

# **THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST**

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## Ep #357: If You Binge AFTER a Stressful Time

Hi! I would bet that most of you are familiar with stress eating, when you eat while feeling stressed.

But what about *after*-stress eating?

Here's what I'm talking about.

You go through a stressful time but, you don't overeat or binge at all while you feel stressed.

But then, once it's over, that's when the overeating or bingeing happens.

It can be really confusing to experience this because we're so used to the idea of stress eating, and stress eating makes a lot of sense. You stress eat to try and distract from the stress or to calm, to comfort, or soothe yourself when feeling stressed.

But, if you're not doing that, and you make it through the stress without eating, why would you do it after?

That's what I'm going to talk with you about today.

I've coached several of my group members on this topic and I've seen three main things come up each time.

They're putting off overeating or binge eating because they simply don't have the time, they're rewarding themselves with a lot of food after the stressful time, or they're eating to get away from the stress quickly.

So maybe you *want* to stress eat. Maybe you're thinking about it while you're going through the stress but, you're so busy, you have so much to do, maybe you barely even have time to eat meals because you're rushing from thing to thing.

And, if you are skipping meals, it would make sense that once you do have time, that your brain will urge you to eat a lot to make up for all the fuel it missed out on while you were stressed.

But if skipping meals isn't so much the issue and it's just about wanting to eat to calm yourself down, once you're not so busy anymore and the stressful time is over, now you have the chance to do what you've been thinking about doing. It's kinda like you've delayed your stress eating.

I remember experiencing that with short bursts of stress while working as a server in restaurants. I was busy working, I didn't have time to take a quick break and snack, but I sure did want to. I kept thinking about it. So when I finally had the time, after the rush was over, I ate all the things I'd been thinking about eating.

And sometimes I would also have that "I deserve it" attitude like, I just did such a stressful thing, so I deserve a reward and of course I chose food as my reward because that was my favorite reward.

That's the second reason I mentioned. You eat a bunch of food as a reward after going through the stressful time.

And then there's eating to calm, soothe, or comfort yourself quickly after feeling stressed.

That's the reason I see come up most often.

You've been feeling stressed, maybe even for days, or longer, and finally, whatever it was that you were going through is over.

And you want to get away from the stress as quickly as possible.

You want to get quick relief and calm, and to stop thinking about whatever it was that was going on.

And you think that eating food will get the job done.

Eating food will provide you with quick relaxation, quick calming, quick soothing. It's all about what will give you the fastest relief from the stress.

Basically, you're trying to regulate your emotions as quickly as possible.

And yeah, eating food will help you to do that, maybe because it's a distraction from the stressful times or maybe because of the affect it has on your neurotransmitters and hormones, creating that "feel good" feeling in your brain.

Now, it's not always bad if you do that.

Like with most things, if you do them in moderation, it's fine.

If you eat a moderate amount of food after feeling stressed, and you don't experience any negative effects, it's not a problem.

But if it's excessive, that's when you might then experience physical discomfort or uncomfortable emotions, which is not at all what you were trying to create by eating, and for some of you, you might then start stressing about all that you ate, so you bring yourself back to stress.

And if you're someone who has a hard time eating only a moderate amount, especially when you're so eager to feel more relaxed, and when you think that eating is not only the way to relax but to stay relaxed, then it's likely you'll fall into eating excessively.

So if you don't want to be eating excessively after periods of stress, here's what you can do.

One, make sure you're prioritizing eating adequate meals. And I want to emphasize the "adequate" part. Don't fall into all or nothing where it's either a super healthy meal or nothing. Some fuel is better than no fuel. Your body and brain will appreciate it. When you feel hungry, do what you can, eat when and where you can. Just do your best to eat until you're full. And if it's not the most mentally satisfying meal, remind yourself that this is more about fuel and it's okay if not every meal is super satisfying. Just do your best to make it physically satisfying so you're not running on fumes.

Two, prioritize rest and pleasure during periods of stress, even if only for short periods of time. One minute of focused deep breathing is better than not doing anything calming. A five minute walk is better than no movement at all. A phone call with a friend while you're doing chores is better than no enjoyable connection at all.

Instead of telling yourself you don't have time, do your best to make time. Don't be all or nothing about it. Something is better than nothing. Even if you don't get all the way to calm, any change in how you're feeling can help.

Doing this can help you to not be planning for future relaxation and pleasure with food because you're getting bits of it now, rather than waiting.

Three, reward yourself with things that will be relaxing or pleasurable, whichever you're looking for, that aren't going to possibly cause you to feel worse afterward.

You can reward yourself with some alone time, reading a book you're enjoying or have been looking forward to, a massage, a walk in your favorite place or somewhere new, a yoga class, spending time with a friend, engaging in your favorite hobby, watching your favorite show, there are so many options beyond eating a lot of food.

And four, allow yourself to relax and calm down naturally.

You don't have to rush it. It will happen, and probably more quickly than you think it will.

It may not happen as quickly as when you're eating food but, it actually might not take *that* much longer.

So don't give up on your brain and body. They want to be calm and relaxed as much as you do.

Give yourself the chance to transition.

This remind me of all the times when I've felt tired during the day and when I lay down to take a nap, my head is buzzing, I have all these thoughts, and I question whether or not I'll be able to fall asleep, even though I'm so tired.

But I don't give up. That's the key. I don't quit on trying to nap and I don't eat food to help me nap. I allow myself to lay there, eyes closed, and sometimes I count. I use counting as a form of mediation to help me calm my thoughts for sleep. The counting becomes my focus and my anchor so if my mind wanders to other thoughts, I bring myself back to the counting. I might also just focus on my breath in the same way. And at some point, I notice that I'm no longer feeling the buzzing or having so many thoughts. And then I'm relaxed, and I fall asleep.

It's very similar when you're just trying to decompress from stress.

You can put your focus on something else, whether it's a book or the tv or a person.

But say that you're out of the stressful situation and are having a hard time not thinking about it anymore.

That's when I'd recommend you either talk about it or write about it.

So much calmness and relief can come just from getting your thoughts out of your head.

And through talking or writing you can also work on resolving your stressful thoughts.

You can help yourself get to a place where you're letting it be over, letting yourself move on from it, and letting it be what it was.

You can calm down your thoughts and when you do that, your feelings, your body, your brain will calm down too.

So you can let it happen naturally as you switch gears into a relaxing activity.

You can help assist it happening by writing or talking.

You will get there. Be patient.

You can create calm without eating even one bite of food.

So give these tips a try.

You have everything you need to calm down after periods of stress. You don't need food.

You can find rewards that will leaving you feel good, not uncomfortable.

And you can do your best to make time for adequate meals, rest, and pleasure while you're in stressful times.

Bingeing doesn't have to be the norm for you after stressful times.

Know what the reason is for why you usually do it and work on what I talked about today to prevent it from happening.

You can do it.

Alright, allow yourself to transition into relaxation rather than forcing it, and I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye.