



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

[00:00:08] Welcome to the Weight Loss for Busy Physicians podcast. I'm your host, master Certified life and weight loss coach, Katrina Ubell, M.D. This is the podcast where busy doctors like you come to learn how to lose weight for the last time by harnessing the power of your mind. If you're looking to overcome your stress, eating and exhaustion and move into freedom around food, you're in the right place. Well, hello there, my friend, and welcome to the podcast. I'm really excited to share with you some information today that I think is going to possibly make a big difference or it might be something that you're actually already doing and not being fully aware of how much it's actually helping you.

Sometimes it's hard to reverse engineer when things are good, right? When there's a problem. We're thinking about all the reasons we have that problem. When things are good and we're feeling good, sometimes we feel like it's just happened to us and we don't even know why or how. So when that happens, we don't know how to even recreate that for ourselves. So this is something I've been thinking about talking to you about for a little while now. And then I was coaching my clients in the Weight Loss for Doctors Only program yesterday, and it actually came up and I thought, okay, that's it, it's time. That's often how these episodes come about it all the moons sort of align and it's time to talk about this.

[00:01:27] Here's what I've discovered. So about a year ago. It's been a year now that I've been doing this on a super regular basis, and that is getting out into nature. So about a year ago, this time of year in Wisconsin, it's finally getting warm. I know those of you who live in other areas are probably feeling sad for me. But for those of us in the Northern hemisphere, it's pretty much consistently, you know, nice to be outside at this

point. Oh, when I do just want to say that right now up in my attic, I have the windows open because it's a beautiful day and I just wanted some fresh air. Normally, I would have closed those windows so that you didn't hear any nature sounds. And I thought, this is actually really appropriate that I have the windows open. So I left them open.

Whether you're able to hear any birds chirping or anything remains to be seen. We'll see. Or some wind chimes, but you'll see why this is relevant. So what we had decided we had a playground in our backyard for, I think, over ten years, like a wooden rainbow swing set type of thing. And it was starting to rot and my kids were getting older and bigger and heavier and they would get on this thing and it was like like this is not safe anymore. Like, literally there were pieces of wood from sort of like a roof area that were just like falling down.

[00:02:42] We're like, this needs to go, This is not good. So like so many other people, when the pandemic hit, we spent a lot of time outside because there were so few other places that we could go. So we were spending a lot more time in our yard than we had before. Where I live, our yards are small. It's like a little postage stamp. That's how I like it. I love a beautiful yard, but I do not like putting the work into creating a beautiful yard. So I like to just have a small little area where it's easy to keep it up and keep it nice and neat and looking good. And so we had decided, you know what?

We want to be able to use more of our backyard. We don't need the space where this playset, the swing set was anymore because it needs to be taken down. So what should we do in that area? And we thought, you know, it would be fun is to put in an additional patio in that area. It's a little bit tucked in behind our garage. Our garage is in this area for the most part are detached. So it's kind of like back hidden back there a little bit for some more privacy. And we thought, you know what? We could put like a hot tub back there and get some comfy lounge furniture and it would be a little bit more protected from the sun.

[00:03:43] We could get some really good umbrellas and it would be just a really nice outdoor living area. So we went through the process of having that swing set taken down and then having a landscaping company, you know, come and install everything that we needed. And like so many other people who had the exact same idea, it kind of took forever, right? All the landscaping companies were so busy, so backed up. I think

we had initially reached out to this company in 2021, in like February. I remember everything was still totally covered in snow and it wasn't able to really be installed until November. So we didn't really get a chance to fully enjoy it until last year. So once Spring hit a year ago, it was like, Oh my gosh, we've got it.

We ordered some patio furniture that was really nice and comfy and we got it all set up. So started spending more time outside, which was really, really nice. And at the same time I started wondering if maybe I should be a better pet parent. So I have a dog. He will be turning five in July. I can't even believe that. But he's a little Westie. His name is Auggie. If you know anything about Westies, they are Terriers, but they feel like they're slightly different than other terriers. They have a lot of personality. And by personality, that means that they're very cute. But also they can have an attitude.

[00:05:02] Obedience is not their strongest suit. They can be very barky. This is my second one. I haven't Mars, haven't been super barky, but they can get very, very barky and they can also just be kind of a little bit like pests, you know, like they just will bug you. Mine little Auggie. He will just come and like, step on your foot. He'll bump you with his nose and he just wants in and out. He just wants whatever he wants. And so I started to realize, you know what? I know this to be the truth, that I really should walk my dog regularly.

So I used to tell myself with our first dog who we got when we were interns. Crazy. I know, But we did that, you know, she was small and we could exhaust her in the house and we didn't actually have to walk her. And then she got diabetes when she was older and she had like a bundle branch block and like had exercise intolerance. And I think we did a decently good job of taking care of her, considering that we were residents for part of the time. And then we had, you know, small children for a lot of it. But, you know, I just kind of felt a little bit guilty like, you know, we probably could have worked a little harder. I'm giving myself the benefit of the doubt that I was busy. I had a lot going on, babies and all that.

[00:06:10] But still, I was kind of like, well, you know, with Auggie, I might want to think about this a little bit differently. Oh, also, they are not great walkers because they have to stop and sniff everything, pee on everything. It's not like, Oh, let's go out and have, like, a pleasant walk. It's like, not really like that. So I really first started last year getting

out into nature and walking him more when I discovered this area that's really pretty close to where we live, like maybe just a 3 or 4 minute drive away. That's like some county property that's pretty, you know, just kind of raw. It's like undeveloped.

And I would see people there when I was driving by walking their dogs off leash, and I was really nervous about walking my dog off leash because like I said, they're not obedient. So if I, you know, scream at him and tell him to come, I mean, maybe he'll come. It's a possibility. Probably not. Or at least not for a little while because they're also terrier. So if he's on the hunt for something, some little, you know, chipmunk or something, his brain gets like, hijacked and he just has to override that. But I did think I knew that it would be so fun for him to be able to run off leash every time I took him to a dog park. He loved it. But he would also just get so incredibly disgustingly filthy that it was like, you know, had to build that into it.

[00:07:21] It's like, okay, we go to the dog park and then I have to have time to give him a full bath, you know, the whole night. And they don't like getting wet either. So I thought, you know what? I want to try this area. I call it the field. I want to try taking him there and seeing if he'll behave himself. So I went with my husband, thought, you know, between the two of us, we could probably wrangle him pretty well if he was misbehaving. And so we started taking him there. One loop.

It's like also kind of hilly, which is nice because it's just pretty flat where I live in general, really just, you know, beautiful, like meadow kind of area. They, I think I don't know who somebody took on an initiative in the last maybe 5 or 10 years to plant a lot of just, you know, natural plants that grow wild in Wisconsin in this area. So it's just gotten really, really pretty. And the flowers, these perennials, just, you know, different ones bloom throughout the year. It's just really nice. So about a year ago, my husband and I are like, all right, let's go. We'll try it out and see how he does. It's one loops about almost a mile. And he just I mean, if there was ever just a way to assess sheer glee in an animal, that is what is the expression of this dog.

[00:08:32] He was so happy. I mean, like just so gleeful and joyful and just so, so, so, so happy. And so we would be able to still walk because we could take him off leash and he could stop and sniff, and then he would come and catch up with us. And he was able

to run like top speed, which he usually isn't able to do so much. So he was loving this a ton, and I was really enjoying it too.

I was like getting out in fresh air, out in nature, just a different type of a walk than walking in the neighborhood. And we have sidewalks in my neighborhood, which is nice, but still it's just he would just have to stop and sniff everything all the time. It's like I always would say that taking him for a walk in the neighborhood is a compliment to even call it a walk as a compliment because it's a lot of standing around. So anyway, I started taking him there pretty much like in the evenings whenever the weather was nice, which was most of the time. So we'd finish up dinner or maybe a little bit before dinner, but more when the sun was starting to set a little bit and it wasn't quite as warm. I would take him out there and, you know, we'd do maybe 1 or 2 laps and then sometimes even three laps.

[00:09:35] And I noticed like, I mean, he would just be wiped. He was so tired, you know, he was just a very well behaved dog when he got that energy out, it was really good for him. So I started doing that more regularly and if I couldn't take him to the field, he was like starting to expect it. He wanted it. So I'd take him on some walks in the neighborhood, too. And so I was doing that every evening, and I started to just notice how it was such a nice end cap to my day. I would get outside, the sun would be setting. Sometimes there was a pretty sunset.

You know, people are kind of like winding down their days, but sometimes outside just kind of, you know, you know, right now I just feel like in the world, a lot of people just really keep to themselves. But it was a little bit more of an opportunity to say hello to different neighbors and stuff. Not even people I know or anything, but just, you know, saying hi. Things like that. And I started noticing all my time of standing around in the neighborhood of how beautiful some of the trees are and just looking at different parts of people's yards, like different plants that they had. Have planted in different flowers and how there's actually some different mosses and lichen on the trees and how it would be different if it had just been raining.

[00:10:43] And I just started to notice this like palpable stress reduction in myself when I was able to get outside, whether I went to the field or I just walked doggie in the neighborhood, it really helped me a lot. And so then gradually over the course of time, I

started to take him for a quick walk in the neighborhood in the morning as well. If I had time and I did get up earlier to be able to do this, because I also had learned about how, you know, just our circadian rhythms and I've been trying to work on improving my sleep.

And one thing that can really help is getting light in your eyes first thing in the morning, especially when the sun is low on the horizon and then same at night. So if you're outside getting that low horizon light in your eyeballs, it helps your brain to know either it's time to get up, you know, wake up, let's get moving, or it's time to wind down. And, you know, sleep is going to be coming soon. And I was noticing that it really was helping me, really always struggled for a long, long time with consistent sleep. And this was really helping me to be tired appropriately and to just feel kind of ready for the day better. It was actually a noticeable for me. Like I go when I do this, it's not exercise. I wouldn't count it as exercise. I would count it as steps.

[00:11:56] We can call it steps, but it's not exercise, but just getting out there, getting that fresh air in the morning, you know, the world's just kind of waking up. It was just really, really, really nice. And again, like dogs are creatures of habit. And so I started getting really used to it to the point where if I didn't take him, he was not particularly pleased. And when I did take him, particularly in the morning, he was just kind of a happier guy during the day. You know, I work from home. He was less barky. He was just less kind of like annoying, to be quite honest. Like he would just kind of like chill out and take naps.

And he just seemed more content. And of course, I know it's better for him in terms of his physical health as well. And it's probably not bad for me, even if I'm not moving like in a traditional sense of a workout or anything like that. So I didn't really set out to set this as a habit or for this to be anything that I would do regularly. And to be honest with you, I really kind of thought, well, once winter hits, I mean, let's just see how is this going to go? Because like I said, I live in Wisconsin. Well, so now I'm coming off of walking my dog twice a day, consistently all throughout the winter. And that's how much it helps me.

[00:12:59] The only times I've really missed are if I have to get up really early to go to the airport or if there's like lightning. I mean, one time I literally looked at him and I said

to him, I'm like, Listen, buddy, I'm not risking my life for you today. That's not going to be happening. I'm not getting struck by lightning so that you can get your walk. But I will look and see like, is there going to be a break in the weather? We should go then. And I invested in a good coat for him and we even had to get like these little kind of booties that sort of look like just like thick rubber balloons that we would put on his paws because it would be so cold sometimes that he couldn't even really walk.

He'd be like hobbling along, holding his paws up because it was, you know, uncomfortable for him. He doesn't really like having those put on at all or even taken off, but he loves a walk so much that he's willing to put up with it so that he can have a walk. I've had people say they're like, Oh my gosh, that's amazing. He keeps them on. I'm like, Well, he loves taking a walk and he knows there's no other way we're going out. So he's willing to tolerate it. So I made it through all of that. I got I think they're called yaktrax, like these things you can stretch over your boots or your shoes that give you more traction for when it's slippery.

[00:14:04] You know, I really went out there like I figured out how to bundle myself up and be really warm. And the other thing that really, really helped me in the mornings in particular was that he's so slow with sniffing is that I would take like my warm drink in my to go cup with me out so I'd be out there, you know, it just woke up. I'm tired. I don't want to be cold, but now I've got my nice warm drink with me. And so weather for you. That's tea or coffee or whatever it is you like to drink.

Like it is kind of nice to get out there and even do it now, even when the weather is warmer, it's just kind of like rather than, you know, sitting and reading the paper and drinking coffee, I'm like out kind of just taking a nice little stroll. So I've been noticing how this is really, really helped me a lot. And I think that connection to nature is really important. I've noticed that when I travel and I don't have it, I really miss it when I get home. I'm so grateful to have it back. And I've been thinking like, I think this needs to be something that we need to spend more time on. And like I said, I was just coaching a dear client who's been in my program for a while and she was just telling me how she's just in a funk.

[00:15:06] She's just for about a month, been having a hard time. And I understand because I've been through those times too. And I bet you have as well, right, where it's

just like nothing's really different. It's just everything feels hard, you know what I mean? Like, everything at work seems harder. She was sharing some of the frustrations of what it's like to be a doctor in today's world. Patient expectations and just all the things and just being in that funk and things are not great and what to do about this. Because when you're first learning this work and you learn about the thinking cycle, it's easy to be like, Well, I just need to just change my thoughts, you know, and yes and no, right?

Like, yes, sometimes we can do that and sometimes it's just not really available to us. And what I mean by that is you try to come up with, you know, umpteen new thoughts and none of them feel true. None of them resonate. That's just not the thing that's going to change, you know, turn the tides or make things better. So I was talking to her about just thinking about what are some of those things that you can do that just make life a little bit better? And one of those things for me is being out in nature. And so there's actually data.

[00:16:15] I got a lot of information for this podcast from the American Psychological Association. I mean, this is like real stuff. This is not just like woo woo ooh nature. It's like, no, this is real stuff here. So, you know, the things that I think also contribute to us struggling is that we spend a lot of time inside. You know, we're looking at technology all throughout the day. And even when we're not at work, we're still looking at screens when we're home and or wherever else we go. You know, when we're inside, there's a lot of fluorescent light, especially if you're in a hospital setting or a clinic setting. It's just, you know, it's not that comfortable for us. And I think it's easy to just be like, oh, what's the big deal?

But over time, I think for many of us, it really can impact us negatively. The other thing is that, you know, when we're inside a lot, we're just breathing in this recycled air. And it, you know, might be purified, maybe not, but also particularly if you're well, even in a clinic setting, but particularly in a hospital setting, you know, there's other like chemical odors and like body fluid odors. And there's just things like that that we're breathing in all day. And, you know, for some of us then into the evening and into the night and it just can affect us. So really what's very clear and this is proven in research is that nature exposure really provides benefits for us both physically and psychologically in terms of our well-being.



[00:17:38] So I'm just going to list off here for you a short list of some benefits of being out in nature. Number one, improved attention. Number two, lower stress. Would you like to be less stressed? Lower stress. Number three, better mood. That sounds good. Number four, reduced risk. A psychiatric disorders. That's awesome. Number five, Increased empathy and cooperation. That's really, really helpful when you're dealing with the general public. Number six, Happiness. Increased happiness and subjective well-being. That sounds good. I'd like that. Number seven, positive social interactions. So an increase in positive social interactions and decrease in mental distress. I mean, okay, I think I'm getting sold here. Number eight, increased meaning and purpose in life.

I mean, what are the downsides of this? Well, let's actually speak to some of those downsides. Okay. So I do just want to note that not everybody has the luxury or privilege of living in a place where it's safe for them to be walking around outside necessarily. So that's something that we have to take into consideration. The other thing is, depending on your work schedule and the time of year, you might be only leaving work or outside of work when it's dark outside. So that's something to be dealt with. Now, what I worked on with the Darkness situation is and honestly even the safety situation, because sometimes it literally 4:30 p.m.

[00:19:02] in December, early January here, it's basically dark. It's so sad when that happens. It just wasn't possible for me to get out and walk in that time frame. So I went out and got some pepper spray and and, you know, taught myself how to use it, basically. So I feel comfortable with that. I don't feel the need to use that when I am walking during the day. But at night I take it with me. I also realized that my dog is very protective at night, like sometimes annoyingly so. But also I'm kind of like, Well, it's kind of good to know that he's got my back, because I do think that crimes of convenience tend to happen less when it's inconvenient. Like there is a dog that you're going to have to contest with.

So if there's a pet you can walk with, that can be helpful as well. But also, like if that's not possible, then taking advantage of when it is possible, right? So sometimes we just have to get really solutions focused, meaning maybe it's, you know, at your lunch break or in the middle of the day figuring out a way to do this, really taking advantage of days off or weekends. That can be another way that we that we can approach those kinds of things. But I also want to talk about some other ways to get nature that are not so much

like getting outside and walking necessarily. I mean, I do think that even just sitting outside, I know for me, I cannot wait to be able to spend more time sitting outside.

[00:20:21] So you don't even have to be moving necessarily. If you have a balcony you can go to and you can sit out there if it's really, you know, loud or whatever, you can put on noise canceling headphones. Maybe if it's like, you know, a lot of street noise that bothers you or something like that, like just being outside, getting some air, it really can be very, very helpful. There's actually research that shows they actually did some studies where they asked people to just look out the window for 40s and it improved their experience.

So, you know, just looking at the window and enjoying any nature that you can see out there can be really helpful because it's easy for us, right, to be like, I can't do that. That's not going to work. Like, let's get solutions focused here. So even 40s, even just a minute can work. Even, you know, you have you're walking from one place to another rather than just being all up in your head and thinking about whatever. Can you look out the window? Can you just, you know, from the parking lot into the building, can you just look around? What is there to look at? Sometimes when we're in a city, right? Like urban nature counts, too. Maybe there is a dandelion growing in the cracks of the pavement and that dandelion is blooming.

[00:21:26] You know, just looking at that flower for a second, like just enjoying that. I know that there's this really, really big weed in a neighbor's yard. That is the kind that's really, really, really hard to dig up. It's like super flat. And I know this type of weed, like when you pull it, the root, the taproot will just break rather than pulling up. And and I was looking at it and I was like, oh, you know, like normally my initial response would be like, ooh, weed bad, right?

But I was like, Oh, it's kind of a kind of a neat shape. It's like kind of interesting and different. And then we had a little, a little sprinkle of snow one day and it was coated in just like a light dusting of snow. And I was like, Oh, that's actually really kind of pretty the way that looks. So we have to be on the lookout. We have to be looking for it. Right now, everything is leafing out here and, you know, there's spring flowers. Like I'm just every time I'm out there trying to have a look, notice things that are different, looking at the trees, looking how things are changing and just creating a connection to that.

So that's what's really important. It's, you know, the being out there is helpful, but also it's that sense of connection to nature or the overall natural world. I mean, it really contributes to happiness even if you're not physically immersed.

[00:22:39] So I know some people are super into being plant parents, you know, they love having plants in their home. That can be a great option as well if that's just a part of it. Figuring out like some people say, Oh well, but then I go out and it's like it's too hot and it's too this and it's too that. I want to just encourage you to. Think of solutions. What are options? Maybe a different time of day, maybe getting, you know, a good umbrella or a good shield or like I know years ago I took my son on a service trip to the Dominican Republic in July.

My goodness gracious. It was so hot, so humid. And I knew that I can be a pretty fragile flower in the heat like that. Like my body is, you know, just not designed or maybe adapted to being in such intense heat. And so I got essentially like a parasol. It was it's like a, an umbrella that on the outside of it, it has like a reflective, like metallic kind of coating or whatever. And you could still use it in the rain, but it also has some air flaps to it. And I would use that to create my own shade. And it made a huge difference. I don't know what I would have done without that thing. It helped me so much, just made it so that I could be outside where there was no other shade and create my own shade so I could be more comfortable and able to do what I was there to do.

[00:23:55] So all of this to say that I want to really encourage you to think about this. I want to encourage you to start thinking about how you can incorporate some nature into your life. I have also So here's this. I'm like, okay, so I walk my dog, I get outside and get nature. I'm having my warm drink in the morning, which is so nice. And then I've added a fourth benefit. So I'm getting all these things done at a time. I don't do this every single time or even every single day, but I found this app that I'm super loving called the Healthy Minds app. It's free.

If you like it, you can give a donation. And they it's a whole like meditation program, but they also do some teaching. And it's not just like meditation. It's also teaching you some other things that just research shows promotes well-being and good mental health and stuff. And it's all research backed and the meditations can be active meditations. So I will listen to one of the active meditations while I'm walking my dog because as long as

you're doing something that's like pretty repetitive or doesn't require a ton of your attention, you can do these things. Because I'll just be honest with you, the stage of life I'm at right now, if I just ask myself to like sit down and do a meditation, first of all, I will never think of it.

[00:25:10] It just never occurs to me. And then day after day, I'm like, Oh, I never I still didn't do it. So that's just the stage of life. I've had different stages and seasons at other times where I could do it more, but right now that hasn't been happening for me and this is a way that I can get it in. And so much of what they're doing is, you know, awareness, awareness of your surroundings, awareness of what you're hearing, awareness of your breath like, things like that. And those are all things that I want to be more aware of when I'm outside anyway.

So it has been absolutely brilliant. There have been days where I come back from that walk and I'm like, I am winning at life. I feel great, got out in nature. I got some fresh air in my lungs. I've moved my body a little bit like, This is so great. I'm just so happy that I've come to this conclusion and really stuck with it so I can see those benefits. So, you know, sometimes we're like, you know, exercise isn't in the mix for me right now, or I just need a change of pace and I need to do some different things or I just don't know what to do to get myself out of this funk or just kind of this feeling of, you know, maybe pre burnout or some hopelessness or things like that.

[00:26:17] Like, I really want to encourage you to get out into nature. You can go to water, you can go to green spaces, try them out and see what works best for you. For me, right now, the green spaces are closer. I'm loving those. But there's also a river I can walk by if I want to and if I really want to go, I can go to Lake Michigan and it looks like the ocean because it's so big and I can get some blue space interaction as well. That's what they call that.

So. That's my challenge and encouragement for you this week. Go get outside, even if it's just, you know, you have a moment at work, Just go out the back door and just stand there for a minute, breathe some fresh air. Look at what there is to look at. Take it all in. Maybe listen to some birds chirping and just let nature do its work for us. We really don't have to do much except just get out there and be present with it. All right, friend. I hope this makes a big difference for you as it has for me.

And I wish you all the best this week, and I'll talk to you next time. Take care. Bye bye.  
Ready to start making progress on your weight loss goals. For lots of free help, go to [katrinaubellmd.com](http://katrinaubellmd.com) and click on Free Resources.