

# **THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST**

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## **Ep #371: Punishing Yourself by Binge Eating**

Hi! When you reflect on and analyze why you binge eat, do you ever wonder if it's a form of self-punishment?

Many people I've worked with have wondered that.

Because when you look at what's happening, and you see yourself doing something that you ultimately don't want to be doing, and it's something that makes you feel so physically bad, and you're doing it to yourself, it makes sense to think that you're doing it to punish yourself.

But most of the time, that's not actually what's happening.

You're not doing it on purpose to punish yourself. It's not intentional punishment. It's really just you giving in to an urge that was created by either you being too restrictive with your eating or you not being willing to feel your emotions.

However, some people do intentionally punish themselves for eating what they think is a "bad" food, or for overeating, or for bingeing. But, it's not usually just them thinking, "I deserve to be punished so I'm going to eat all this food as a punishment."

When we break it down, it usually looks more like this:

They did something, they made a mistake.

Then they are hard on themselves, beating themselves up mentally, being really mean to themselves.

So then they feel bad, maybe ashamed, angry, disappointed, guilty, some feeling like that.

And then, to avoid feeling those feelings, they eat.

So the eating isn't necessarily the punishment. It's really a response to the emotions they're feeling. The eating is a way to avoid feeling the feelings that they've created for themselves by being too hard on themselves.

What's really happening, is that they're punishing themselves with their words, making themselves feel worse about what they did.

Now, there might also be times when people are thinking they deserve to feel worse, and then they choose to eat more to feel worse. But even that is them being hard on themselves and being mean to themselves, telling themselves they deserve to feel worse because of what they did, and they're making themselves feel worse before they even eat anything, just by what they're telling themselves.

Yes eating all that food, or eating more food, will make you feel physically worse but, the first thing that feels worse, is the emotions that you feel when you punish yourself with words.

That's what I want to focus on here in this episode – your punishing words.

How you treat yourself when you make a mistake, when you binge when you overeat, when you do something you regret or wish you hadn't, when you think you did something wrong.

Because really, if you weren't punishing yourself with your words, you wouldn't cause the chain reaction of feeling worse emotionally and then eating to numb, escape, or avoid those emotions.

So, when you make a mistake, or do something you regret or wish you hadn't, or think you did something wrong, whether it's eating related or not, why do you think you deserve to be punished? Why do you want to punish yourself by beating yourself up mentally?

You might think that's just how it should be. You might think it's the right way to respond. But is it helping you to change?

Because that's what you really want, isn't it?

And it's likely that you punishing yourself isn't helping you change, or helping you in any way.

It's just making you feel bad.

And it's also likely that you then will keep reminding yourself of what you did, and keep continuing the punishment for hours, days, months, even years.

You keep thinking about it and keep beating yourself up about it and keep punishing yourself for it.

But when does it end? How much punishment is enough?

Now, going back to thinking you deserve to be punished, if you think that, I understand where you're coming from.

But here's how I think about it.

Whatever consequence you experienced from your mistake, your decision, whatever you did, that can be enough.

You don't have to add punishment beyond that.

Have you ever held back from saying something to someone when you're mad at them because of what they did, because you know they already feel bad and you don't feel the need to say something that will probably make them feel worse?

That's what I'm talking about.

Say you binged. You already feel awful from eating that much food. You don't need to make yourself feel worse by saying mean things to yourself.

Say you did something that resulted in you losing a friend. You already feel awful about the end of the friendship, you don't need to make yourself feel worse by beating yourself up about what you did.

You don't deserve more punishment on top of what you're already naturally experiencing.

One of my group members once said she needs to pay for what she did.

And I told her that she already did.

And her acknowledging that allowed her to stop what could have possibly been endless punishment for decades for a mistake, or multiple mistakes she made years ago.

And that's when the changes started to happen. It's when she forgave herself, had compassion for herself, and understood herself that she was able to move forward.

All that mental punishment was actually holding her back for so long.

I had another group member who talked about punishment as being righteous. Like I was talking about before, she thought that punishment was the right thing to do.

But what if self-forgiveness, compassion, and understanding is actually the righteous thing? The right thing to do?

You get to decide what you think is the right way but, as you're deciding, think about what you want the outcome to be.

Do you want to keep bringing yourself down? Or, do you want to facilitate change?

If you're wanting to facilitate change, ask yourself, honestly, if your previous punishments have done that?

And if they have, why did they? What was it that facilitated the change?

And that last question is important because I'm guessing that it wasn't really the added punishment that did it. It's more likely that there was a later thought, different self-talk, that caused you to feel determined, encouraged, or driven.

And really, you could just skip the part where you add punishment and just get to the determination, encouragement, and drive.

I was talking with someone who was arguing with me about what I teach when it comes to body neutrality and body acceptance.

They were saying that being harsh with themselves actually does help them to change how they're eating so they can change their body.

But when we really broke it down, them being harsh with themselves made them feel so bad, and they did nothing while that was happening, and then at some point, they decided they're going to make a change.

It wasn't the harshness, it was the decision to change.

And the harshness didn't have to be part of it.

You can acknowledge that you're unhappy with something and decide to change without beating yourself up for an extended time.

The same goes for any kind of mental punishment you may put on yourself after bingeing, or at any other time.

So, whatever you experience naturally after making a mistake is enough.

You don't need to add to it.

It's not the inherent right way to respond.

You get to decide how you want to respond.

And if you want my opinion, I suggest you get curious about why you did what you did.

What were you thinking? What were you trying to do? Why did you think it was right at the time?

Get some understanding of yourself because not only can that highlight what you can work on to prevent that mistake again and help you to do better moving forward but, it can also feel like a weight lifting off your shoulders or your chest, where ever you feel it.

You can see that you're not a bad person, or a failure, or weak, or a loser, or whatever other word you're punishing yourself with. You can see that you're just a person who was trying to do what they thought was best, or right, for themselves or someone else, and you didn't know at the time that it wasn't the best or right way. And that's okay, you can forgive yourself for not knowing everything and not knowing the future or simply not thinking about it. It happens.

You can get curious and then you can forgive. You deserve forgiveness. You deserve the chance to change.

Give yourself that chance.

Alright, so I hope today's episode has given you some insight into self-punishment, how it relates to eating, and what option you want to choose when you make a mistake, including when you binge or overeat.

You decide what's right for you. Think it all the way through to make your decision.

Okay, that's all for today, I'll talk to you next time, bye bye.