

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #381: If You Don't Binge For Awhile But Then Start Again

Hello! Today I'm talking with you about not bingeing for awhile but then starting to binge again.

For those of us who have binged for years, this has happened to a lot of us.

You're doing well, you might even think that you're done with bingeing and you'll never do it again, but then you do and it's so disheartening.

It can be so confusing too. What happened? What started the bingeing again?

Of course that's going to be a question that you'll want to answer. What changed? What's different?

But there's another question that people don't always think to ask.

And it's, "what were you doing to not binge during that time when you weren't bingeing?"

Sometimes people think that while they weren't binge eating that they were doing everything right and that their relationship with food had changed for the better. But that's not always true.

For some people, some of the time, they're actually engaging in temporary fixes to not binge for awhile. And eventually, they can't keep it up any longer.

I've worked with so many people who have experienced this.

They didn't binge for awhile but when they look back, they were following super strict food rules during that time. So they were white-knuckling and using willpower to not eat certain foods and only eat nutrient dense foods, which can make it easier to not binge for awhile since most people are usually going to binge on unhealthy foods. But at some point, they eventually caved, ate those foods they hadn't been allowing for so long, and that long-time restriction turned into strong urges for all they'd been restricting from themselves.

A lot of the time, that process happens for people over a period of just a few or several days but sometimes, people can sustain it for longer. And after they do, the bingeing begins again.

So they never actually healed their relationship with food and didn't transition out of diet mentality, which is a huge cause of binge eating. So eventually, after being in diet mentality for so long, and being restrictive for so long, the urge to stop being so restrictive showed up. They were urging to be free from all the restrictive rules that their diet mentality drives them to make for themselves and it led them to binge.

What I've also seen is people being super busy for that period of time. And it's a busy that's not stressful so they're not stress eating or eating for relief and relaxation. It's a good busy and they're so busy they're not even thinking about food in a binge way.

But when the busy time ends, and there is more free time and space, the food thoughts come back just as they used to be.

When they got busy, the bingeing may have stopped but, they never actually worked through the reasons why they were bingeing and thinking about food so much prior to the busy period.

And unfortunately, we can't just be busy in a good way all the time. It's just not realistic. We're going to go through seasons and sometimes the busy will get stressful or the busy will die down. And we need to learn how to go through those times without using food as a crutch to help us.

So if you've gone through a period of time when you're not bingeing for awhile and then you do start bingeing again, take an honest look at what helped you to not binge during that time.

Were you busy? Were you able to sustain restrictive eating during that time?

If it's something that simply can't be sustained forever, that needs to be acknowledged.

Sometimes we look back at those times and think we were doing so well and were doing the right things but if that's not true, you need to be honest with yourself about that.

Because, it's not going to be useful for you to try and make that be your solution again.

Busy isn't the solution. Restricting and food rules isn't the solution.

But, knowing what isn't the solution can help you to see what can be.

If you started binge eating when things quieted down after being busy, then that can show you that you need to work on handling your downtime and free time in a different way.

So you're not using food to entertain yourself or to deal with the emotions and thoughts that come up during that time. You're incorporating better coping tools like journaling, talking with people, self-care, meditation, relaxing activities and you're creating a more fulfilling life for yourself with activities you enjoy during your newly-found available time.

And if you started bingeing after a period of excessive restriction, then it can show you that being less restrictive is something that would help you to work on.

That one can be hard for people to get on board with sometimes. They think, "no, I just need to be more disciplined." But what does that even mean? That you *never* allow yourself to eat those foods for the rest of your life? How does that sound?

If it doesn't sound appealing to you, or realistic or doable, then it's not your solution.

What would be more helpful is to be more relaxed with food. To not be so strict.

Because when you are, you're not going to have that reaction you had to the restriction. You're not going to go from never eating them to urging to eat all of them all the time.

When you think about quote "normal" eaters, part of the reason why they're so quote "normal" is because they don't go back and forth from restricting to allowing.

They allow all the time. The food is always allowed.

That's why they can take it or leave it. That's why they're so relaxed. That's why they don't think about it so much.

They can have it when they want, it's not going away, they're allowed, so it's not a big deal.

It becomes a big deal when it becomes forbidden.

So if you don't want to go back and forth from doing well to bingeing and create a cycle of that, stop being so restrictive and allow yourself to eat the foods.

Now, the problem isn't always what you're doing during that "well" time.

Sometimes people really are doing all the things right and that's why they're doing well and not bingeing. They aren't being overly restrictive, aren't hating their bodies, are handling their emotions in a productive way, are incorporating a variety of fulfilling, enjoyable activities in their life, and they're not bingeing as a result.

But then something happens.

Something happens and they stop doing what had been helping them to not binge and start doing something that is going to create urges to binge or they start engaging in old habits again.

And that's why it would also be helpful to ask yourself what changed, or what happened that was different.

One thing could be a highly emotional event.

For a period of time, they didn't experience a lot of intense negative emotions. Discomfort would happen sometimes but it was fairly easy for them to allow it and work through it.

But then this thing happened and they experienced a lot of emotions, or one intense emotion, and maybe they kept feeling it for days.

And either they had never learned how to handle emotions at all or they did but hadn't yet experienced big emotions since learning.

So when it happened, they went back to their old go-to and ate food.

If this is what happened to you, then if you want to not go back to bingeing, your work is in practicing feeling emotions without eating, practicing better coping tools, and practicing changing your thoughts, since your thoughts are what cause the emotions.

And you don't have to wait until another big emotional event happens in order to practice these things. Do it with the less intense and small emotions. The better you get at doing it with the small to moderate emotions, the easier it will be to do it during the bigger ones.

Practice feeling discomfort, practice your non-eating coping tools, and practice shifting your thoughts, and get help with it if you need it.

Another thing could be a sudden desire to lose weight.

Maybe during that time when you were not bingeing, you were accepting of your weight, weren't trying to lose, and were just neutral about it.

But then, for some reason, the desire came.

You wanted to lose weight and the way you know to do that is by cutting out certain foods and basically being restrictive like I talked about a few minutes ago.

So you started doing that.

And just like I talked about before, at some point you started feeling urges for what you'd been restricting. And if you did decide to eat the foods, you might tell yourself that it's just this one time so not only are you urging for the food but you're feeling an urgency to eat a lot before you take it away from yourself again.

And you binge on those foods.

When you started trying to lose weight, you let go of the freedom with food that had helped you to not binge.

Now, I am not against intentionally losing weight after stopping binge eating but it is so important that you don't go back to restrictive eating and diets to lose the weight.

100% permission and allowance with food needs to always be there, whether you're trying to lose weight or not.

You may wonder how that's possible and I'm not going to go too deep into it since this isn't a weight loss podcast but the simple answer is that you always have the permission to eat what you want and then you make eating decisions based on what you genuinely want to do, what doesn't feel too restrictive, and you eat in a way that you would be *willing* to do for the rest of your life.

It really is possible to lose weight without cutting out foods you love. You can learn to eat them in smaller portions. That's how people lose weight without going on restrictive diets and it really is possible. I've actually done it myself and know many others who have too.

So, if your bingeing started back up when you started trying to lose weight, you need to never let go of that unconditional permission and allowance to eat any food. That can't ever go away.

Another thing that might have changed is your busyness, but different than what I talked about before when being busy helped you to not binge.

In this case, you got busy in a stressful way and you started eating more to calm your stress and eating more to get quick moments of pleasure.

I get that sometimes we have stressful busy seasons. But it's so important that you do everything you can to make time for self-care and pleasure.

That might mean saying no to things that aren't urgent. I've seen a lot of people add to their busyness and stress by prioritizing chores that aren't urgent or nearly as important as taking time for yourself. Can the dishes wait? Can the laundry wait? Can the food shopping wait?

Sometimes we think we need to get these things done now when we really don't. We can do them another time and everything will be okay. And you will be so much more okay if you instead take time for yourself.

It might also mean that you delegate things to other people. Can your partner, or someone else watch the kids for 30 minutes? Can your kids help with things around the house? Can you delegate tasks to your co-workers, employees, or whoever else?

Now, the answer may be no to everything I'm suggesting but I bet for a lot of you, a lot of the time it's actually not no. There is something you can do. Be willing to let things go, that aren't super important, for the sake of your well-being. Your well-being is important.

And if in fact the answer really is no, then when you are able to make time, even if it's just a few minutes, or an hour, or whatever you can manage, make the most of that time. Do what will help you. Do what you need. And don't tell yourself it's not enough time. That will take away from your calmness or pleasure. Appreciate every minute that you get for yourself. Love on those minutes. Take care of yourself during those minutes.

And the opposite could happen with busy times too.

While you weren't bingeing, life was fun, you had a lot of enjoyable things to do. And then, life got boring.

Maybe you went on a lot of trips and now you don't have anything planned.

Maybe it was summertime and now you're entering into the colder months.

Life got more boring and you started eating more for enjoyment.

So the change that happened was more boredom.

This is where you need to bring joy into your life.

I don't care what the weather is, you can do enjoyable things.

I don't care if nothing is planned for you, *you* can make plans for you.

This is when you have to start being proactive and trying different things, and researching things to do, and reaching out to people to hang out.

I totally understand what it's like to go from having exciting plans and having things to do just landing in your lap to then having nothing.

And it's up to us to make things happen if they're not.

Food isn't the only option for enjoyment. Go find the others.

So, if you go from doing well to bingeing, something has changed or what you were doing while doing well wasn't sustainable.

So which was it for you?

Learn a lesson from it. Do the work that needs to be done. And when it doubt, get back to the basics. Don't be overly restrictive with your eating, be neutral with your body thoughts, practice handling your emotions in a productive way, and incorporate a variety of fulfilling, enjoyable activities in your life.

You can prevent the back and forth.

Know what causes it for you.

Alright, that's all for today. Bye bye.