

# THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## Ep #322: Bingeing Because You're Anticipating Future Restrictions

Hello! Today I'm talking with you about bingeing because you're anticipating future restrictions.

Being overly restrictive with your eating is one of the main causes of binge eating.

It's not just any kind of restriction that causes binge eating because some restrictions can actually help you to eat how you truly want to be eating.

For example, when you choose to stop eating when you feel full, you're restricting your food intake but that's of course not a bad thing. It's what most people want to be doing so they can feel comfortable after eating.

Or you may choose to not eat 5 joy foods in one day because you won't feel good if you do. So you're restricting the amount of joy foods you're eating but you feel good about choosing that restriction because it's going to help you to feel your best.

When you're restricting in ways that you genuinely want to, that's not a bad thing.

It's when you're restricting in ways that you don't want to, ways that make you *feel* restricted, or deprived, or resentful that can cause a problem for you.

That's what I call being overly restrictive – when you're putting restrictions on yourself that you don't want, that don't feel good to you, and that you really don't need to.

When you do that, your resentment, deprivation, and feeling restricted can build up and at some point, you might react to those feelings by eating all that you have been restricting. You finally cave and do what you haven't been allowing, that you have been wanting to do.

When you want something and you keep telling yourself you can't have it, your desire for it will grow, your desire will become stronger and more urgent, and it will turn in to an urge for it.

And the result can be a binge.

So once you actually allow yourself to eat the food, you're not just joyfully, calmly enjoying it. You're eating it with a sense of urgency, like you need to have it now and you can't wait any longer, you might feel like you can't stop because your drive to eat it is so strong, you might be hyper focused on the food like you can't think of anything else, and you might eat a lot of it because that's how we react to deprivation. We go from zero to 100 once we finally get what we've been denied of.

But it's not always just what you've been restricting yourself of that can cause that urge to binge eat.

Preparing to restrict yourself in the future can also cause you to feel those urges.

Have you ever had a "last hurrah" before you start a diet?

You're anticipating that you're not going to be allowed to eat certain foods, so you eat them now. Maybe you eat several different foods in one sitting that you're anticipating not eating for a long time.

And maybe you're anticipating that you're going to be eating less in quantity so you want to enjoy bigger portions before you start eating less.

When you start telling yourself that a food, or many foods are going away tomorrow, for a very long time, you might feel an urgency to eat them now.

And not just one, but a lot because you want to eat as much of it as you can while you can.

Because you're anticipating restriction coming, restriction that you don't necessarily want but you think you have to do, you preemptively binge.

And that's important to assess for yourself. Do you really want to restrict how you're going to restrict? Or do you think you have to.

For most people, when they want to lose weight, they think they have to stop eating certain foods entirely, or significantly cut back on certain foods. That's how we've been taught to lose weight, right? You overhaul your diet.

But that's not how it has to be and in my opinion, it's not the best way to do it.

You could make small changes that you feel are doable and that you're totally on board with, cut back a little, again, only on things you want to cut back on, and make progress. It doesn't have to be a dramatic change, it can be so much smaller. You can make small changes over time.

And smaller changes will be so much more sustainable than big ones.

You've probably seen how unsustainable making big changes can be if you've ever completely changed how you're eating to lose weight and then haven't been able to keep it up and maintain what you lost.

And it's not just preparing for weight loss diets that can cause future restriction bingeing.

You might be gearing up to restrict certain foods because you think that those foods are causing you to binge.

Maybe you binged yesterday, so you're making your plan today for how you will prevent future bingeing, and your plan is to never eat those foods you binged on.

I used to do that a lot. I'd make a list of foods I wasn't allowing myself to buy anymore because those were foods I binged on. I thought that if I didn't buy them then I wouldn't binge.

And I was totally wrong by the way. I'd just binge on something else if I felt the urge. Or I'd ignore my list and buy those foods anyway.

But anyway, when you declare that you won't be buying or eating those foods again, you might, right then and there, start to crave them more.

I remember one time I told myself I wasn't going to eat sugar for a whole month and immediately my brain said, "But what about the chocolate coconut donuts?!"

Now, this was so interesting to me because I hadn't eaten one of those donuts in a long time. This was a particular donut from a particular donut shop and I hadn't even thought about them in a long time. But as soon as I put that restriction on myself, my brain freaked out a little. It worried about the donut that I was going to be deprived of.

What if I all of the sudden wanted it? And again, I hadn't even wanted it in such a long time.

But putting that restriction on myself brought up this concern.

And to me, that means this is not a useful restriction for me. It's not one that I wanted to have.

I don't exactly remember why I was choosing to cut out sugar for a month but I bet that whatever the reason was, it was unnecessary and obviously not what I really wanted.

If you're putting a restriction on yourself, it should feel good. It should feel easy. It shouldn't bring up fear, or concern, or sadness.

If it does, either let go of that restriction or, make it smaller.

Something I've found to be so much more helpful for myself is to just focus on today.

There have been times after holidays when I've overindulged that I've told myself I wasn't going to eat any joy foods for the next week and my body immediately tensed up. And I recognized this, I recognized how I was reacting to that restriction.

So I chose to just focus on today. I told myself that today I was going to take a break from joy foods because I had had a few the previous day.

This one day that I was going to take a break felt totally doable. This one day I was totally on board with because I really did want to take a break for the day. I knew that if I ate more that day then I probably wouldn't feel so great. I may have felt fine after that holiday but if I continued to eat that way, I probably wouldn't.

So this was what I genuinely wanted to do. And because it felt good and because it was what I really wanted, I didn't feel strong urges.

I may have felt some desire or a craving, because that can happen after eating a lot of sugar but, those were easy to manage because I just had to remind myself of what I really wanted and why.

So when you are choosing to put a restriction on yourself, notice how you feel. Notice what your body does. Notice what your mind does.

And if you start urging to get it all while you can, or to hurry up and eat this and this and this, or you're thinking this your opportunity, or you start thinking about all the foods you're not going to be eating anymore, you're being overly restrictive. You're being too restrictive.

Another example where this can show up is when you are alone and anticipate that you'll be around another person soon and you aren't going to allow yourself to eat certain foods when they're around.

You might be not allowing them because you're ashamed of eating them, you think they're bad foods so you feel guilty eating them, or you fear judgement from the other person.

Because you are telling yourself that you won't eat them when the other person or people are there, you feel that urgency to eat as much as you can now.

So, to avoid any kind of anticipated future restriction bingeing, give yourself permission to eat any food at any time.

Give yourself permission to eat any food you want to eat in front of that person. You're not doing anything wrong, you're just eating a food. And if they do judge you, that's on them. Again, you're not doing anything wrong.

Give yourself permission to eat any food you want to eat even if you've binged on it before. The food isn't the problem. You can binge on any food, not just those foods you've binged on. And restricting them can actually perpetuate bingeing on them.

Give yourself permission to eat any food you want to eat even if you're trying to manage your weight. Cutting out all the sugary, high carb, ultra-processed foods isn't required for weight loss.

Fun fact, I actually used to work at a weight loss center where we would provide 95% of what a person was going to eat and the food we sold them included high-carb foods, sugary foods, and ultra processed foods. They were just in smaller, lower calorie portions. And people would lose weight eating that way.

I've lost weight eating those kinds of foods and I know plenty of other people who have too.

Because I know a lot of you are concerned about your weight and even though I recommend again and again that you don't focus on weight loss until you've greatly decreased your binge eating, or stopped bingeing completely, I know some of you still worry about gaining weight.

So if that's you, I want to tell you that you will be so much better off giving yourself permission to eat the foods you want to eat rather than forbidding them.

It's better to eat them sometimes than to never eat them unless you're bingeing. You'll likely eat way more of them while you're bingeing than if you were just eating them sometimes outside of a binge. And, if you're eating them regularly, you'll be less likely to feel urges to binge on them.

And to remind you of what I mean when I say that you give yourself permission, what I'm saying is that everything is allowed. Everything is permitted.

But that doesn't mean that you just eat anything and everything whenever you feel like it or just eat whatever comes into your mind. If you do that, coming from a binge eating background, you'll probably eat way too much and feel awful.

What it does mean is that you don't say no to yourself and not eat certain foods because you think you can't or that you need to not or have to not eat them. You say no if you aren't in the mood for that food. Or you say no because you're taking care of your body and are choosing to not stuff it to the brim.

You have permission and now you get to choose yes or no. It's not an automatic no because you're not giving yourself permission to choose. It's your choice.

And when you're making your choice, you're going to take your body into consideration. You're not just doing what you want to do all the time, you're also going to consider your body and how it will feel when you're making your decision.

Only thinking about yourself is something that leads to bingeing. So think about your body too and care about it.

Because if you don't care about your body before you eat, and you just eat too much without consideration of how your body will feel, you'll definitely care about how your body feels after when you're so uncomfortable in it because it's so full.

So, avoid future restriction bingeing by only choosing to restrict in ways you genuinely want to.

Don't cut out things you don't want to cut out. You don't need to cut them out.

You can if you want to and if you want to know whether or not you do want the restriction you're putting on yourself, notice what your mind and body do when you tell yourself you're going to do it.

If your body tenses up, and if you start thinking about those foods more, and if you feel an urgency to eat what you're going to restrict, then you're being overly restrictive.

And I'm telling you, if you're not being overly restrictive, and if you pause to take a moment and check in with yourself to see what you really want and don't want, you're going to see that you're not going to want everything all of the time.

There are for sure times when I don't want foods that I've wanted at other times.

And I'll choose to take a break from a certain food and it feels good to me in my body and mind.

For example, say I ate ice cream every day for a week, or more than a week. I might be totally okay with not buying it the next time I go grocery shopping. I'm not really craving it anymore, I believe I've had enough, and what I ate was satisfying. So I'm choosing to not buy it because I want to not buy it, and not buying it this time is not a problem. I have permission to buy it again but I'm choosing not to.

But if I still did want ice cream and I told myself I'm not going to buy it again for awhile because I already ate too much, I can't keep eating it, I have to stop, and I'm basically judging myself and forcing myself to not eat anymore, that's when it can become a problem and be too restrictive. I'd feel deprived before I even finished the ice cream I have....so I might just eat it all now, in one sitting, while I can, while it's still here.

It's going to be so much better for me if I give myself the choice, if I give myself the permission to buy more. I'm allowed and I get to decide what I want to do.

Do the same for yourself. Give yourself the permission. You're allowed to have it if you want to. Know that.

And then you decide what you want and don't want.

Don't force yourself to do anything. It will likely backfire.

Either you will immediately get that urge once you anticipate future restriction or you'll experience what I talked about at the start of the episode where you hold off for awhile and then the urge grows and grows as the deprivation, resentment, and restricted feelings grow.

No food is going away.

Tomorrow, and every day after that, you're allowed to eat anything you want to eat.

Period.

That is all, bye bye.