

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #394: How to Stop Grazing

Hi! I just want to give you a reminder real quick, that registration for the next round of The Stop Binge Eating Program will be opening in just two weeks, on March 4th of 2026.

If you're so tired of bingeing, are so tired of how it affects you mentally, emotionally, and physically, if it gets in the way of you living your life how you want to be living it, and you haven't been making the kind of progress you want to be making on your own, then come join me in the program so we can work together on this.

I want to help you get your ideal eating habits, feel better about yourself, feel better in your body, quiet your thoughts about food, so you can feel more confident, proud of yourself, happier, relaxed around food, and have more energy.

That's what stopping binge eating can help you do and that's my goal for everyone in the program.

So if you want to do it, join the waitlist now by going to coachkir.com/group. That webpage has lots of information about the program but if you have any questions that aren't answered there, you can email them to info@coachkir.com.

Are you ready to change your eating habits and change your life? Let's do it together!

Alright, now onto today's episode. Today I'm talking with you about grazing, which means repeatedly eating unplanned, small amounts of food over a period of time.

Do you ever find yourself eating a little bit of this and a little bit of that, repeatedly, again and again, over a period of time, and you're not even hungry?

It might be while you're home all day.

It might be after you've eaten a meal.

It might be while you're at a social gathering.

It might not even really be considered a binge because you're not feeling out of control, you're not feeling extremely full after, but it does end up being a lot of food, way more than you want to be eating, or more than your body would like for you to be eating.

And even though the grazing might not be considered a binge, it could actually lead you into bingeing territory.

I know for me, I could start out grazing, but then as I kept eating, there would be less time between foods or bites, my speed of eating would increase, my thinking would change, and then it would start to look like a binge, and in the end I might actually feel way too full.

So grazing can be something that can snowball into a binge but it can also just be an eating habit that doesn't turn into a binge but it is still a bothersome habit.

And I also do have to say that for some people, and some of the time, it's not a problem at all.

I do it sometimes and it's totally fine, not a problem at all.

For so many things I talk about, I always want you to investigate whether or not things are a problem for you, and if so, why they are a problem for you.

I don't want you to assume that grazing is always a bad thing. It could be totally fine.

This reminds me of when I was coaching someone who wanted to stop snacking in bed and when I asked her why it was a problem for her, she couldn't really come up with a reason for why. She had just assumed that snacking in bed was a bad thing, maybe it was taught to her, maybe she heard it somewhere, but she had that belief.

But really, for her, she enjoyed doing it, she made sure not to get crumbs in her bed, she felt fine afterward, and really, it wasn't a problem.

So she felt relieved. She could still engage in this enjoyable activity, and she didn't have to put in effort to not do it...which also meant she could focus her efforts on eating habits that actually were a problem for her.

So, I think it's important that you assess when or if grazing is problem for you, first and foremost.

Maybe sometimes it is, maybe sometimes it isn't, or maybe it is all the time. That's for you to decide for yourself.

Now of course, today I'm talking about when it is a problem and I want to start with why you do it.

The most common reason I've seen for why people do it is because they're trying to control their emotions.

When I say controlling your emotions, that doesn't always mean that you're trying to avoid feeling a negative emotion. Sometimes you could just be trying to go from neutral to positive.

You could be feeling neutral, not good, not bad, and eating gives you that little bit of joy and pleasure. It perks you up a little.

It might not even be super noticeable, which is why this can be so confusing for some people, but it could be that you are just eating for entertainment, to give you something to do, to feel a little happier for a moment.

It's like if you're sitting down to watch a show, it could be the same thing. You're not feeling bad, you're just neutral, and you might not even notice it but you do feel a little more positive once you start watching, assuming you enjoy the show and it's a show that is meant to make you feel good.

So if you ever find yourself coming into awareness of what you're doing, and asking yourself, "Why am I doing this?" that just might be the reason why.

You're trying to feel more positive emotions, even just slightly. And you're using food to do it, so you're trying control your emotions to make them feel differently than they felt before eating.

Then there's the more obvious one – when you're trying to avoid feeling an uncomfortable, negative emotion.

