made that now makes it so much easier for me to feel what I'm feeling.

That's the shift I work on extensively with my group members so they'll be willing to feel their emotions and feel their urges without eating to make them go away.

When we get factual and don't exaggerate in our mind, we can make things more tolerable and bearable and less painful and scary.

It makes me think of when you first get into cold water and it feels freezing. But then your body adjusts and makes it more tolerable and then it's not as intensely cold anymore.

If this is the first time you've ever done this, you might be telling yourself you won't be able to handle the cold. But after seeing that you will, that it's jarring at first but if you allow your body to adjust, you start to tell the story that it won't be that bad after a few minutes and you're more willing to get in.

When you first feel an emotion or urge, it might feel intense or painful. But then you adjust your mind like I'm talking about here and it makes it more tolerable and it's not as intense anymore.

And when you actually allow yourself to feel, and you do it right, meaning you're not freaking yourself out about it but are calming yourself instead, then you begin to create evidence for yourself that it might be jarring at first but if you adjust your mind, you start telling the story that it won't be that bad after a few minutes, then you're more willing to feel it.

I notice this happens for me sometimes with my urges to keep eating. These are not binge urges, they're urges to overeat, but it's still the same idea.

Initially, as soon as the urge hits, it's at it's strongest. But I mentally calm myself by telling myself why I don't want more and that I'll be okay if I feel this. It's just sensations in my body. And over the next few minutes, that urge gradually dissipates until it's gone.

And I helped that to happen by not making it bigger than it is. I get factual about it. It's sensations that will pass and because I know it's there because I'm desiring more, I can decrease my desire by telling myself the honest truth about why I truly don't want more.

You have more influence over how intense your emotions and urges are and how long they stay intense and how you handle them than you think you do.

We're not able to just flip them off like a switch, unless of course you eat but I'm assuming you're here because that's not what you want to be doing.

And although we can't just switch them off, we can manage our thinking to make the experience of feeling them easier on us.

So notice how you're describing your emotions and urges and if your descriptions are causing you to feel more uncomfortable emotions on top of what you're already feeling, or if they're making you resistant to feeling your feelings, know that the story you're telling is optional. You don't have to tell it that way.

You can get factual with what's really happening.

I wasn't going to explode. I was just feeling tightness in my chest and energy in my body and I'm capable of feeling any feeling. I was designed to feel them all.

And that to me feels so much more manageable.

I can feel sensations and so can you.

Alright, now you go feel those sensations so you can prevent yourself from bingeing and I'll talk to you again soon. Bye bye!