



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey, everybody. How are you? Welcome to the podcast today. So excited to have you here. We're already on episode number 12. I was like, "Gosh, this is going by fast." So, I want to just jump in today right away to a listener question. I got a question on episode 7, which was about overcoming your weight set point. You may recall that one if you've been listening up until this point. If you have not listened to that episode yet, I highly recommend that you listen to that one right after this one. It's going to give you a lot of really, really good information about the science behind what I recommend for my clients.

So the person who submitted this just give me her initials and it's KRT. So KRT, she wrote "Hi, Katrina. This episode was a game-changer for me. I have been snacking all day long without realizing I was sabotaging weight loss. Thank you for making this podcast. I would love to hear more about what types of things you eat, particularly I worry about the types of fats I am choosing. Are they healthy or unhealthy? Also, my husband is vegetarian but my kids and I eat meat, so we try to eat vegetarian meals probably three times a week. Do you have any suggestions for vegetarian meals?"

So I wrote back to KRT in the comments of that episode number 7, and I gave her some information about the fats which I can read to you guys here a little bit, but I just wanted to tell you a little bit more about what I eat as well in case any of you have been wondering that. As far as the fats go, whether they're healthy or unhealthy, for the most part we're going for full-fat meats like the fat that's in there. The plant-based fats that I eat and encourage others to eat are avocados, nuts and unsweetened nut butters. By the way, my favorite unsweetened peanut butter is from Whole Foods, if you have one.

Their 365 brand of peanut butter is unsweetened. It's natural peanut butter, but it doesn't separate so much. Because really, is there one single person who likes to mix up that peanut butter with the hard-as-a-rock peanut butter at the bottom and the super oil slick at the top? Right? I mean, I love peanut butter, but not enough that I want to do that all the time. It has a brown top to it. It's like a brown cap and it comes in a pretty big size. To me, it tastes pretty much exactly like Jif or Skippy, which was what I grew up on ... because those ones, Jif and Skippy have sugar added, so if you have a Whole Foods and you want to try it out, I definitely recommend that one.

Also olive oil, full-fat unsweetened or very low-sugar salad dressings, so that's going to be ranch or blue cheese. I have a couple clients who will just drizzle olive oil on their salads and squeeze some lemon on it. I often tell my clients if you want to make a vinaigrette, then make it like the French do: mostly oil, a little vinegar and really blend that up. Make sure you're really tossing it well so you're consuming that. You don't want all that dressing to be sitting in a lake at the bottom of your bowl.

Also, other full-fat dairy, so we're talking full-fat sour cream, full-fat heavy whipping cream, full-fat cheese. If you're doing mozzarella, make sure it's not part skim and get the full-fat, whole milk kind. Also some people will do the whole milk yogurt. Now yogurt does have some naturally occurring sugars in it just in the form of lactose. I've found that some people find it to be so tart anyway. They have to add so much fruit to it to get it to be palatable that they decide not to eat that much yogurt because they're getting all the additional natural sugar that's in there. Other people do fine with it, so I leave that up to the individual client and also just see what kind of results they get. If they're struggling, that might be something that we mix up.

Other than that, also eggs and ... A lot of people really like coconut oil or coconut butter or coconut cream, and that's totally fine. That's great. I personally am not a coconut fan. I just don't care for it. I really, really tried because everybody thinks it's amazing, apparently. Everyone in my life is like, "It's so good." I'm like, "I just don't like it. It's just not my thing." So if it is your thing, feel free and go for that. I haven't eaten meat in many years because I'm a vegetarian, but you're definitely looking for the higher-fat ground beef which if I recall, I think that was called ground chuck, back in the days when I used to buy that. I don't remember, but whatever the higher fat percentage is. You're not draining that off, you're mixing that in, like say if you're making tacos or something.

And then other fattier cuts of meat, like if you're doing chicken, you can do the dark meat or like the thighs, things like that. That's going to give you more fat ... or a fattier kind of fish like salmon would be great as well. As far as what I eat, I did a podcast about constraints. We eat a lot of the same stuff over and over again. I'll be honest, one of our favorite meals is rice and beans. I know it sounds so college kid, but we get these beans dried, so they're dried beans that we get from this ... I mean, this sounds so hipster, hoity-toity, but I like an artisanal bean company. I fully realize how ridiculous this sounds. I can't even say it without laughing at myself.

A number of years ago, my mother-in-law sent us beans from this place for Christmas. We were like, "Okay, beans, whatever." Didn't think too much of it and made them and we were like, "Oh my god, these are amazing!!" Comparing these, it's like apples and oranges comparing those beans to the beans that you get in the store. They have all these really unusual types. They all have so much flavor. They're super fresh. And for beans they're expensive, but comparing it to meat, it's actually not that expensive. I'm actually on ... They have a bean club, so you get I think six pounds of beans and then a couple of other things every three months or so and we love it.

My kids will take the leftovers for lunch in a thermos to school. They just think it's amazing. And when we do the rice, we do brown rice and I put a ton of olive oil on it and mix that in and then some salt too. It makes it taste super yummy. They love it. I have clients who do butter, too. I'm not against butter, it's just that I try to go plant-based a little bit more when I can. I cook the beans in the Instant Pot, so super-duper easy and then I also cook ... All my brown rice goes in the Instant Pot as well. So if you have a rice cooker, for sure go ahead with it. For me, I don't. Just 22 minutes on high pressure with the Instant Pot and it's just perfect.

So besides that, we do a little bit of tofu. We do sometimes some eggs. We do make a frittata or something or omelets, or scrambled eggs, easy stuff like that. Other than that ... I'm just trying to think what's in my house. Oh yeah. Lentils from Trader Joe's. Trader Joe's has these pre-cooked lentils that are already kind of seasoned that are in the produce section. What I do is I heat those up and I drizzle on olive oil and garlic salt and seriously, my kids, they love it. It's really, really good and it's really good on a salad, too, like you put that on as the protein for your salad.

So not everybody does well on a vegetarian diet because it does tend to be higher carb. Some people really do better on a low-carb diet, so then you're probably going to want to do a little bit more of the animal flesh, meaning fish and meat. If you have to do that, that's totally fine, but for us, pretty much every day my dinners are some sort of protein which usually for me at dinner is going to be tofu, lentils, or beans. Then I do some vegetables, typically some cooked vegetables and then I make myself a salad. Pretty much eat that every day. And then for breakfast I usually have a little bit of oatmeal with some fruit. I have couple of eggs usually, so I'll have two hard-boiled eggs. I can scramble them, I can make a little omelet if I want. Sometimes I'll saute up some veggies and eat that with the eggs.

So I do get variety. I get to pick what I'm going to eat, but I'm really, really constraining it down. In terms of deciding what to have, it's like I'm deciding which fruit I'm going to have. I'm deciding how to eat my eggs. Of course, I have coffee and cream because you know, I love coffee and that's basically it. For lunch, I have veggies, fruit, a little bit of fat which I usually have in the form of peanut butter, and a lot of times my protein is just some cheese, like some really yummy cheese. Of course, I get to pick which kind of cheese. I usually go and get some really high quality cheese, so it tastes really good. That's it.

It's super satisfying, super quick to put it all together and make my lunch. It's never hard and it packs really well. So that's usually what I do when I'm eating three meals a day. Hopefully that gives you some ideas of what to do. We also will eat soups. Like tonight, in fact, we're having homemade tomato soup which we all love. I don't want to spend too much time in this podcast talking about the food that I eat, but I'll just tell you really quick how I make this. It doesn't even really have a recipe; I just kind of wing it, but I saute up two onions and a bunch of garlic, at least six or eight cloves and a bunch of olive oil and melted butter. Once that's cooked through, then I add three of the big cans of whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes. Those are those Italian tomatoes that are super-duper good.

I just get the plain ones, because I'm adding my seasoning later. I dump those all in and bring that to a little bit of a simmer just to let the flavors meld a little bit, not for very long. Then I take some fresh basil and wash that up really quick, chop it up and turn the heat off and stir in the basil so that it wilts. I don't really want it to cook because I want to have really good flavor. Of course, some salt and pepper. And then if I want to keep it in that pot, I take my immersion blender, that stick blender kind of thing, and just go through and blend it all up.

That leaves a teeny bit of texture to it, like a little bit of a chunk, but if I want it really smooth, then I use my Blendtec blender, which is like a Vitamix. I just blend that thing through. It's perfectly smooth. It's like baby food. Then I stir in some heavy whipping cream. How much? I don't measure, but I probably use about half of one of those little cartons. How much are those cartons? Kind of like a milk container. How much is that, 16 ounces maybe? I'm not even totally sure, but I just put about half of that in until it seems like enough and it's seriously so good.

What you're getting there is you're getting your fat and you're getting veggies. Then I'll have something for some protein and probably a salad with it, so super easy, super delicious. I can't stress enough, keep your food really simple and constrained and find really, really good things you love to eat that are quick and easy and then eat them over and over again. My kids just today, "Tomato soup, woo-hoo!" They're not bored of it. They love it. It's so good.

Okay, let's move along. Thank you KRT for submitting that question. If you guys have questions, please go to the show notes page for this episode, which you'll find at katrinaubellmd.com/12 and down at the bottom of the show notes page, there's a comments section and submit your comments for me, any questions that you have and I will get back to you. All right, today we are going to turn around here a little bit. We're going to start talking about emotions. And not only just emotions, but when we have emotions that are really heavy and uncomfortable. You know what I'm talking about, right? Those times when it's not just a minor annoyance. You're not just a little bored, like something really, really difficult is going on for you in your life and the emotions that go along with that are really pretty intense.

Right now I have a client whose father is going through cancer treatment and she is not having a lot of pleasant emotions most of the time. She's really sad, she's scared. She might be a little bit depressed at times. She doesn't really want to change that overnight. It seems unreasonable to just go, "I'm not going to think about that anymore so I can change my feelings." She doesn't necessarily even really want to feel calm about it or neutral or content about it. Feeling afraid and sad feels very authentic to her during this time where they're finding out more information and coming up with a treatment protocol for him.

A similar thing happens when people either separate from their spouses or divorce. There's a lot of uncomfortable negative emotions that can feel really overwhelming and inescapable, really. You can feel really isolated and lonely, maybe because your friends don't really understand what you're going through or because you're losing some of your friends in the divorce as people take sides. These emotions can stay with us for many months, possibly even years depending on how long the divorce takes and whether the two of you are co-parenting, meaning you have to still stay in touch and communicate about the kids and that kind of thing.

What I want to share with you guys today is what happened to me a number of years ago that caused very serious, deep grief. And this isn't something that I typically lead with when I am getting to know people, but at a certain point in a new friendship or relationship, I usually find that I want to tell the person about it because it was and really still is such a huge part of my life and my family's life. I feel like you and I here are getting to know each other and developing a relationship through this podcast, so I want you to know about it as well. And if anything, I always want to be able to pay forward all the help and support that I got during this time, so if today's episode ends up helping somebody else in a similar place in their lives, then it's totally worth it to me.

In fact, please share this episode with anyone who you think might benefit from it. And I also think that telling our story here is a way for me to honor her memory. So the day this podcast episode will be released is April 4th, and April 4th is the seven year anniversary of my daughter's death. She died while I was in labor with her when I was nine days overdue. Her name was Vivienne, which is pretty ironic because it means "life", but we had chosen that name for her before she died, so we just went with it and named her that.

So the process of conceiving her was difficult. We had naturally conceived our first son, but then had unexplained secondary infertility, which as a doctor is so difficult to accept. Like, "There's got to be a reason. There's got to be some reason, you know? How come nobody can tell us?" It was a really stressful couple-year-long process that started with us saying we'd never do IVF and finished with us doing IVF. We were super incredibly private about this struggle. Seriously, almost nobody in our lives knew and I even found myself feeling like I had to lie about it sometimes to people who are pretty close in my life, which was really strange.

Somehow, I just wanted the experience to be only for and about us. In fact, there's probably going to be a number of people listening to this who have known us for years who have no idea that this is what we went through. So we were super lucky because the IVF took on the first try. We were so excited until I was six weeks pregnant and had an ovarian torsion because one of my ovaries was still so big from the stimulation that it torsed. But seriously, that pregnancy saved my ovary because the infertility specialist got me right in as soon as I started having symptoms and then they immediately did an ultrasound right there in the office.

My husband recalls seeing the Doppler blood flow on the ultrasound and how the blood flow just stopped before it reached the ovary. I couldn't even look. I didn't see it. I was trying not to writhe around on the table and hold still for the doctor because the pain I was in was so horrible. But they immediately rushed me to the OR, the infertility doctor did the surgery and he was able to save my ovary and the pregnancy, so it just felt like a miracle. And then the rest of the pregnancy was totally normal, no worries. We found out we were having a girl and we were super excited and when I was overdue, I wasn't really surprised because I had to be induced with my other son, my first son, at 41 weeks.

I wasn't induced earlier this time because it was Holy Week and Easter weekend, which is a big deal here and so there were no scheduled inductions available at the hospital. Interestingly, they had offered me April 1st, but told me that the only reason those spots were available was because nobody wanted an April Fools' baby. "Nobody wants an April Fools' baby." And I never even critically thought about that statement. I just had a belief that my baby was safer in my belly than being forced out and I thought that if nobody else wanted that due date, then neither did I.

So we scheduled an induction for the day after Easter, April 5th. I had a BPP heading into the weekend. Everything looked good, so there really was no reason to worry. So then the night before Easter, I went into labor on my own and the contractions weren't long enough or close enough together to even call L&D, so we decided to stay home and try to make it to the Easter egg hunt in the morning, which ... So I should back up and tell you that Easter was always one of my absolute favorite holidays growing up. I loved egg hunts and all the decorations and the candy. I always liked decorating my house for Easter way more than even for Christmas.

Think when you live in a cold climate, you're just excited that spring is coming. I always had dishes of Easter candy for about a month before the holiday, and in case you're wondering, yes, this definitely did fuel my desires and urges for snacking and overeating candy. Naturally, I loved putting on an Easter egg hunt for our son and I really didn't want to miss it because I was sitting around at the hospital, so I labored all night at home. But by 6 AM, it was getting too intense, so we woke my son up and had him do the hunt early. I couldn't even make it through half of it. We had to go. It was time.

So I'll spare you the whole play-by-play. We don't need everybody sobbing in their cars on the way to work while they're listening to this, but what happened was they admitted me, couldn't find a heartbeat, and confirmed it with ultrasound. She had died. This baby that I wanted so desperately was now dead. It was absolutely unbelievable. You can imagine all the negative emotions that flooded in. It really felt crushing, like the weight of the emotions was suffocating me.

Thus began my first experience with real grief. I had never gone through deep, desperate grief before. I only ever had one living grandmother and she died when I was pretty young. I mean sure, I had my ups and downs in life, but never anything remotely close to this. And it's so interesting, because once I got my epidural and I could actually think straight, one of my first thoughts was "I've got to figure out how to do this right." And I didn't mean it like there's only one right way to grieve, but more like "I don't know how to go through something like this without completely screwing my life up, so I'm going to have to learn."

As we moms do, one of my first concerns of course is my four-year-old son, who was planning to come to the hospital later to meet his sister and how we were going to break it to him. And all within that first week, I learned about picking a cemetery plot, a headstone and planning a funeral service. Two days after I left the hospital, I was in the therapist's office because I knew I was going to need help if I was ever planning to go back to work as a pediatrician. I knew I would have to do some serious work on myself before plunging right back into the sea of babies and pregnant moms at my office.

All I wanted was a do-over, so I started reading every book I could find about pregnancy and infant loss. And I have to say, people really came out of the woodwork to support us. It was amazing and I'm still so grateful for all the cards and meals and flowers and hugs and tears and emotional support that I got. I can't say that one thing in particular was the thing that got us through, but reading those books was so instrumental to me being able to resolve my grief and start functioning normally again.

And now as a life coach, I can see why those books helped me so much. What they taught me is that grief is a process that you can't avoid. I still remember a quote that I read back then. It went: "Grief is patient. It will wait for you." And I knew that that meant that if I avoided the grief or resisted it and tried to move on with my life without actually working through it, I would either end up gaining 300 pounds or getting divorced or being horribly depressed or something.

So I actually scheduled our nanny to come some days so that I could work on my grief. I was basically carving out time to let myself go to that painful place to cry and read and long for her and worry and feel sorry for myself. And then I'd clean myself up and got back to holding it together for my son. Because when something really difficult and horrible happens, some of us will just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get to work doing what needs to be done and never checking in with ourselves as far as what's actually going on for us. We make everything about other people and use food or something else to make ourselves feel better.

If the uncomfortable emotions start to come in, we might look for some comfort food to avoid feeling bad. And we really develop this skill as doctors because when bad stuff's going down, who are the patients looking to for guidance? It's us. We're the ones holding it together. We're the ones running the code. We're the ones breaking the bad news. So everyone else is falling apart around us and we're holding it together for them.

We need to make sure we're taking time to process through those emotions on our own and not just trying to neutralize it with food or something else.

And I hear this pretty often from my clients, that they put on a considerable amount of weight after they had like say, a parent die. Immediately, right away we're often so grief-stricken that we don't have much appetite, but once the dust settles a bit and the help is gone and everyone's back to their normal life, we're still sitting there with the enormous weight of our emotions and we just want to get away. It's the same with relationship issues. It's the same with an ill friend or family member. For me, since I had 45 pounds of baby weight on my body and no breastfeeding infant to help me lose the weight, I actually got to work dieting and exercising.

Honestly, it was actually pretty therapeutic for me because seeing my body and having to wear maternity clothes without a baby to show for it just added insult to injury all day, every day. It felt like something I could control when so much else felt so out of control. But ultimately what I learned was how important it is to actually feel your emotions. Most of us haven't ever been taught how to do this. So the first thing to realize is that we as human beings are supposed to have negative and uncomfortable emotions. Nobody teaches us this. Without the negative emotions, we would never identify the positive emotions as positive. It's that contrast between the two that makes the good so good.

If you didn't know what sad felt like, how would you know what happy feels like? I usually tell my clients to count on about half of their emotions being negative. This is just part of our human experience. It does not mean that we're doing something wrong or something in our lives is wrong. It's totally normal and we need to accept that. When we don't accept that and we think that we should be feeling better all the time, that's when we start to buffer with food. That's when we try to neutralize those negative emotions by overeating.

And for people who don't use food in this way, they're the ones who are smoking or drinking or doing drugs or spending too much or working too much or gambling or addicted to porn. Everybody has a way that they can utilize when they want to escape negative emotions. Part of the reason we're so quick to try to escape these emotions is because we think they're so strong and powerful, like if they're too intense, they might actually kill us.

But let's review what a feeling actually is. All it is, and this applies to every single emotion, is a physical response created by chemical signals that are released by the brain and organs. So those signals are triggered by thoughts. Remember that thought model. We have our neutral circumstance that we can have thoughts about and our thoughts create our feelings. And you guys know my favorite example of this, right? You have a thought about public speaking. Your thoughts release chemical signals into the body that make you have the butterfly feeling in your stomach, the sweaty palms, the elevated heart rate. We call that feeling nervous. If you change your thoughts about the public speaking, the chemical signals change and the nervous feeling goes away.

With my daughter, the neutral fact or circumstance is "My baby died." I know it's going to be hard for some of you guys to believe that that's neutral, but it really is. "My baby died." It's a neutral fact. Then it's my thoughts about my baby dying that create the feeling of grief. We can feel any feeling and survive. I would go so far as to say that feelings really are harmless.

They are not the end of the world. I mean sure, they can be really uncomfortable for a time, but most of our day-to-day emotions will only last in our bodies for a few minutes before they dissipate.

This is such a revelation for people, especially people who binge eat. They get an overwhelming urge to eat a lot of food and they act on it to get the urge to go away, but if they allow the urge to be there and they actually just feel it, they find that it actually goes away relatively quickly. But what you have to believe is that you can feel the emotion and not make it worse by resisting it and making it more powerful than it is.

One of the best descriptions of this is a beach ball in a pool. Think about that. You have this beach ball and the beach ball is the emotion. You try to hold the ball under the water in the pool and you have to push really hard and work at it. It's hard and exhausting. This is what resisting an emotion is. Or you can let it float on the surface and that's effortless and that's feeling the emotion. Just letting it be there. Letting it flow through you and away from you.

Sometimes, though, something really bad happens and those emotions don't leave you in a few minutes. Maybe you had a bad outcome in the OR or you find out you missed a really important diagnosis in your patient. Maybe you just found out that you're being sued by a patient. Maybe your child got in trouble for doing something really bad. Maybe you're at a low point in your marriage. Maybe you were humiliated at work by a colleague. So the way to feel those emotions is to think about putting them in an imaginary backpack. You feel that weight on your back already when you're experiencing these emotions, so just envision a backpack there holding the weight of those emotions.

So you trudge through your day, you're doing your thing, you're completing all your obligations with 40 extra pounds on your back. You don't need to escape it. You don't need to avoid it. You don't need to react to it by complaining or freaking out on other people. You don't have to display outwardly anything at all. You have the courage to carry that weight. You remember that the feeling is harmless and you embrace that discomfort as part of your human experience and over time the backpack gets lighter, and before you know it you can take it off because it's empty.

Pema Chodron, who is a brilliant woman and author, says that when we fear and resist negative emotion, we suffer. But when we have compassion for ourselves and allow the negative emotion, we grow and thrive. For sure, I've grown as a human being since losing my daughter. I would absolutely not be the person I am today had I not gone through that loss. It changed my life in every possible way. But here's the thing: a lot of those changes have been really good. I don't take my children for granted any more. I became a much more deliberate and intentional mother. I value my friendships and family relationships so much more. I am now the one who walks towards the person who's grieving and I tell them that I'm sorry because I know how much it hurts to be ignored by people who you thought cared about you when you're in so much pain.

Of course, I will never say that I was glad that it happened. I don't even necessarily think that my life is better because of it. But I can definitely identify the good that came from the experience of it. I often tell myself that it happened exactly as it was supposed to because it did. I was supposed to have a baby that died because I had a baby that died.

That really helps me to accept it as reality and not fight for what should've been or could've been. I mean, I could easily focus on how I should've taken that April Fools' induction date. If they had induced on that day and had monitors on the whole time, maybe she would've been saved.

But this line of thinking doesn't serve any purpose because the reality is that she didn't tolerate labor and she's dead. Another thought that helps me when I think of that experience is that we made the best decisions we could with the information we had at the time and that feels really true and believable to me. So for those of you going through a really difficult period in your life right now, my heart goes out to you. Just know that feeling what you're feeling is normal and expected. Nothing has gone wrong. Don't let yourself fall into a pattern of avoiding it, resisting or reacting to your emotions. Let yourself feel them, because that is the path out of that dark place that you're in.

I'm sending so much love to you and I dedicate this podcast to my daughter, Vivienne Louise Rose. Talk to you next week. Take care. Bye bye.