That is for sure something I used to do a lot.

I would eat to in an attempt to calm myself down.

I would do it at work, I would do it at parties, I would do it at home.

I remember being busy and stressed at work and going into the back to eat bread to have a moment of calm, more than once. And also picking at croutons that were just in a big bin, just keep going back for more and more.

I remember being at parties, feeling awkward and uncomfortable, and grazing on the food to distract myself.

I remember being at home, feeling nervous about something and grazing to feel calmer, or feeling bored or lonely, and grazing to feel better.

I'd eat, go do something else, go back to eat again, go back to eat again, and the cycle would continue on and on.

And it can be hard to stop.

It's like you're getting into a grazing mindset. And like with so many kinds of mindsets, when you're in it, it can be challenging to get out of it.

Especially if the grazing is doing something for you, which it is.

Your brain is getting something good from this, so it's going to keep telling you to do it.

And in this case, with emotions, it's helping you to control and regulate your emotions.

And also, if you don't know what else to do, how else to feel better, how else to calm yourself, then you're going to want to keep going back to the food.

So, how do you stop grazing for this reason?

The first step is always going to be awareness.

You have to actually recognize what you're doing before you can stop yourself from doing it.

So many of you are eating unconsciously, mindlessly, you're not even paying attention to what you're eating, or paying attention to the fact that you're eating.

You're focused on something else, or you're just in it, doing it, but aren't observing yourself. You're just reacting.

So if grazing is a problem for you, the first thing you're going to do is practice paying more attention to when you're eating.

Then, rather than just asking yourself, "Why am I doing this?" and not answering, or silently answering, "I don't know," you're going to ask the question for real and actually answer it.

Why *are* you doing this? And I hope that after listening to this episode you have an easier time coming up with an answer.

Are you trying to control your emotions with the food? And if so, what are you trying to feel? Or, you can ask, what are you feeling that you're trying to change?

Let's identify what's really going on here. Because you're not just eating, you're eating for a reason.

Once you are aware of what you're doing, and you acknowledge why you're doing what you're doing, you've started the process of stopping eating.

Because now, you have an idea for what could help you to stop grazing.

If this is emotional, and you know what you're trying to feel, you can begin to explore how else you could feel what you're trying to feel.

If you're bored and are wanting entertainment, what else could be entertaining for you?

If you're lonely and are wanting connection, how can you connect, even if just in a small way, right now?

If you're feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, and are wanting to feel calm, how can you calm yourself right now? It could be by doing some deep breathing, by giving yourself a real break, by journaling to work through your thoughts that are causing you to feel how you're feeling so you can change how you're thinking about your circumstances, and that is a great and effective way to change how you're feeling. It could be by getting some movement, by laying down, or by talking to someone.

Explore ideas and even better, come up with ideas that sound useful to you, or that have worked for you in the past ahead of time, so you're ready with ideas.

If you're feeling neutral and are just wanting a little better feeling, how can you do that without eating food?

So pay attention to yourself, acknowledge why you're grazing, and redirect to something else that will give you what you're wanting from the food.

Now, grazing isn't always happening to control emotions.

It can also be the result of all or nothing thinking.

If you're a perfectionist, at least when it comes to your eating, if you aim to have a perfect day with your eating, if you don't allow flexibility and off-plan eating, then you might set yourself up for grazing.

As soon as you eat something that's off-plan or that you might think has ruined your day, you then go for something else. You think that eating in alignment with how you truly want to be eating doesn't matter anymore since you messed up already.

So you don't put in any effort to work through cravings or urges, you just eat what's there, eat what comes into your mind, and eat whatever's presented to you for the rest of the day.

If this is a reason why you graze, we gotta get rid of this all-or-nothing, this perfectionist way of thinking.

One of the most useful things you can incorporate into your eating mindset is flexibility.

Allow yourself to make changes, to eat something you didn't plan to eat, to eat a little more than you planned to. It's going to be okay. You'll be okay.

And you'll be even more okay than if you don't allow for flexibility.

Changes happen, spontaneous things happen, plans change, you change your mind, and it's all okay.

You don't need to eat perfectly and eat exactly according to plan 100% of the time to be a healthy person.

And being able to pivot and be flexible is part of what will help you to have a healthy mind.

So practice allowing more flexibility so when something happens, you don't give up on your day.

Now, although at the start of the episode I mentioned grazing when you're not hungry, I do want to address when you *are* hungry but you're just not aware of it.

Sometimes that's why the grazing happens.

You start eating and you go back for more and more and it's because you're physically hungry.

Because so many people are disconnected from their hunger signals, they don't even realize they're hungry until they're *very* hungry. They don't notice the more subtle signals, they only notice when it's very obvious.

Or, they ignore it when they do feel it, and it kind of quiets down, they forget they were hungry, and once they start eating the hunger awakens. But again, they might not even realize the physical sensation of hunger, they just keep having the desire to eat, which is a hunger symptom too, but they assume it's not hunger, it's just them wanting to eat. So they think it's just mental and not actually physical hunger.

They might think they're just wanting food for emotional or restrictive reasons but it's actually just hunger.

So I encourage you to pay attention to and honor your hunger signals.

Now at first, it might be a challenge to notice the more subtle hunger signals. But you're going to start to intentionally pay more attention to your body to try and find them. You can check in with your body periodically or at the times when you usually eat your meal to see how it feels. You're going to start practicing checking in with your body and paying attention to it.

And you might not find a signal for hunger right away, or you might think you do but then realize you don't, and that's okay. You're re-learning.

But just start looking for it.

And when you do feel it, eat. Don't put it off if you don't have to. If you can eat, eat. If you can't, eat as soon as you can.

And when you do, do your best to be intentional with your meal so rather than getting yourself in the mindset of "going back for more," you're getting in the mindset of "this is my meal," which can make it easier to stop when you're full.

Something else people experience is the hunger-grazing that people do before meals.

Ever been grazing on food while cooking dinner?

And then you're not even hungry for the meal anymore?

There's two things I want to suggest for that.

One, is to remind yourself that you're looking forward to your meal and you want to be hungry for your meal.

This is something that I do when people get appetizers when we're out to eat. I may have a little, but I'm thinking that I want to save room for my meal. I'm looking forward to my meal, and I want to be able to eat as much of it as I can before I get full. Or sometimes I just won't even eat the appetizer. I don't order appetizers in general for this reason, because usually no appetizers on the menu are as appealing to me as my meal, and I want to go from hungry to a full with as much of my meal as I can, and not take up space in my belly with food that isn't gonna be as good.

I remind myself of what I want the most.

So you can do that for yourself too.

If you don't want to be grazing, if you want to enjoy the whole meal and as much of it as you can before you get full, tell yourself that.

In addition to that, the other suggestion I have is being willing to be hungry.

You're likely cooking dinner because you're hungry. You're likely out to eat because you're hungry.

And you can wait another 15-30 minutes, however long it is before you eat.

That's something I'll tell myself. "I can be hungry for another 15 minutes."

You can be hungry for a little longer. Hunger is not an emergency and you'll be okay if you don't eat immediately when you feel hungry.

Is it uncomfortable? Yes. But you are going to feel that discomfort and reap the reward of enjoying your meal more.

You can calm yourself down and feel the discomfort of hunger.

You can also remind yourself that your meal will be so much more enjoyable if you're hungry for it. So stay hungry for a few more minutes because it will be so worth it once you sit down to eat the meal.

So, I hope this has given you some insight into why you graze and what you can do to stop doing it.

And it's very likely that what will help you will be a combination of things I talked about so try one tip I shared, see how it goes, and if you need to, incorporate another.

But first and foremost know that it's always going to start with awareness.

You have the option of checking out, not paying attention to yourself, and reacting *or* checking in, paying attention, and being intentional.

Even if you start grazing, it's not all over. You can take charge at any time.

Alright? That's all for today, don't forget to join the waitlist for The Stop Binge Eating Program that is opening for registration in two weeks at coachkir.com/group and I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye!