

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #348: How You Know When, What, and How Much to Eat

Hello! In today's episode, I'm talking about how you know when, how much, and what to eat.

And I want to begin by asking you, how do you know when it's time for you to eat? And how do you determine how much you should eat? And how do you determine what you will eat?

Really take a moment to think about that.

For a long time, I would answer those questions by saying something about time, calories, and serving sizes.

That's how I would determine when, what, and how much most of the time.

I thought that there was a right amount of time to wait between meals and snacks.

I thought that there was a right amount of calories to eat and not just in a day but at each meal and each snack.

I thought that there were right foods to eat based on how many calories they contained.

I thought that serving sizes on packages were the right amount to eat.

And this was something that started for me in college when I successfully lost a significant amount of weight for the first time ever.

I did it by spacing out my meals in a certain way and counting calories. And when I would eat for pleasure, I would always look at what the package said was a serving size.

Before that, I don't think I ever thought about those things. I think before then I would just eat when I wanted to or when it was time to, like at scheduled lunch time or dinner time or before school.

So that's how it was for me for a long time.

Calories, time, and serving sizes.

And do you know what was missing there?

My body's signals and my wants.

Most of the time, I was using external things to decide when to eat and how much to eat.

And I trusted those external things more than my body and my mind.

I didn't think my desires were reliable. I didn't think my body was reliable.

I thought that if I just listened to my body then I would overeat and gain weight.

Or if I was trying to lose weight, which I was most of the time, then I wouldn't lose weight.

Basically, I thought I knew what my body needed better than my body did.

So, I spent time planning my meals around calorie amounts, and spent time inputting calories into an app, and spent time doing math in my head when I wasn't able to add it up in the app.

And I didn't like it. At first I did because I felt in control. But, over time, I got so tired of doing it.

I was doing it not because I wanted to but, because I felt obligated.

I thought I had to do it to lose weight. Or to not gain weight.

So basically, I was like a slave to calorie counting, adding and inputting even though it was not at all how I wanted to be using my time.

And not only was it something I didn't want to do most of the time, it also sometimes used to stop me from eating when I was actually, physically hungry.

The same thing happened with my time rules.

I would feel physically hungry but, I wouldn't allow myself to eat because it wasn't time yet, it hadn't been long enough between meals, or because if I did then I worried I'd end up eating too many calories for the day.

And from there, urges and all or nothing thinking would come up.

Sometimes I'd wait too long and feel ravenous and didn't know how to manage that so I'd end up overeating or bingeing.

Sometimes I would eat, but then decide that I wouldn't be able to stay within my calorie budget for the day and just keep eating, ending up overeating, or bingeing.

I thought that eating according to time and calories would keep me in control, eating the correct amount at the correct times but that wasn't always the case.

I still binged. I still overate and felt very uncomfortable after eating sometimes.

And thinking that serving sizes were the correct amount didn't always help either.

Sometimes I wanted more and I would restrict myself from having more because I thought it was too much, just because the package said so, and then feel deprived.

Sometimes I'd eat more than the serving size and fall into all or nothing thinking over that too. I'd think that I messed up and ate too much so I might as well just keep eating and then eat perfectly the next day.

Now, I want to say that eating according to calories, time, or serving sizes isn't wrong or bad.

It's not.

But if you are making all, or most of your eating decisions based on external things such as those, then that means that you're ignoring what's going on internally in your body and in your mind.

And if you ignore your body's needs and your wants, you will likely experience urges to overeat or binge.

Your brain might urge you to eat when your body is needing fuel if you've been ignoring your body's request for fuel.

Your brain might urge you to eat what you've been denying yourself of.

And the more you're not eating according to your body's signals and the more you're denying yourself of what you want and amounts you want, the more intense your urges will be, and therefore the more you will feel driven to eat.

So the external factors can't be the only things you're considering when you're deciding when and how much to eat.

Again, I'm not saying that you should never consider them. It's okay if you do. I do.

There are times when I think I'm hungry but when I consider how long it's been since I last ate, and it's only been like an hour or two since I ate my last meal and I felt full after eating, I can assume that it's not actually physical hunger, I'm just wanting to eat for some reason.

There are times when I'm not very hungry but I'll consider what time I'll be able to eat again and I might choose to eat a meal now knowing that I won't be able to eat again for a few hours and I don't want to force myself to be hungry and get too hungry.

There are times when I'll look at calories when I'm deciding how much of a particular food I'm going to cook for myself or when I'm portioning my plate.

There are times when I'll be at a restaurant that has calories on their menu and I'll choose to not order something that is really high in calories.

There are times when I do eat the recommended serving size.

But, I'm not exclusively only using those factors to decide.

I'm not going to eat just because it's been x number of hours and I think I should be hungry. If I'm not hungry, I'm not hungry. My body isn't asking me for fuel. So most of the time I'll wait until I feel hungry.

I'm not going to hold myself back from eating when I recognize that I am truly physically hungry because I've eaten x number of calories or it's only been x number of hours since I last ate.

I'm not going to force myself to eat less of a joy food when I'm wanting more, and that amount I'm wanting isn't likely going to negatively affect how I feel.

I'm going to consider my body and what I want.

If I feel physical hunger, I will eat.

If I'm not feeling full, I will eat more.

If I want more than the serving size, I will eat more, and I will consider how I'll feel physically when deciding how much I'll eat.

And what I recommend to you is that you consider your body and your wants more than the external factors.

Your body will tell you when it needs food and when it wants you to stop eating.

Now, I know for a lot of you you are very disconnected from this *because* you've been eating according to external factors for so long and have stopped paying such close attention to your body.

So you don't even realize you're feeling hungry or feeling full until you're very hungry or very full. You don't notice it until it is glaringly obvious because it's become uncomfortable to the point where you simply can't ignore it.

