



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: You are listening to the Weight Loss for Busy Physicians podcast with Katrina Ubell, MD, episode number 208.

Welcome to Weight Loss for Busy Physicians, the podcast for busy doctors like you. Get the practical solutions and support you need to permanently lose the weight so you can feel better and have the life you want. If you're looking to overcome your stress eating and exhaustion, and move into freedom around food, you're in the right place. Well, hey there, my friend, Happy New Year. Welcome back to the podcast. I'm so, so, so glad you're here. Are we just so excited that it's 2021?

Even though a lot of things may not have changed, it does feel super great to just have a fresh start, just a chance to start over again. It feels like kind of you've taken like a great shower, and trimmed your nails and cleaned your ears out. You're just like ready to go. You're like, done all the hygiene, you're just ready to start fresh. It's so, so, so good. So, so glad that you're here and starting off the new year with me as well.

I want to let you know, if you are thinking, listen, 2021 I'm going to get on it this year. I'm going to really get going with some weight loss. I do have a really awesome free resource for you called Six Steps to Jumpstart Your Weight Loss, I want to offer that to you to just get you started. Because you may have some ideas of what you want to be doing. And for some of you who might be in my program, that's awesome. We're going to be starting here in just really a couple of days, which is super fun.

But if you're trying to do this on your own, or you don't qualify for my program, I want to give you some great help.

So with these six steps, what I suggest that you do is you download it, you have a look at the steps and you pick one, you pick the one that seems easiest for you, the one that you're like, "Oh yeah, I can totally do that one." What we tend to do is we want to change all the things all at once, and then we completely burn out and we don't do anything. And so what I want to suggest that you do is you pick the easiest one and you start doing it consistently. When that one starts feeling like just a part of your routine, it just feels like a normal habit, then you can go back to the list and pick a second one. What's the next one? The next easiest one for you, and start to apply that to your life as well. And then just keep adding, keep adding, keep adding, you're going to notice some major, major results.

So the way to get the Six Steps to Jumpstart Your Weight Loss is to go to katrinaubellmd.com/six, S-I-X. Or you can also text your best email address to 414-877-6220. When you get prompted for the code word, just reply with the word six. Okay, so S-I-X, and then you will get an email to you immediately. So I know for many of us we're like, "Oh, I'm not going to remember that website to go to, to sign up for it and get it for free." But you can just text on your phone right now. So like I said, just text your best email address to 414-877-6220. And then when you get prompted for the code word, reply with six or just go to katrinaubellmd.com/six.

Okay, I have such a great treat for you. I know so many of you are loving all these success stories. You love hearing stories of women just like you, physicians just like you who are sorting out their weight issue. And so I thought it would be so fun to kick off the new year with another success story. This is Em Wang. She is so great. She is someone who all of us on the team, we just adore her. She's just such a lovely, lovely person. She actually lives in Hong Kong, and is doing amazing medical work and some coaching out there as well. And so she's just fabulous. We love her so much. And she has a great story. And I wanted you to hear it as well.

She has a story where, so many of us when we were children, we were kind of maybe teased or even just very lovingly given nicknames about how we were bigger, or maybe a little fluffy or a little chubby or things like that. And we completely internalize these beliefs about ourselves. And it affects us well into adulthood. So that's just part of her story. I can't wait for you to hear more about it. And she'll just tell you everything. She'll tell you all the details about herself. But I do also want to encourage you to check out the website blog post for this episode, because she is also this great artist and has just on her own created these really fun little sketches that basically describe the work that she's doing. She'll tell you more about it when you listen. But we wanted to make sure that we got one of her sketches up for you to be able to see so make sure you go to katrinaubellmd.com/podcast, and then you can see more of her sketches.

So fun. She's so great. I can't wait for you to hear all about her story and just maybe get some inspiration for yourself. It's so great when we start going like wait, okay, yeah sure, Katrina could do it, but what about this person? Now, she's done it and this person has done it and this person's done it and this person's done it, you start to realize, you know what, maybe I'm not so special anyway. You are special, but not special in the way that you can't lose weight, or that's impossible for you. And so I can't wait for you to hear all about Em Wang and her story. So please listen, enjoy. And I'll talk to you next week. Em Wang, thank you so much for being here on the podcast.

Emily Wong: Thanks for having me.

Katrina Ubell: I'm super, super excited because you're coming to us from Hong Kong. So as we're talking, it's already tomorrow for you, which is probably not a big novelty for you but it is for me right now. As I was telling you, I told my kids I'm going to be talking to someone in a couple minutes who's already in tomorrow. They're like, "What?", it's so fun. It's so fun. Okay, well, I like to start all of these success stories with you just giving us a brief introduction of kind of who you are and all of that stuff. So how about you go ahead and do that?

Emily Wong: Okay, okay. So I basically spent some years growing up here in Hong Kong, and then came to the U.S. and did my degree at the University of Washington. So I went to med school there, and then did my training at UCLA. And I'm a general internist. I worked in academic medicine and was the head of business operations for the Department of Medicine at the University of Washington for about 15 years, and then decided to come back to Hong Kong when I had an empty nest. And so I've been practicing here for about eight or nine years, and I specialize in integrative medicine. And more recently, I've been doing some health and wellness coaching.

Katrina Ubell: Super fun, awesome. Is the plan to stay there indefinitely at this point?

Emily Wong: Probably not indefinitely, definitely. So like when my kids have kids, which might be soon, I'll hopefully come back for more extended periods. But for now, I have aging grandmother and dad and people like that to take care of here in Hong Kong. So for now I'm here.

Katrina Ubell: Cool, super fun. All right, awesome. Okay, so now I would love it if you could just tell us your weight struggle, like when did weight become an issue for you? Let's talk about that.

Emily Wong: Okay, okay. So it's funny when I look back at this, because I can't remember a time when I was not thinking of myself as being heavy and overweight. And actually even growing up, it was kind of a joke in the family, kind of a sad joke for me, but my nickname growing up was little elephant in Chinese. And my parents thought it was super cute when I was born. And I don't know, they always tell the story of how when I was born, the movie Dumbo the Elephant came out. And of course, she's super cute. And so like, "Oh so we named you after little elephant." And then there would always be these jokes of course, when I was growing up about how clumsy and how fat I was, and all of these things, which really in retrospect, made me really ashamed of my name and who I was, and I wanted to hide. And I just remember, because I'm a taller, kind of bigger boned person anyway. And so I just remember

growing up, my dad would always say these things like, "Well, we love you, you'll never be in a beauty contest, but I love you anyway."

And I know I just made a face. And then my mom would just be like, "Don't worry about your hair, don't even try." The message was, "You're just never going to be anything. So don't even try." So I think I just kind of grew up with that kind of image of myself. And looking back-

Katrina Ubell: Were they just like, managing your expectations or something? I think that was a cultural thing.

Emily Wong: Yeah, I think it came from a place of kindness of like it's okay. It's a consolation kind of thing. Like don't worry, don't try to be perfect. And it was so funny, because I do remember that when I was in college, so I always thought of myself as being chubby and overweight. And when I look back on my pictures, it's not like I was horribly overweight, but I just had this image in my head that I was way more out of control with my weight than I actually was. And I just remember in college at one point, my parents sent me this article, Karen Carpenter, I don't know if you know her, but she died of anorexia. And they sent me this article, and they're like, "Oh, we're always talking about your weight. We don't want you to be worried about your body image. So don't ever get anorexia, okay?", like as if people with eating disorders just choose whether they want to have one or not.

Katrina Ubell: It's actually kind of sweet the intention right there. They're like they'll give you a hard time about it, but don't take it to the extreme.

Emily Wong: Exactly. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. So I just always kind of just hated the way I looked, my body. I had super round cheeks when I was younger and of course I had the almond shaped eyes. And so I just was always, you didn't want to look in the mirror or anything. I never stuck with a diet for longer than a couple of weeks. And I think the lowest weight that I was as an adult was right at my wedding, as usual. I had just done like a

ton of step aerobics classes and things like that. And I got down to this weight, which I remember was like 155. And it just seemed like, wow, this is a miracle. But I knew was just going to be like this moment in time.

And then after that, I started internship, and then I put on a bunch of weight after that. And then I had a baby and another baby. And so I do remember, between the two babies, I was just like, this is not okay. And so I joined this gym. There was this female bodybuilder, the kind with the big muscles all over.

Katrina Ubell: Jacked, yeah.

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah. And she worked with me and weightlifting and things like that. And so I do feel like my second pregnancy, I gained less weight. And I do remember being eight months pregnant and on the Stairmaster and other people were looking at me like, "Oh, my God, you're awesome." And I'm like, "I'm awesome." But despite doing that, and I have to say that I even, I did triathlons, I ran half marathons, and I just never really got below maybe the 170s even training bricks, like two hours, three hours a day. I was just always at this, I can't drop below this certain weight. And I feel like I was eating pretty healthy at the time. But looking back, but actually, like Halloween candy, Easter candy was always a thing. We'd always eat dessert. In fact, I remember being in the department chair's office when I was working in the chair's office, and I had one of those M&M dispensers on my meeting tables, so people would come in and grab a handful of M&Ms. And I was like the M&M dispenser not just for everybody else, but also for me. Yeah, exactly. I will eat half of the M&Ms and you can have some too.

It just makes people have to think about at the time, I was like, "Whoa, I'm eating really healthy. And really? Where did I get that idea, right?"

Katrina Ubell: They're so powerful, our brains are. Like we're eating, I mean even when it was low fat time. You snack well time and everything. We all know chocolate. There's never been a time where we all kind of thought that chocolate was totally a thing

that there's not a problem potentially, right? But it's just our brains are so powerful in denying the facts, which is like when you eat the half the container of M&Ms, it would be hard.

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, I think I just somehow had this narrative in my head that if I just worked out enough, my weight would go down. And I just remember being really disappointed and being like okay, well, this is never going to work. And I'm just always going to be overweight. And my mom is overweight, my brother's overweight. They both have diabetes. This is just a thing. This is just how I'm going to be the rest of my life. And so I actually found your podcast about a year and a half ago, like in May of 2019. And it was just mind blowing, the stuff that you were talking about, like with the model-

Katrina Ubell: How did you find the podcast? I'm totally just curious how you found the podcast, yeah.

Emily Wong: Oh, it's interesting, because I think I was just listening to podcasts for physicians who had side gigs, and I'm trying to remember the name of the podcast as it seemed to, but anyway, there were a number of them and you were interviewed on one of them. And you were saying your podcast was about weight loss, and I'm like, "Oh my God. Oh my God."

And I think it's really fun, because I had already gone to sort of a very low carb sort of approach at that point. I was already doing some intermittent fasting. And so I actually had kind of realized that nutrition is actually the name of the game and not exercise. But I mean, I totally remember being like at least six months into your podcast before I joined WLDO. And I remember like thinking as soon as I joined WLDO, I'm just like, oh you're supposed to weigh yourself every day? I missed a key good part of this program.

Katrina Ubell: By the way, WLDO, that's our affectionate nickname for weight loss for doctors, that program. We all call it WLDO. Everybody's like, "What's WLDO?" That's about it. So you listened to the podcast and then did you start implementing anything? Did you apply what you learned?

Emily Wong: Yeah, I did. Yes, I was doing the self coaching, the thought downloads, I did the no sugar, no flour. I would do the planning ahead protocol and the journaling. So I did all of that, not perfectly, but that definitely helped. And I probably lost about eight pounds before I even joined the program.

Katrina Ubell: Nice. So then what made you kind of take that leap of like, I'm getting success on my own, I'm making progress but I need some additional help. What was that kind of transition like for you?

Emily Wong: There were a couple of things. So I was already enrolled in a health and wellness coaching program through the University of Arizona. And I was realizing that in order to be a good health and wellness coach, weight loss is one of the main reasons why people would want to seek out a coach. And I just didn't feel like the approach was going to be targeted enough. And I actually did really want to coach other doctors. I actually felt like that was something that really spoke to me. I really loved this tribe of women physicians that were in and I was like okay, I just need to figure out what it is that's in this program that would be different than the podcast, and how this could be, because I feel like we don't really have a very long attention span as doctors. It's basically like you give me the thing and I'm just going to do it.

Katrina Ubell: Don't waste my time. Don't mess around with me.

Emily Wong: Yeah, exactly, exactly. No messing around. And so I just felt like I wanted to supplement that health and wellness coaching with some of the tools that I felt like I was going to learn from your program, so yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Okay, awesome. So you joined the program. Well, actually, before we get to that, you were telling me before that you've worked with coaches for a long time.

Emily Wong: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: What did you say? 1998 was when you first started? By the way, I feel like you look younger than me. Like seriously, I

don't know what is the fountain of youth that you're drinking from. But I always, when I thought about how old your son was, I was like, "Wait, how is that possible?" Literally my brain was hurting.

Emily Wong: I could have another baby.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Exactly, exactly. So you started like, yeah, I mean that's 22 years ago, right?

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah. So when I started in my academic career path, I actually had two tiny children under the age of three, and I was applying for this huge national centers of excellence and women's health grant. And I was like, there's no way I can put more on my plate. I'm never going to get promoted, whatever. So I actually found this professional organizer, who was the wife of one of the other faculty. And so she came in and helped me out with my files and stuff. And she was like, "Oh, and by the way, I'm a professional coach. Do you want to work with me?" I was like, no idea what that was. And I was like, okay.

So she worked with me. Her name is Cathy Pao. She's amazing. I worked with her for like, probably 20 years, so between 1998 all the way up to coming back to Hong Kong pretty much. In fact, she's the one who helped me see that despite all my successes in academic medicine, that I had really been hiding and avoiding coming back to Hong Kong because I have this family business here, I have all these issues with being here in Hong Kong. And I realized it was time to face up to those fears, with my kids leaving the nest, and my grandmother was turning 91, I think at the time, or 92 actually. And so I was like, I only have a few years to spend with her. She raised me and she's losing her memory. So she has dementia. Anyway, so now she's 101.

Katrina Ubell: Incredible. Oh my gosh, that is incredible. That is incredible. Yeah, so you really had a lot of success with coaching before. Do you think that helped you with kind of taking the leap into signing up for weight loss for doctors only? Kind of like knowing what coaching is, I feel like a lot of people

are just like I don't even know what is it that we do, what is coaching, and you had a better idea.

Emily Wong: Yeah. Yeah. I think it helped. But honestly, I feel like it was such a different approach. Because the coaching that I had before was more what we would call maybe action line coaching. So you really focus much more on what are you going to do and what are your goals. And I think that it didn't really go so deep into your thoughts and your feelings and in many ways, it seems like the model is deeper, but simpler. It's faster, because you can change things really quickly, and it's all up to you. And I learned all the sort of stuff about being responsible for your choices and being emotionally responsible and all of that stuff but it didn't feel like it was sort of crystallized in a way that was so easy to apply.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, like what do you actually do with it? Yeah, it's interesting is I've, I don't want to speak negatively about anybody's work. But I have spent some time going to various conferences of someone who is very, very well known as a kind of like, self help leader kind of person. And what I found is that this person's work, sometimes I'll be like, "Oh, there's the model." The model's in there. But it's so confusing what's being taught and you're like, "That was awesome." And then I'm like, "Now, what am I going to do next? I don't even know what to do?" And I sometimes think like, and I'm a coach. I can't imagine somebody who doesn't have any background in this, and I mean, there are people who say this person has completely changed their life for the better. So I'm not even taking away from that. But I agree with you is the point that just, it's just like there's something that's so powerful in simplicity. It doesn't necessarily make it easy to change but it's just like there's your brain will want to be confused and overwhelmed to protect itself. And the simpler the work, the easier it is to get yourself out of that confusion.

Emily Wong: Yeah, and I think the other thing that's really powerful about the way that you teach this is that it's the self awareness piece. So it's about kind of like just knowing that those thoughts are there, being okay with those thoughts being there. And

that's the sort of core of. If I think about my health and wellness coaching, that's that Jon Kabat Zinn, like just noticing those thoughts, being aware of them, not judging them, and just allowing them to be there. That piece, I think, was also missing from my current coaching.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, that's so cool. And I love how it all builds because over the course of time for me, I don't have quite as many years of like, I didn't discover this work as long ago as 1998, although it would have been fun had I. Things would be different. But just thinking back to it's like this is a very circuitous path, when you look back, you're like, "Oh, yeah.", and then see them, then this happened. And then I learned that, and then this built on that and you see how it's all happening, and all building up to create exactly what you want, which is so cool. So you came into the program then, and what was your experience? So you just dived in headfirst? Were you like, "Give it all to me?" Or were you a little reluctant at first?

Emily Wong: No, I was totally, so I remember, like you sign up. And then there's this period of time that you're waiting, and I was just like, "Okay, I'm going to do it all.", and start the first month's modules. I had them done within three days, I'm like, "Okay, I'm done." I dove into it. And actually, I think the funny thing is that I didn't actually lose any weight in the first six months. So I think it was because I was doing a lot of mind work. And I had already lost some weight just listening to the podcast.

And so during that time, I think that when I look back on it, it's one of those situations that you have talked about before in your podcast, which is where when your body is ready, then it's ready. And before that, it's not. And I think I've always still have the old mathematical model of calories in, calories out. And what I realized, I think through this work is that my body at least is very hormonal. And when I say that, I don't mean like menopause hormones. I mean very dependent on cortisol and insulin. So I think that those are two really powerful hormones for me in my body. When I'm stressed, I literally will put on weight without changing anything in my protocol. And when I don't sleep, I will feel my body feels different. It feels like okay, I

got to hold on to my weight. Maybe that's just my mind, creating that.

Katrina Ubell: It's like a protection, right?

Emily Wong: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: It's like something is threatening or scary, so let's hang on to it for protection.

Emily Wong: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I love that you've made that connection, that you're not telling yourself a story about how poor you, the weight doesn't come off very well, because it's very easy. That's like what most people do. And instead, you just got really, really curious and notice the associations. So then, if the weight goes up, you're like, "How has my sleep been the last couple days? How stressed am I? What's really going on for me?"

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah.

Katrina Ubell: That's super powerful.

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Katrina Ubell: What was that like? So the first six months, so basically the whole Weight Loss for Doctors line program, you didn't lose weight. Were you like deep down bummed about that? You signed up for masters? So definitely, you're connected enough to keep going. But was it hard to stay connected to that? Or were you like, I totally get it and I need to do this work?

Emily Wong: I guess I was just, yeah I was definitely, I don't want to say disappointed, but I definitely was like, I'm waiting for this to happen.

Katrina Ubell: You weren't overjoyed, probably.

Emily Wong: There was a part of me that didn't actually think it was ever going to happen. I was literally kind of like, in my head, like

I need to do this work, regardless of what happens to my weight, because I could see all the things because I had like all these scarcity thoughts. I had all these, I had a huge problem with money, like I just relationship. So I felt like there were all these things that I was working on. And that was all such good work. That was kind of like, I'm just going to keep going with this because I feel like this is just such a powerful turning point for me in terms of my personal growth. And it was almost like the weight was definitely secondary. And so it was kind of a shock when the weight started coming off again, like in the second half, and I was like, "Oh, interesting." Because it does prove the point that it's really not what you're putting in your mouth or what you're doing with your body so much as what's going on in your mind.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, it's so much more energetic, and all the things that we as doctors don't want to think about, because this is not how we're trained. And this seems like more woo woo out there, whatever. But I'm always just like listen, if the traditional thing works for you, great. I love it. Have a great life. But when it's not working for you, instead of beating yourself up thinking that something's wrong with you, maybe there's a piece that's missing. Maybe there's a part that you haven't really dug into.

Emily Wong: Right.

Katrina Ubell: Oh, that's so powerful.

Emily Wong: Our bodies are so much more complex. Like in medicine, we just like to slice and dice everything. And with Occam's razor, just be like, "Okay, this is it."

Katrina Ubell: Right, and I'm a doctor and I know.

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And it's like, well no, it's not quite that simple.

Katrina Ubell: It's not quite that simple, exactly. Totally curious, are you into traditional Chinese medicine at all or anyone in your family? Has that factored into your life at all?

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah. So I actually trained in acupuncture, and I actually have an East West medicine clinic at the University of Washington for about four years. So coming back to Hong Kong, I haven't been practicing here, because of course, there's so many people who have been trained better in a CME course. But I definitely refer to a lot of TCM providers, and there's just really great resources available. So that's definitely part of my integrative medicine kind of approach for people who are open to that.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, yeah. Did you apply any of that knowledge to yourself with weight loss?

Emily Wong: I did. I did. And in fact, it's interesting, because when I was doing that training I did in San Francisco, and I remember at the time, I was training for my third half marathon or something like that. And I remember at the time, being okay, like now I have this traditional Chinese medicine stuff, and I can really do this really lose weight, and I just remember there's this concept in Chinese medicine which has to do with chi, which is like your body's kind of life force. And I think what I realized was that I was depleting my life force by training as hard as I was, in order to pursue this goal of losing weight. But then you would think that by the third marathon, all these triathlons, it would have occurred to me that maybe that's not the way. Maybe it's not going to happen that way.

So I took this different approach, completely different perspective from Chinese medicine to be like, oh okay, actually you're working against your body's kind of wanting to heal you. You're actually breaking because you're depleting your energy, it was definitely that kind of burning the candle at both ends things. And I can see looking back that my cortisol level's probably super high. I was definitely in that mindset of like, "Oh, I'm just going to burn it all off so I can eat whatever I want." And that obviously didn't work.

Katrina Ubell: Right, right, right. I just think it's so fascinating, especially when you have that background or you know more about it, like applying that, but I kind of wonder if it's similar to anything

where it's like so easy to see so clearly for other people what they should be doing or what's happening, but then trying to have that personal insight on your own. Sometimes we really just don't see it, which is one reason why group coaching is so powerful, because someone else is being coached and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I see it plain as day." And then when it comes to you, of course that person though is like struggling and trying to see it and trying to understand it. And then once you you understand that intellectually, you can start going, "Oh, wait a minute, this is that same thing that I do that I struggle with too. And that's like an easier entrance."

Emily Wong: For sure, yeah. And coming back to the Chinese medicine. Like, I do feel like I learned about chi kung, which is a kind of meditation. And I feel like that was how I started sort of repleting my chi, and I think that really served me with kind of like learning those principles. And really, Chinese medicine is a whole lifestyle. I mean, we tend to think of like acupuncture as something we can take out and just sort of like have it be sort of a free standing way to treat, yeah. But it's really, yeah, it really is a whole kind of lifestyle.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, I did acupuncture, before all of my in vitro cycles. And I did it literally in the little pre op area right before embryo transfer and right after embryo transfer. Wwell, I had ended up switching providers when I started to do IVF. And they were so pro other alternative stuff. But I remember the main person, they had a specific person I had to see who had privileges at the hospital who could come and he was the one who did that. But I had a different person that I worked with just kind of like otherwise. And she totally would talk to me about you need to be eating these kinds of foods and you need to be really nurturing your body in this way and all these different things. So I mean, I think I paid attention somewhat, because I really wanted to get pregnant. So I was like, sure, whatever. I'll eat the sesame foods or whatever. But it was very much like a means to an end versus a lifestyle type of approach.

Emily Wong: Yeah. They've done studies on even cardiac surgery patients, clearly has shown that the outcomes are improved.

And maybe all it is just like calming down your cortisol levels and like mellowing things out, a little bit more dopamine, a little more serotonin, but whatever is going on with neurotransmitters or chemicals, it's definitely a good state.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, I just think I'm like listen, I don't have to understand exactly how it works. Better is better. If it's showing it helps, I don't have to totally understand. But I also am like, well, it's been around, traditional Chinese medicine, for so long. If it didn't work, I think it's like, it's not a fad. Yeah, that's super, super cool. So in terms of I always think it's interesting to think about just like cultural norms, basically. And then coming to America, you said you were six when you came to America?

Emily Wong: No, I was 16.

Katrina Ubell: So you're 16, oh okay, okay, I got that wrong. Okay. So growing up, many of us would race to eat all of our food. Is that, because sometimes I'm like, people are like, "Oh, this is just a cultural thing." But I'm like, "I think all the cultures do it." Maybe it's a normal thing, maybe it's a scarcity thing. Were there certain things that you had to really work through that were specific to your cultural background?

Emily Wong: For sure, for sure. Yeah, yeah. In fact, when I think back at the first six months, when I said I didn't lose any weight, it was very much, because I think that there was a lot of sort of eating in group meals, so it's family style. Every Asian meal is usually family style. So it's hard to even control your portions or you don't know what's going to be served. But more importantly, there definitely is a lot of scrutiny. Who's eating what? Have you had this? Why haven't you had that? Why don't you have more of that? And so there's a lot of food pushing as well as sort of people pleasing on the other end of the food pusher, you're usually the people pleaser, and it's kind of like, "Oh well, her feelings will be hurt if I don't eat this." And so I definitely had to work through a lot of that as well as the food waste kind of thoughts.

Katrina Ubell: And in a culture where your elders are so deeply respected, it's like we can talk about how, well, grandma's just going to have to manage her own thoughts or whatever, but it's different than other people's relationships.

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah. It is different. I think what's really, really helped me with that ironically is like, when I think about family pressures, what's really helped me is that I think about how my daughter is. So my daughter is 25 and she's a vegan now. She was vegetarian before, but she has been for years. In fact, she's more or less converted me, because I'm making recipes for her. And I'm like, these are really great recipes and I love these, and so when I think about how she is, I think she's kind of a role model for me in terms of kind of just very gently, sort of being like no, this is just the way I eat and I'm just not pushy about it. Other people make all kinds of, I think pretty rude comments about it. It's kind of like, oh you're a vegetarian. So does that mean you don't eat fish? It's like, huh? And in the Chinese culture, it's almost like I'm like, "Oh my daughter is vegetarian." They're like, "Oh, my daughter, I'm sorry." Nothing's wrong with her, you know?

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, but you see her, just like owning it, not making it like a big deal. But just being so confident in herself in that decision. And why can't you do that with you?

Emily Wong: Yeah, she likes her reasons. She's not going to be talked out of it. And she's not going to take offense at people who ask questions who just don't know.

Katrina Ubell: Right, right, exactly, exactly. So if you could sum up maybe like your top two or three lessons from being coached and doing this work, what are some big takeaways that you've gotten out of this?

Emily Wong: I would say definitely coming back to the awareness issue, I would say that that's probably the biggest thing. So I'll just give you one example of that, which is that I just laugh again thinking back about this. But it used to be that I would always, if I was eating by myself, I would sit down to a meal,

and either watch TV or read a book or be doing something else while eating that meal. And what would happen is that I would sort of lose focus on what I was eating, and I was just like, "Oh, I want a little bit more, the show's not over yet so let me get some more food." And so then I get a little bit more food, and then I'm watching the next show and then—

Katrina Ubell: I wouldn't know because there's too much more cereal, not. I don't know, add more milk, go back and forth.

Emily Wong: Exactly, exactly. I mean, that was a pattern that I had been, like again, as long as I can remember all the way back to like college, med school, high school, that was the thing. Eating was great and entertaining myself and distracting myself with some kind of entertainment made it even better. And so it was always this thing. And I remember being in your program, and talking to one of the coaches, the one on one coaches and being like, but no, I can't not, this is my favorite thing is to sit down with a book or whatever. And just realizing that that didn't serve me and being aware while I ate was so important, so I could feel that hunger scale, give myself that time. And so now, I never had anything else that I'm doing at the same time as eating. I put on some music, I have a whole ritual, I set down a glass of water for myself. And I'm just like no, this is my time. Because really, how long does it take to eat a meal?

Katrina Ubell: Not that long, even when you're not wolfing it down, yeah.

Emily Wong: Exactly, exactly, right, right. And so I think that mindfulness, the second thing is probably around scarcity. And so I do realize that and this doesn't have so much to do with food, but more with like, I feel like I stress myself out by thinking about time as being a scarce resource or money scarcity. And so it shows up in all different ways in my life, but whenever I feel that sense of anxiety or stress, or I'm putting some kind of pressure on myself, when I have that awareness, that I just sort of have to take a deep breath and step back when I'm on my game. It just doesn't—

Katrina Ubell: That might just work. If you could do this 80% of the time, you're doing awesome.

Emily Wong: Right, right. So it's that recovering perfectionist thing. It's like okay, so what is the whole point here? Even just coming on this podcast with you, I just was coaching with myself with a coach, and I was just like, I'm going to mess it up, or I just feel so, because Katrina said goddess, and I don't know how to talk to her and-

Katrina Ubell: Yes, yes I am.

Emily Wong: You're a goddess too.

Katrina Ubell: As are you.

Emily Wong: And she was just like, "You know what? What is the reason that you really want to do this podcast? What is the purpose of this?" And I was like, "Yeah, you're right. It's not about me. It's not about Katrina." It's about the people out there that we're really wanting to help. It's about showing up and being in integrity with myself. It's showing up and being myself, just being my authentic who I am and helping other people to see that this is why this works is because we can be honest with each other. And I feel like a lot of times as doctors, it's actually really hard to be vulnerable.

It's really hard for us to sort of even like, for me for years, it was kind of like, I'm a doctor, I should know all the things. Why can't I lose weight? I know the physiology, and you've talked about this on your podcast. It's embarrassing. You feel like you somehow have failed as a doctor if you aren't perfect.

Katrina Ubell: And everyone can see that you're failing, because they can see it on your body.

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And that's just not how life is. And that's not how we support each other. And only by being honest, and only by being our authentic selves, can we truly love ourselves. So that's the third thing I would say is just learning that my purpose in life is to really just manifest

compassion. And I need to start with myself. So that's where my heart is. And that's what I want to share with you.

Katrina Ubell: Yes, oh my gosh, I love that. And it really is true. It's like you cannot really offer compassion to others in a meaningful way. It's like you have to be your own first recipient of it and really learn how to have compassion for yourself even when you do all the things you know you shouldn't do or you wish you didn't do or that you hate that you do. And then you can offer it to others so much more. Oh my gosh, geez, we just dropped the mic right there. I totally love it. Oh, my gosh. So okay, just because our time is coming to an end here. So you are now a coach yourself. Are you coaching patients in Hong Kong? Tell me exactly what are you doing?

Emily Wong: So I have two different populations that I coach. One is women doctors in the U.S. So this is through my health and wellness coaching program that I did through the University of Arizona, like I just threw out these emails to people that I knew from residency fellowship, whatever. And basically, I was coaching doctors through the early phases of the pandemic in New York and New Jersey. There were like family medicine doctors going, "I don't know how to manage," but it's all good, but they're radiologists probably.

Katrina Ubell: Right, right.

Emily Wong: Yeah. So I have that kind of population. And like I said, I just feel like women physicians are my tribe. I honestly feel like by doing this work, that we will transform the future of medicine, so that's the goal.

Katrina Ubell: I agree.

Emily Wong: Yeah, so that is kind of like one special interest area. And then here in Hong Kong, what I've done is actually this last month in the process of switching over my primary care practice into a coaching practice. So I sent like 500 emails and was like, "Hey, I'm actually going to switch and do health and wellness coaching now. If you want to stay my patient in primary care, then you're welcome to sign up for this package. This is how it

looks. I'm happy to do a free trial with you." And yeah, so I'm coaching now some of my primary care patients, and that's super fun, because they have never had the model before.

Katrina Ubell: Right, yes. Yeah. So you get to have that experience of blowing people's minds. I'm just like, "What? My thoughts or my feelings. What?"

Emily Wong: Yeah. And that focus there is, really so we call them ex-pat women. So ex-pats are like people who live away from the U.S. So it's ex-pat women who are 50 and up. And what I'm going to help them do is to create a roadmap for the best half of their life.

Katrina Ubell: I love it. Oh, my gosh, that's so good. So if anybody wants to check you out, like find out more information, where can they go?

Emily Wong: So I have a website. So it's integrityhealing.info. So integrityhealing, all one word smushed together, dot info.

Katrina Ubell: Awesome. They can find that. That's so great. Oh my gosh, it's so fun. I love to talk about you all the time, too. I'm like, well you know my client in Hong Kong. It's so fun.

Emily Wong: I feel so embarrassed that I missed that one message from you that went to my junk mailbox of the drawings about the tea doodles.

Katrina Ubell: Oh, have we ever talked about that? You do like the most adorable, like I have, I mean, I'm just going to say this publicly on this podcast like, secretly, I really was like, wait, could we commission her? In fact, actually, would you let us use maybe one of your drawings for the image for this podcast?

Emily Wong: Absolutely, yes.

Katrina Ubell: Oh my gosh, we'll figure, we'll sort it out on the back end, we'll figure out which one we should do but you just happened to share, well you should talk a little more like you feel like

sometimes if you draw it, you're able to kind of see that pattern better.

Emily Wong: So I'm an artist. And so I tend to see things in images. And so when I'm journaling, what will often happen is that an image will pop into my head, and then I'll draw it and that actually helps me kind of along my journaling process. And what I've done is that so I call them, so I call them T doodles, thought doodles kind of like on downloads. And what I've done is the ones that I like the best, I've made them kind of nicer, I colored them in and I sent them to your team as a thank you, for all the amazing work that your team does.

Katrina Ubell: Oh my gosh, we seriously, we're all dying. We're like, "What? We love her even more now." This is so great. This is so cool. And I think my initial way of thinking is like, I'm not particularly artistic, like that's not something that comes naturally to me. But I have actually, I don't know, read or saw or something that this is something that actually can be developed. A lot of people think they're not artistic, but if you want to learn how to draw, this is actually a skill that you can develop. So now I just tell myself, this is an undeveloped skill that I have, but it's undeveloped. But that is just not anything that I have in my wheelhouse of capabilities right now. So I just find that so amazing. And it just makes so much sense maybe, because I'm a pretty visual person too. And so I often have kind of images in my mind. And so you just are able to put them out actually onto paper, which is so fun. That's so great every time.

Emily Wong: One of the things that I teach in my kind of healthy aging is that mindful creativity is actually a form of meditation. So it's hard sometimes just to sit there or whatever. But actually, if you're focused on doing an activity, and it could be like creating a mandala, it could be like making a collage or whatever, that actually is a way to just train your brain to focus on this one project. It's pretty simple. You have to make some very simple decisions and just go with it.

Katrina Ubell: And just do it. You know, I agree. I mean, back in early medical school, I did run a marathon. My body was an absolute

trashed mess through the whole thing. So unless you think like, "Oh, my God, she ran the marathon." Yeah, it almost killed me. But I do have to say that it was like that first year of medical school, I actually started training right before I went through a really intense breakup with my boyfriend at the time. And all of that running was actually like bomb for my soul.

Because I really could just go into a meditative state. The number of times I fell, I can't even tell you because I would be so not even inhabiting my body but I turned on something, just go flying. So I always remember that it would take maybe a couple miles, like once you start running that many miles, it takes couple miles to get kind of comfortable into that zone. And then it's just like, you could just feel like you could go forever. Yeah, it's such an incredible experience. So one thing I've recently I mean, now we're like totally just chatting, and everyone gets so satisfied. But something I've been experimenting with is sound meditation. So actually creating sound and having that be the meditation, I really liked that. Because like you said, it's something to do. And it's different than sit there in the quiet, and try not to think of anything, which of course doesn't work. But our brains are like, oh, yeah, here's a rapid fire all of above. I'm trying new things.

Emily Wong: The guru at the University of Arizona program is Andy Weil. And what I love about the way he teaches meditation is that we're actually all meditating all the time. We just don't think of it that way. So when you brush your teeth, it's going to take a minute or two, and that's a meditation. When you wash the dishes, or load the dishwasher or unload the dishwasher, that is actually kind of a ritualistic thing where you can kind of just not even think about what you're doing, you don't have to pay attention. That is a meditation. So he encourages us and I think you do too, is to not be always like have to be listening to something or be distracted. Just allow yourself to be doing that task or the minute or two or whatever it takes.

Katrina Ubell: That's the same thing with the eating for you, like being willing to be with yourself long enough to do whatever that task is. And that's what so many of us, we're like no, but being with

myself without other outside input is really uncomfortable. And that's what we have to learn how to change, right?

Emily Wong: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's being with ourselves. And I want to say like just kind of enjoying the simple pleasure of brushing, cleaning your teeth or having clean dishes. There is a pleasure to be had there that we're kind of like so over that.

Katrina Ubell: Well, I did that podcast on all those pleasures that are part of our life. They're there if you just pay attention, and it really can be like look at this, all the dishes are put away, the dishwasher is empty, or like the breakfast dishes are in there, whatever. And it's just like there's something calming about that and taking note of it, rather than jumping right to the next thing or constantly being bombarded with new information. Of course, I'm telling people like, don't listen to podcasts. That's the problem with podcasts. There's a balance that must be achieved to that—

Emily Wong: We both use that for ourselves.

Katrina Ubell: Exactly. Well, thank you so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you for coming and sharing your story. It's so inspiring. And yeah, you're just amazing. So thank you so much. Thank you.

Did you know that you can find a lot more help from me on my website? Go to katrinaubellmd.com and click on free resources.