

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #380: If The Food Isn't The Problem, What Is? And How Do You Solve It?

Hello! Registration for the next round of The Stop Binge Eating Program will be opening in just one month, on December 11th of 2025.

If you join this round, you'll be starting off the new year with a plan, structure, accountability, guidance, and help. And because you'll be committed to the program, you are not going to just fall off and quit on yourself after a month or two, like too many people do when they start New Year Resolutions and start working on goals at the beginning of the year. You are going to keep going all the way until you reach your goal and stop binge eating.

And I'm going to be with you every step of the way, guiding you, answering your questions, sharing new perspectives and ideas, and helping you to finally do what you've been trying to do for years.

So if you're ready to make this coming year the year that you stop binge eating, then get on the waitlist now so you can be notified as soon as registration opens on December 11th. Go to coachkir.com/group to get on it and if you have any questions that aren't answered on that webpage, you can email them to info@coachkir.com.

Alright, now let's talk about, the problem.

When you're struggling with binge eating, you see yourself eating a lot of food.

You might see yourself eat a lot of the same foods when you're bingeing, or similar foods.

When you're feeling an urge to binge, you might think of the same kinds of foods each time.

When you eat certain foods, you have a hard time stopping eating them.

And also, there are certain foods that you've never binged on, never or rarely have a hard time stopping eating, and don't urge for.

When you're seeing these kinds of patterns, it makes sense that you'd view the particular foods that you binge on as the problem.

Which is why so many people cut out, make off limits, or forbid those certain foods to help them not binge.

That's exactly what I did for so many years.

When I would get fed up with myself, I would sit down and make a list of foods that I wouldn't allow myself to buy. I'd list the foods I'd binged on recently, and maybe add to the list some classic binge foods of mine too. That was my main strategy.

I thought that if I didn't eat those foods then I wouldn't binge.

But unfortunately, that wasn't true.

I still binged when I wasn't buying those foods because when I felt an urge to binge, I'd binge on other foods that weren't on the list.

Then I'd probably add the foods I'd binged on to the list but really, that wasn't going to stop me from bingeing again. I could end up making a list of 100 foods to not buy and *still* binge.

Because, when I was feeling that urge to binge, or the urge to keep eating way past full, I would find something to eat. And it might have even been something that was considered healthy.

And, let's be real, many times when I was feeling the urge, I didn't care about my list anymore. I'd say "screw the list" and go buy the food.

That list didn't stop me from bingeing nor did it actually stop me from buying the food.

Because when the urge was there, I was bingeing. I wouldn't let anything stop me from bingeing.

Clearly trying to manipulate the food wasn't working, it wasn't the solution. So that meant that the food wasn't the problem.

If the food was the problem, then I would have eliminated it and the bingeing would have stopped.

But that's not what happened.

And even though it never worked, I kept doing it because I didn't know what else to do.

I thought I just needed to try harder but what I really needed to do was to try something different.

And I didn't even know what to do that was different until I learned what the real problem was.

You can't come up with a relevant solution if you don't know what the problem is so as long as I thought the food was the problem, I was never going to find the real solution.

So it is so important that you understand what the real problem is here.

It's not the food, so you don't need to try and control it or manipulate it or eliminate it.

But what the real problem is, isn't one simple answer. So you'll need to explore your habits, thoughts, and behaviors to understand what the problem is for you.

Obviously though, I'm going to give you a starting point. I'm not just going to say, "go figure it out for yourself."

And I'll start with two of the most common ones, that are actually likely intertwined, which is why I'll talk about them together.

They are being too restrictive with your food and having negative body image.

Being too restrictive with your food can cause you to feel urges to binge eat and for most people, the reason they are so restrictive is because they are trying to lose weight and change their body. Or, they're afraid of gaining weight because they have a negative view of themselves and their body at a larger size.

So they could think negatively about their body as it is or think negatively of their body at a size larger than it is now. So, they're desperately trying to be thinner or to stay as they are.

And in order to do that, they think they need to not eat certain foods or to eat less than their body is asking them to via the body's hunger and fullness signals.

Hunger gets ignored or foods are forbidden. And at some point, the brain will make sure the hunger can't be ignored. It will make the hunger strong, it will urge them to eat a lot to make up for the lack of fuel it's been getting and also to prevent future starvation. The brain is concerned about survival first and foremost and it is going to do what it can to make sure it's getting fueled properly.

Or, if foods are forbidden, at some point, they're going to get tired of being denied of what they want, they're going to get tired of feeling deprived, restricted, and maybe even resentful. And their desire for what they haven't been allowing themselves to eat will build and build, and they'll want and think about it more. The desire will become strong and urgent, it will become an urge.

But not only has that restriction caused an urge, if they're giving in to that urge, and are finally allowing themselves to eat those foods they haven't been allowing, and they're telling themselves that it's just this one time and they're not going to allow them again, they'll also feel an urge to eat a lot because they want to eat as much as they can while they can, while they're allowing it. They want to get it all in before it goes away again.

And then what happens? The binge affects their weight. So they panic because they're afraid of gaining. They're afraid of what it will mean about them if they gain, they're afraid of how their body will be perceived not only by other people but mostly by themselves.

So they go back to being overly restrictive again and the cycle repeats.

The excessive restriction causes urges to binge and the fear of weight gain, or the fear of not losing weight and staying the size they are causes the excessive restriction.

So if that's the problem for you, the excessive restriction needs to stop. But in order to be willing to do that, it's likely that you're going to need to do some work on body image and what you make weight gain mean about you and your body, and what you think about your body as it is now. Because if you're terrified of gaining weight or not losing weight, you're probably not going to be willing to be less restrictive with your food, especially if you think that having those restrictions is the only way to lose weight or that if you don't have them then you will gain.

And I get why you might think that way. I used to think that way too. I used to also think that if I didn't count calories then I would gain.

And we think this way because it's what we've been taught by diet culture but also, we may have seen it happen to us.

We've seen ourselves be more permissive with what we eat and then we overeat or binge and we gain weight or don't lose.

But, when you're being permissive, is it after a period of not allowing for a long time? Because if it is, then of course you're going to binge because you have a build up of deprivation and desire.

And when you're being permissive, is it temporary because you're not going to be permissive tomorrow, or any day in the near future? Then of course you're going to want to eat a lot of it now while you can.

And when you're being permissive and are eating the food, are you telling yourself that you shouldn't be eating it, that it's bad, or that you're doing something wrong? Then you're not really being permissive. You are with your actions but not in your mind, and in your mind is where it counts the most.

What I'm talking about is unconditional permission 100% of the time. Not going back and forth between allowing and not allowing and not eating it but telling yourself that you shouldn't.

It's being in allowance and permission all the time and never telling yourself that you're doing something wrong or bad when you eat certain foods.

So you may have seen yourself binge or overeat when giving yourself permission to eat certain foods but, you might not be being permissive enough.

So you're going to do it differently this time.

You can be permissive and less restrictive and not binge and not gain and actually lose.

Now, I'm not going to get into all that here because this is not a weight loss podcast, it's a stop binge eating podcast. And just so you know, when people near the end of my program, we do talk about that when they're ready.

But here, I'm going to say that forbidding foods and constantly denying yourself of what you want and ignoring hunger is not the only way to manage your weight and is definitely not the best way. But it is a good way to keep your urges to binge coming. So you might think that doing it is helping you but if you really look at the whole story, it might help you for a bit but then it backfires and you likely binge and gain weight back.

It is so important that you recognize that being so restrictive isn't actually helping you the way you might think it is.

Now, as I was saying before, your fear of gaining or not losing can keep you in excessively restricting.

So let's talk about why that fear is there.

It's because of what you make it mean.

So many people have told me that if they gain weight then they are a failure. That's something they're afraid of being.

Because they associate gaining weight with failing, they're afraid of gaining weight.

People might also make other associations.

If they gain weight it means they're lazy, they're out of control, they're going to be unattractive, so many negative connotations.

They might also be thinking that way about their body now if it's not as small as they want it to be, which is why they fear staying at this weight because if they stay here, they make it mean they're a failure, lazy, out of control, unattractive, or something else like that.

And this is all very likely tied to the views of our society. As a society, these are the associations linked to weight gain and bigger bodies. So it makes sense that they would think that way.

If this is how you're thinking, it needs to change. You don't have to think the same way society does. And you can change how you're thinking because those associations are not facts.

If you gain weight, or have a bigger body, you are not factually a failure, lazy, out of control, or unattractive.

You are a person in this size body.

If you gain weight, it means you ate more food than your body required for fuel.

That's all it has to be. You don't have to be mean to yourself about it, attack yourself for it, or make it into a morality thing.

You can simply acknowledge the facts.

And if you do gain weight, you can acknowledge why it happened, but again, without blaming yourself or being hard on yourself.

For example, you went through a tough emotional time and didn't know how to handle your emotions so you ate too much food.

If that's what happened, have compassion for yourself. You didn't know what else to do. Don't hate on yourself for trying to help yourself through a tough time and for doing the only thing you knew to do to help yourself. And don't hate on your body for responding how it did to the excess food.

When you stop making weight gain and your body as it is mean things they don't factually mean, you won't be so afraid of them. You won't be as afraid of gaining and you won't be so afraid of staying the same.

You'll be calmer and more relaxed. And you'll be more open to the idea of not being so restrictive with your food.

The fear pushes you toward being overly restrictive, which causes urges to binge.

So let's settle that fear so you can ease up on the restrictions, stop feeling those urges to binge that come from restriction, and then stop bingeing.

Now let's talk about another possible problem.

How you're handling your emotions.

I definitely fell into this problem. I had no idea how to handle my emotions because I was never taught to, which is true for so many people.

And at some point, I started using food.

I used food to settle my nerves, to feel joy and pleasure, to enhance my good feelings and feel even better, to feel comforted and to feel relaxed, to escape emotions, cover up emotions, and to distract myself.

Basically, I used food to feel better.

So when I was wanting to feel better in any of the ways I just listed, I would think of food since I'd taught my brain that food was the way.

And when I was urging to feel better, I would urge for food. The more I urged to feel better, the stronger my urge for food was.

And I would urge to keep eating because I wanted to keep feeling how I was feeling while eating the food. If I stopped eating, the feelings would stop so I kept eating.

And I'd eat until I was stuffed to the brim. But then, once it felt like some of my food had digested and I had more room, I might have eaten more to get back to those good feelings, especially because I felt so crappy after eating that first round of food.

So the problem wasn't that I had food around, or that delicious food was available for me to go and buy, it was that I didn't know how else to feel better or how to just feel how I was feeling.

I see so many other people face this same problem and they eat a lot of food to try and solve it. But it doesn't work and actually makes them feel worse than they did before they ate.

And it's likely that if you experience this, it's because you were never taught how to handle your emotions.

You probably weren't taught how to experience discomfort. Most of us are taught that it's not okay to feel uncomfortable and therefore need to change it quickly and we're taught how to avoid feeling the discomfort.

And the way you were taught to change it and avoid it, either by someone else or you learned it yourself by doing it, was by eating food because it does work temporarily.

But obviously it's not the best solution because the ultimate outcome is that you don't feel better if you're eating excessively.

Now, I do want to say real quick that it's okay to eat for emotional reasons. It's okay to eat for joy and pleasure, for comfort, or for celebration. But, if it's the only tool you have in your toolbox for emotional management then you're going to get yourself into trouble.

Because as humans, we all feel emotions every day, all different ones in a day. Ones that are uncomfortable and ones that feel great. And if we go to food any time we feel uncomfortable or any time we want to extend the good feeling ones, we're going to be eating excessively. So that's what I'm talking about here. It's the excessive eating.

So, to solve this problem there's two things that need to happen.

First is a willingness to be in the emotion. It's a willingness to be uncomfortable.

If you're not willing, it's likely that you have negative associations with it, like I talked about with the body stuff.

You might think that feeling uncomfortable is scary, that it will never end, that it will get worse, that it's too painful, that it's wrong to feel how you're feeling, something like that.

And if you're thinking that way about it then of course you're not going to want to do it.

But what if you just thought of it as normal, harmless sensations in your body? How does that feel to think about it that way?

Less scary I'd assume.

That's really what the emotion is. It's sensations in your body. And you are absolutely capable of feeling those sensations and you will be okay if you do. It is okay to feel how you're feeling and you are safe.

Then, once you are feeling it, rather than eating to escape or change it, the second thing that needs to happen is that you change what you're thinking.

You feel how you feel because of what you're thinking. Your thoughts are what cause your emotions.

So if you change what you're thinking then your emotion will change.

That's actually how you change your emotions for real, not just temporarily like food does.

You change your perspective, your interpretation, your opinion.

Any time you notice that you feel differently, that's what has happened – your thoughts changed.

Sometimes this happens rather easily and naturally. But other times you need to put conscious effort into making the change.

This is something I work with my group members on a lot in my program because it's key in stopping binge eating.

But I did also create a podcast episode that walks you through how to do this if you want to give it a listen. It's #266: How to Change Your Thoughts.

But basically, you're going to write down what you're thinking, or type it out, or speak your thoughts to someone so you can become aware of what you're thinking that's causing you to feel how you're feeling.

Then, you're going to explore how else you can think.

For example, if I'm feeling angry because I binged, and when I wrote down my thoughts about it I saw that I was thinking, "I'm such an idiot for doing this again," I can explore how I want to think about myself having binged. And one option is that I'm not an idiot, I just haven't figured this out yet, and I will figure it out. Notice how different that way of thinking feels? Way less negative, more encouraging, more compassionate, so now I feel better just by changing how I'm thinking about myself.

There's always another way to think, another perspective, and if you take the time to explore what it could be, and you find something that is believable and true to you, that's when you'll feel better.

You don't need to eat to feel better. You can stay with your discomfort and then work on your thoughts to feel better.

And when you do it that way, it will actually resolve the emotion and you won't feel worse after like you would if you ate excessive food.

So, the food isn't the problem. It's your excessive restriction that's coming from trying to control your body and it's using food to control your emotions.

So solve for that.

Solve for the actual problem.

Practice thinking more factually and less negatively about your body as it is now and about gaining weight so you will be more willing to be less restrictive with food.

Practice feeling discomfort and changing your thoughts.

And if you want help with doing this, or you want help staying committed to the process or if you have questions as you do this, then come work with me in The Stop Binge Eating Program so I can give you personalized help, answers, strategies, and tips. Again, registration is opening in one month on December 11th of 2025 and you can join the waitlist by going to coachkir.com/group so you can get notified via email as soon as it opens.

Alright, that is all for today, I hope you can more clearly see what the problem really is, and I will talk to you next time. Bye bye!