You might actually think your body doesn't even tell you when it's moderately hungry or comfortably full. But it does. You're probably just not looking for it because you're more focused on external things. You're not actually paying attention to what your body is telling you.

So start paying more attention. Look for the signals.

And also know that you may think you should be hungry at certain times or full after eating a certain amount but, you might be wrong. Maybe your hunger and fullness signals are working just fine but you think they're off because you think that you should be hungry after x number of hours or after eating x amount of food.

Give your body a chance to communicate with its signals what it really needs instead of you deciding what it needs or what should be happening.

And I also know that for a lot of you you are very disconnected from what you want when it comes to both fuel and joy eating and are disconnected from how much you want when it comes to joy eating that has nothing to do with hunger and fullness, you're just eating for enjoyment.

You don't trust yourself to make the right decisions.

And this is most likely because you've been so caught up in diets and what you think you need to do to lose weight.

For so long, you've been telling yourself that you shouldn't eat what you want, that the amount of joy food you want is too much, basically that what you want is wrong because it's more than the serving size or is a food you've been told is bad, or a food that will cause you to gain weight or a food that will stop you from losing weight.

So you think that your wants aren't valid and are wrong. So you shouldn't give yourself what you want.

And then, the longer you deny yourself, the more your desire grows, the desire becomes stronger, it becomes urgent, and now you're urging for what you haven't been allowing yourself to have.

Then, you hear yourself wanting excessive amounts of certain foods, and foods you don't even love, and you think that that is your true want.

But it's not.

That's your want that is caused by excessive restriction and deprivation.

When you aren't judging yourself for what you want and how much you want, and when you stop denying yourself again and again, you'll finally see what your true wants are.

On one of the group coaching calls in my group program, I was talking with someone who feels urges to binge on ice cream, as many people do. They said they sometimes want to eat the entire container.

They see themselves wanting the entire container and think they can't trust their wants, because their wants are excessive.

But then, as *they* never do, I gave them permission to eat the entire container. I told them to eat the entire container if they want to.

And they immediately said they don't want to.

When they were given permission, and they weren't feeling restricted, their true wants for how much they want popped into their head.

When you aren't overly restricting yourself, you can much more easily access your true wants, which really are to eat in moderation so you don't feel awful afterward.

When you *are* overly restricting yourself, you *think* you want excessive amounts.

This is why it's so important to let go of the rules and the shouldn't's and should's and can't's and denying yourself.

That stuff makes you think you want more than you really do.

So when you let go of them, you can actually see what you really want.

And when you give yourself what you really want, you won't feel such strong urges for it. There is no deprivation or scarcity or denial so the desire doesn't build.

You'll be much more relaxed about it. Your desire will be at a quote "normal" level.

So let go of the diet rules. Give yourself permission to eat what you want. That's how you can decrease your desire to eat in excess.

So, instead of focusing mainly on external factors, focus more on your internal factors.

Pay attention to your body and learn what it feels like to experience it's signals and their different intensities.

Pay attention to your wants and allow yourself to eat what you want and how much you want.

That's how you can create more satisfaction both physically and mentally which makes it easier for you to move on and stop eating.

Now, there's one last thing I want to talk about.

You might think it's easier to eat according to the external factors than it is to eat according to your body and your wants.

You might think it's easier to not overeat.

But, I want to remind you of what I talked about earlier in this episode when I was mostly using external factors when making eating decisions.

It didn't always turn out so well for me. And I know I'm not the only one.

Using those external factors is not a guarantee that you won't overeat or binge.

Because, you will still have thoughts.

You can use those and still think that you want to eat more, or think that you shouldn't eat more, or think you've ruined the day or have blown it or have screwed it up so you might as well keep eating, or think that you don't care about those factors and just keep eating anyway.

I binged for years while eating mostly according to time, calories, and serving sizes. They didn't stop me from eating more.

So whether you choose to eat according to external or internal factors, thought work still needs to be done.

Decisions still need to be made by you.

You need to decide to stop at the one serving, and decide to stop at x number of calories, and decide when is the right time to eat.

And if you choose to go by more of the internal factors, you're deciding to wait for hunger, and deciding to eat when you feel hungry, deciding to stop when you feel full, deciding to eat what you're in the mood for, deciding what you think will be a satisfying amount of joy food.

Decisions are happening either way.

So just know that following the external factors isn't really the easier way out.

It will still require thought work, decisions, focus, and effort.

So knowing this, you get to decide what it is you want to be focusing on, what you want to be your determining factors, and what you want to put effort into.

I personally didn't want to be putting as much focus as I was into counting, adding, inputting into an app, keeping track of time, and also essentially denying my wants, hunger, and fullness.

I much prefer to use my body and my mind as the main deciding factors.

Now, I'm not saying you have to do that too. You are allowed to do whatever you want to do.

If you love counting calories or points or macros, if eating according to the clock works for you and you like doing it that way, if you like using serving sizes to decide how much you eat, if you like to weigh and measure your food, or whatever external things, then do it. Do what you want, what works for you, and what you like to do.

But, in this episode I just wanted to present another option to you in case you don't want to be doing the things you've been doing, and if you do want to rely more on yourself and your body to make decisions.

And lastly, and this is very important, if you do choose to use the internal factors more, and you haven't in a very long time, be patient with yourself. Give yourself grace. You're re-learning. It can take time. At first you will not be very good at it but that's okay. With practice, you will get better.

So don't expect perfection. You're not supposed to be perfect at anything eating related. Allow imperfection.

And please remember what I said earlier, that you don't have to only choose internal or external. I don't. You can find a balance that works for you.

Alright, so I hope this has helped you to decide how you want to be deciding when, what, and how much to eat. It's totally up to you.

And that is all. I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye.