

# THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## Ep #265: Eating Without Distractions

Hello! Quick reminder for those of you who want to work with me directly, and who want to go much more deeply into this work than I do on the podcast, registration for The Stop Binge Eating Program will be opening in a little over 2 weeks on Sept 14<sup>th</sup> of 2023. Get all the info and register on that day by going to [coachkir.com/group](https://coachkir.com/group) and if you have any questions that aren't answered there, email them to [info@coachkir.com](mailto:info@coachkir.com).

If you want personalized help, this is how you can get it. I can help you, you *can* stop binge eating, and you can have the eating habits and the eating mindset that you want to have.

You really can and I'd love to help you make it happen.

So come join me, and what I'm sure will be an amazing group of people who are working on the same thing as you, in the next round of The Stop Binge Eating Program this fall!

Alright, now let's talk about eating without distractions.

Eating without distractions is something I'm sure most of us have been told to do or have read about because we're told that it is supposed to help us eat more slowly, more mindfully, to notice our fullness cues more easily, and to enjoy our food more.

But most of us rarely do it or never do it.

We're usually watching something, listening to something, reading something, or doing something while we eat.

We're not just sitting there with our food, just us and our food, in silence.

So is this a problem?

And does eating without distractions actually do what we're told it will do?

Well, I'm going to talk about this with you today and I'm also going to share with you what happened to me when I embarked on 5 days of eating without distractions.

I took on this experiment, which I'll get into in a moment, and although this is just my experience and obviously not a legit study since I was the only subject, I thought you might find it interesting to hear what was going through my head and how I ate throughout these 5 days.

But before I get into that, let's talk about the concept of eating without distractions first.

Like I said, most people don't do it, and most people don't *want* to do it. They would rather do something while they eat.

Also, it can be unrealistic if you're someone who eats most or all of your meals with other people.

You're probably not going to tell the other person or people to not talk and to have the room be completely silent.

And this doesn't have to have a detrimental effect on your eating.

Distractions while you're eating doesn't have to stop you from paying attention to your body, to your food, and to the speed at which you're eating, which is really what's important here.

You can still periodically check in with all of those while in the midst of distractions.

You can shift your focus from what you're listening to, watching, reading, or doing to your food, your body, and your speed.

You can take a moment to shift your focus from conversation that you're having to those things as well.

You can intentionally be mindful of what you want to be mindful of.

And really, it just takes a few seconds to check in and see if you're still enjoying your food, if you're still hungry or are full, and to manage your eating speed.

When distractions are present, that doesn't have to mean that mindfulness goes out the window.

Eating *with* distractions doesn't have to mean that you're not eating mindfully.

But it's your job to make sure that you're occasionally checking in instead of completely checking out while you're eating.

So eating with distractions doesn't have to be a problem but, that leaves the question of whether it will do what it is claimed to do.

Well, it really depends.

It *can*. But it's not a straight up guarantee and here's why.

If you're not enjoying eating without distractions, you might eat more quickly to get it over with.

If you're caught up in your thoughts, which we of course are still going to have even without outside distractions, you could be distracted by them and not notice your fullness signals or not pay attention to your food.

If you're enjoying the food *a lot*, you might still eat it fast, or you might still not notice that you're full, or you might ignore your fullness signals.

Eating without distractions isn't going to guarantee that you will eat exactly how you want to eat. It's not the magic solution, and thank goodness because personally, it's not what I want to do every single time I eat.

So what matters more than whether or not you're eating with distractions is whether or not you're being mindful while you eat, which simply means that you're paying attention to, are aware of, and are present with yourself and your food.

So now, if you'd like to hear about it, I'd love to share my experience from last week with you.

I was curious about what it would be like to eat without distractions so I set a goal to eat every meal and snack that I ate alone without any distractions.

And during the week, I usually eat almost all of my meals alone.

I live alone, work from home alone, and my nighttime activities vary so for me it's always breakfast and lunch alone and usually dinner.

Last week, I actually did have lunch out with a friend on Thursday, and then ate dinner with my boyfriend on Friday night but every other time I ate I was alone.

So I had lots of opportunities to eat without any distractions to see what would happen.

Now, before I go into all this, I just want to reiterate that this is just my experience, it's not a true study that we're going to get significant results and findings from, and my experience could be completely different from yours.

And this is partly because I'm simply just a different person than you, and we're all different and have different minds, but also because my mindset around food and my eating habits might be different than yours given the work I've done on my eating vs what I'm sure is also amazing work you've done on yours but still, different work, different places with our eating and our thoughts and mindset. So please

just take this as a little experiment that I had some fun with, or really, not a lot of fun with, that you might find interesting and hey, if you want to try it yourself to see what happens with you, go for it.

So, here's what I set out to do and the rules I had in place.

I would eat without distractions for every meal I ate by myself for 5 days.

There would be complete silence, except for any street or outside noise of course and nothing to read or watch so no phone, no tv, no reading, no music, no podcasts.

It would be just me, my food, and a pen and a piece of paper to take notes.

Also, there would be no eating anything if there is a distraction so if the tv was on, I would not eat. If I wanted to eat, I would have to pause it or turn it off. Although, while cooking I did do a few tastes throughout the days to see if the food was hot enough and I did also eat a few mints to freshen up my breath so those were the only exceptions.

And just so you know how different this is for me, here's what I normally do.

While eating breakfast, I read a news email that I get in my inbox daily that skims the news and sometimes I'll look up or read about other things. But basically breakfast time is reading about things time.

While eating lunch and dinner, I'll usually have some kind of show on that's easy to watch, something I don't have to fully focus on in order to enjoy it, and I might again be reading stuff on my phone, so either just one or both.

While eating a joy food snack, I've been practicing for awhile eating without distractions so doing that with my joy food snacks during this experiment wasn't any different than what I've been doing.

While eating a fueling snack because I'm a little hungry, I'll usually be watching or reading something or listening to something then too.

So other than eating joy food snacks alone without distractions, which I actually really enjoy doing, this was going to be very different for me.

So in doing this experiment, I wanted to see if I'd eat faster or more slowly, if I'd enjoy it, and if I'd get more pleasure or satisfaction from the food I was eating.

As for noticing fullness cues, I'm pretty good about not overeating, especially when I'm eating alone at home so stopping when I'm full wasn't really a big focus for me with this experiment. But of course, I'm always doing my best to stop before I feel too full.

And also, I decided I wasn't going to do any self-coaching, any thought work about this while doing it, so I wasn't going to work on changing my thoughts. I was just going to see what came up and observe my thinking. So you're gonna get the raw thoughts, what was going on in my head without any effort put into thinking more usefully.

So now that we have all that set, let me share with you what happened.

The morning of the first day, as soon as I remembered what I would be doing, I was *dreading it*. Like, serious dread, I did not want to do this, and it was because I was thinking it was going to be SO BORING.

But regardless, I set out to do this, I know I really did want to do this for experiment sake, so I was going to do it even though I thought it was going to be so boring and was dreading it.

Then, it was time for Monday, Day 1 breakfast.

It looks like I didn't take any notes while I was eating, only after, and this is what they say, which I'm also editing for clarity:

Not bad!

Not boring!

Didn't eat any faster.

Same satisfaction as usual.

Probably because I practice putting food and utensils down between bites regularly.

I looked around, was with my thoughts which were pretty calm, I had a song stuck in my head, which is fairly typical, I saw my neighbor and thought about him.

So meal one, as dreadful and as boring as I thought it would be, it was not that bad.

Then before lunch, I have a note saying, "Just want to get the eating over with so I can do something enjoyable," and again, "It's gonna be so boring."

So interesting to me how so many of us, myself included, can get so excited about eating but then when we think about only eating, and not doing anything else while eating, it doesn't sound so exciting anymore.

Then, during lunch, I took more notes and here's what I wrote:

"I can't believe I have to do this all week."

"I wish my salad wasn't so big."

And what I find so interesting about that second thought is that I really like the salad I made. It's a new recipe for me and it's super tasty yet in my mind, I just wanted to be done with it and just being there eating it wasn't enough enjoyment for me.

However, the next note I wrote says this:

"Kind of enjoying just being with my thoughts, hanging out with me, thinking of memories, singing a song again."

"Maybe it's not that bad because I have a fairly calm mind most of the time."

So I went from wanting my food to be gone so I could go do something else to then actually enjoying just being with me.

And I think for some people that's what trips them up when it comes to stuff like this.

They don't enjoy just being with themselves, in their mind.

They have too much going on in their mind or they don't like what they hear in their mind so they don't want to hang out in there.

I mean, if you were hanging out with someone who was talking nonstop about their to do list, what they're stressed about, all the not fun stuff they have going on, and were being super negative, would you want to hang out with them?

This is one reason why people get so caught up in distracting themselves, because they want a break from their minds. And it's okay to do that but, if this sounds like your mind, please make sure you're also working on decluttering your mind and are doing work on your thoughts. And side note, this is some of the work we do inside of The Stop Binge Eating Program.

Now, moving on, the last thought I have written for lunch was, "Yes! Finally done! As if it were excruciatingly hard and it wasn't. But just kinda happy to now get some entertainment outside of my brain."

And that was it. I enjoyed my brain but was ready for some variety.

So for me it wasn't like I was trying to escape myself and escape my mind, I just wanted to do something else like if you've been just sitting and chatting with someone else for awhile and you then decide to go do something instead of just sitting and talking.

Now, after lunch, the next thing I ate was not a meal but a joy food snack. I was going to eat a good size cookie without distraction, just me and the cookie and for this, I was not feeling resistance.

Like I said before, this is something I've been doing for awhile already and I think that's partly why I wasn't feeling resistance like I was for my meals. When I'm eating a joy food snack alone, I've found that I get so much more satisfaction when I eat it without distractions. I put all my focus on the food and the pleasure and flavor and texture and everything. So when I'm done, I feel like I got a lot of pleasure so I'm not feeling a huge desire for more. I got what I wanted.

I also think I wasn't feeling a lot of resistance because I knew it wouldn't take very long. For the meals, I'm imagining having to only eat for like 10-15 mins but with the joy food snack, it is more like a minute, maybe two depending on how much I'm eating. So it's less time.

But what's really going on is that my thoughts about eating that joy food without distractions are so different than the meal.

Before the meal I'm thinking, "This is gonna be so boring," while before the joy food snack I'm thinking, "This is gonna be so good."

For me, it's really what I'm thinking about as I'm anticipating the eating that is having the biggest effect in this experiment because for both, once I'm in it, I'm enjoying it to different degrees.

And I think that's an important lesson for all of us. So often we dread things that aren't actually going to be as dreadful as we think they will be and we gotta remind ourselves of this.

Then came dinner and before the meal, as I was cooking, I was on my phone looking at digital coupons on the two apps I use because I was going grocery shopping after dinner. And when my food was just about ready, I felt annoyed that I had to stop looking for coupons.

It was like I was being interrupted and I didn't like that.

Then as I was eating I noticed myself wanting to read through my notes from my earlier in the day just to have something to do but nope, I stopped myself. No reading, not even my notes.

And the last note for that dinner says, "Wasn't bad once I got into eating. Enjoyed my thoughts."

And that was day one.

In a nutshell, I was feeling dread, anticipating boredom, feeling resistance and apprehension, and then it wasn't that bad.

Then on day two I wasn't dreading it as much but wasn't looking forward to it.

During breakfast it wasn't that bad but I had a little itching to be done and when I was done, I was excited to listen to music.

At lunch I had a similar experience to the day before where I was a little annoyed at how much food I still had left and also noted that I was singing songs in my head and thinking about stuff.

And before dinner, I thought about what I was going to have and then felt disappointed that I had to eat it in silence. I even sighed as I sat down like a "here we go again" kind of thing.

Then, during breakfast on Day Three, I was feeling more okay about it and I also wrote this:

"Still ready for this to be over haha. Partly because it takes extra thought for me to not eat without distraction. Also, I'm not seeing a good reason I like for doing it. Not really noticing a difference. Only that I'm eating faster because distractions slow me down. And I want to be done haha."

So that was an interesting thing I noticed that's the opposite of what we think no distractions will do like I talked about before.

Shifting my focus from the food to the distraction actually helps to slow me down. And, enjoying the experience also slows me down. When I'm not enjoying it I go faster so I can be done with it.

Now, of course I could work on my thoughts to enjoy the experience of no distractions more but, I don't think that's work that I actually want to do. I don't see a problem with eating while distracted for me personally, because most of the time I'm still being mindful, and especially during a workday it helps to give me more of a pleasure boost that I want to have between periods of working.

So yeah, I could work on the thought I have that it's going to be boring, especially since I have evidence to show that it's not as boring as I think it is, but like I said, it's not work I want to do or think I need to do. I believe my energy and effort would be better used on other things and for now, I'm just going to continue enjoying my mindfully distracted eating.

But anyway, back to Day Three.

At lunch I was more neutral but slightly on the negative side. I also ate kinda fast. The food was really good, I wasn't splitting my pleasure focus, so I'm guessing I was just trying to have continuous pleasure with the food.

I also made a note that I feel pulled to do something while eating, which is different than feeling pulled to eat while doing things. Then I asked, "Is this a problem?" and I wrote, "I don't mind it."

So if it's not a problem for me, it's not a problem for me. I'm okay with wanting to have something else going on while I eat.

Then On Day Four I had lunch plans with a friend as I said and I had made these plans the day before without at all considering this experiment. I swear I didn't purposefully schedule it to get out of this, I honestly forgot about it in that moment when I suggested this day. This is actually what I wrote:

"Made lunch plans with a friend not thinking about this experiment. Feels like I'm cheating but, this is life. I wasn't gonna say no because of this and I didn't have another good time in the next week to have lunch with her. I thought about adding on more days but I'm not interested in that. I don't want to continue this. It's not for me. I also might not have my dinner alone tonight too – plans TBD.

Tomorrow is up in the air. Am I basically done? I hope so haha."

"Even thinking about lunch it'll be nice to eat with her but I miss MY meals times – reading and stuff. I like it."

First thing, something I talk about with my group members often when we have eating plans, it's okay to change your plans if you like your reasons. I loved my reason to take this break from the experiment and also, I never said I *had* to eat all my meals alone because I didn't want to miss out on something just because I planned to do this.

Things come up in life. People ask you to go to lunch. It's okay if you accept the invite and change your plan. Enjoy yourself.

Also, I can tell here that I'm getting really clear about this not being something I think is helpful for me but I also want to be clear that I wasn't having a huge issue before doing it while doing what I have been doing. So maybe for you you might find something like this to be helpful but for me, when it comes to my fuel meals, I just wasn't seeing a compelling reason for me to keep doing it. Except that I committed to these 5 days but other than that, beyond the 5 days, no.

Then the only other note I have for that day says, "Kinda became, 'it is what it is.' One more day. Ready to be done."

And then came day 5, and I wrote, "Thank freakin' god. I'm ready to be done with this."

During lunch I wrote that I would enjoy this so much more if I was watching something with it.

And as almost always, it wasn't that bad once I got into eating, I forgot about my resistance, and was enjoying thinking about stuff.

And that was it.

So what are my main takeaways from this?



The obvious one is that I don't think eating without distractions made a helpful difference for me personally but again, I also didn't have any huge issues going into it.

Also, it actually sometimes caused me to eat faster because I wanted to be done with it.

I did actually enjoy being with my thoughts while eating but, I spend a lot of time with myself in my head and sometimes it's nice to consume something in addition.

I will definitely continue to enjoy my joy food snacks when I'm alone without distractions but my meals, probably not. And that's not because I don't like it. As I wrote many times, when I was in it it wasn't that bad. But it's because I don't think I need to and I prefer not to.

Sometimes when I'm coaching my group members they'll present an eating habit that they have and when I ask if it's a problem, they can't really find a reason for why it is. They don't see a negative outcome when they do it. They only presented it because they'd previously heard they shouldn't eat that way or that it's a bad habit. And if that's that case, and they don't have a good reason to work on changing it, then they don't have to.

And that's what I found for myself here.

If you try this, you might have a different experience, you might have a different outcome and if you want to give it a go, go for it. It could be interesting to see what happens in your mind and what you learn about yourself.

But also know that you don't have to.

What matters the most is that you're being mindful of your food, your mind, and your body.

You don't have to be 100% of the time but, check in, see what's going on, and pay attention because your food, mind, and body matter just as much as whatever you're listening to, watching, reading, or doing.

Alright, that's what I have for you today and I'll leave you with one more quick reminder about the next Stop Binge Eating Program that will be opening for registration on September 14<sup>th</sup> of 2023 and you can go to [coachkir.com/group](https://coachkir.com/group) to get all the info, it's also the page where you will register, and before registration opens you'll be able to join the waitlist so you can get notified via email as soon as registration opens so you don't forget or miss out on the bonus I'll be offering for those who register in the first few days.

Alright, I'll talk to you next time, bye bye!