



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well hello there, my friend! How are you? Thanks for joining me again on episode 15, Weight Loss for Busy Physicians. I'm Katrina Ubell. I have some really exciting news and that news is that tomorrow, I get to see Hamilton live. Those of you who have listened to the early podcasts know that I'm obsessed. My family is obsessed with the musical Hamilton. We live in Milwaukee and Chicago is not that far away. They have Hamilton playing there. I'm super excited to go. Yeah, it was crazy expensive to get tickets, but you know what? Sometimes you've got to treat yourself. That's what we're doing here.

We have spring break starting after school today. We're going to be dropping the kids off to spend the week with my parents actually, which will be really fun for them. On the way back, we're going to be driving through Chicago and we thought, "You know what? Let's go see Hamilton." We're going to be doing that. Super excited. Maybe going to hit up a few of the Chicago shopping ... The stores that we just don't have in the Milwaukee area and have a great week. I will report back next time about how it was. I'm sure it's going to be ridiculously amazing. I'm super excited. I'm going to have to make sure I'm not actually singing along like I do in the car. I'm going to have to just mouth it to myself probably or something like that. I'll let you guys know how it all goes.

All right. Today we are going to talk about goals. More specifically, your goal weight, but also other goals that we have in our lives. Let's start talking about that. If you're listening to this podcast, then you probably have at least a few pounds that you want to lose, I'm going to guess. Weight loss is a goal of yours. As we've discussed in previous podcasts, there's a difference between wanting something and committing to it. Let's review that. Wanting feels really safe and sometimes even noble. If I'm overweight, I should want to lose weight. I might desperately want to lose weight. I've had clients describe this desire like wanting to unzip their bodies and let their inner thin person out. The issue with wanting is that it requires no effort to want something. You don't have to move forward at all. If you only want a goal, you'll never take the action required to achieve it.

Let's think about medical school. At one point, you decided you wanted to go to medical school. Wanting it wasn't enough. If wanting it was enough, we'd have tons and tons of doctors. I remember freshman year in college how there were so many people who were premed. Remember that? I wasn't even premed at that time. I didn't even know I wanted to go to med school at that point, but I just remember everybody talking about it. Within a year or two, that number had drastically decreased.

Some of them simply found something else that they were more passionate about, but plenty didn't want to put forth the action required, that effort required to actually become a doctor. Doing things like studying, taking the hardest classes, working hard to get top grades, asking for help if they didn't understand certain concepts.

For all of you doctors listening, you understand what I'm describing. Wanting it wasn't enough. You had to commit. You had to take all the steps. If you had a setback or a failure, you reassessed and kept going. Maybe you didn't do great on the MCAT the first time. Maybe you didn't get into medical school the first or second try. For me, I didn't have as perfect of grades as a lot of other applicants. I majored in pretty much the most challenging major at my college. I did biomedical engineering with a concentration in mechanical engineering at Johns Hopkins. I worked my tail off, no joke, for pretty average grades. I did my absolute best. There was no lack of effort, but that still meant that my grades were not crazy impressive.

First of all, I put in the effort, the massive action required to get pretty average grades. Had I not worked as hard as I did, I would have gotten grades that no medical school would ever have even considered. Even though I did do the work, I still needed to figure out a way to convince the medical schools that they should take a chance on me. It would have been a lot easier to just want to go to medical school and hope that if I did what most people did, that it would work out for me. That wasn't going to be good enough. I was committed to making med school happen. I worked with a special advisor for my major who wrote my recommendation in a way where he was able to help the med schools I was applying to interpret my grades better. They knew and understood the level of work and intensity that was behind every B that I had on my transcript.

I made sure every application and secondary was filled out exactly according to the instructions. I made sure I didn't overlook anything that might make the admissions people doubt my dedication and commitment. Obviously it worked out for me. I could have easily listened to the regular premed advisor, who told me to take a year or two off and try to do other things to improve my application, but I was committed to med school right after undergrad. I didn't want to wait. I did everything I could think of to make what I wanted happen. I'm sure you have some sort of story like that too.

Maybe it wasn't with your schooling, but with something else. Maybe you fought harder for your marriage than you ever have fought for anything else. Maybe you decided to do, say, a triathlon or something and trained really hard and you were really committed to the training schedule, so that you would be able to finish it without passing out or ending up in the ER. Maybe you have a child with special needs and you've had to learn how to balance becoming a parent advocate all while still working, managing your household and keeping the rest of your life up. We know we have this skill. We just need to learn how to apply it to the weight and overeating issue.

What so many of us do is we say we're committed to losing weight and we start following a program. Then we have a little setback or hiccup. It can be something really relatively minor, like your call night blew up. You didn't make it to the grocery store or your family ate the food you thought you were going to eat, so now it isn't there anymore. We can make that mean that we failed. We tell ourselves a story about how we have to eat something. I've thought that so many times. Haven't you? "Well I have to eat something!" Or that we knew this new plan wasn't going to work because our lives are so crazy and that's just evidence again, right? "My call night blew up. My life is so crazy. I knew this wasn't going to work."

What we need to learn is the ability to watch the stories that our brains spin and question them. What is your brain offering and is it even true? Do you have to eat something? You probably don't. You have all this body fat on your body that you can access. Really, is it the new plan's fault that you didn't plan thoroughly enough? We don't want to also take it to the extreme, to the other end. I don't want you to take personal responsibility for the setback, but then turn that into an opportunity to beat yourself up because that also won't result in the weight loss that you want. We notice what our brains tell us and then we question that. Part of the work I do with my clients is to create an eating protocol that has many, many backup plans. We joke that we have plans A through G because emergencies do come up. Stuff happens.

You're on your way home, thinking you're going to make a nice dinner, and then the ER calls. Now you have to take somebody back to the OR or something crazy. We don't have to use these emergencies as excuses to not follow our plan. The plan then has all the backups, all the backup plans built into it. Creating this plan and then committing to it and doing it, even when it's easier to go off plan or you really feel sorry for yourself about what you're going through is the massive action needed to get the results you're wanting. You probably have an idea of what weight you'd like to weigh. I want you to ask yourself why you picked that number. Is it your pre-pregnancy weight? Is it the weight you were when you got married? Is it the weight you were when you were in high school? Is it just your old Weight Watchers goal weight? If you're going with your old Weight Watchers goal weight or something similar like that, I want you to question that a little bit. I'll tell you why.

When I had my goal weight back during my Weight Watchers years, that number was largely determined by the point at which my BMI was normal and I wouldn't have to pay to go to the meetings anymore. It really had nothing to do with what was a good weight for me. I'd get down to that number, tell myself that I'd keep following the plan and try to lose more weight while not having to pay. Well guess what? I never did the work necessary to commit to losing more weight. My goal weight was the goal. Once I reached that, I didn't create a new goal and I didn't create a plan. I had a little bit of a plan. I think it was just like a vague idea that I'd just keep going and see where my weight settled out. I bet you can guess where this story is heading, right?

I went to one or maybe two more meetings and then I didn't go back. I'd let things come up, so I wouldn't attend the meeting that I planned to go to. I had it planned and I'd let myself get distracted or do something that I thought was more fun. I'd tell myself that I wanted to see if I could maintain without counting the points. This sounded really noble in my brain, like a good challenge, but what it resulted in was me giving myself a pass and going back to my old eating habits. This is exactly how I kept yo-yoing with my weight. Now sometimes we honestly don't know what a good weight is for us. Some people haven't ever been at a normal weight during their entire adult years. They literally don't know where their bodies would even settle out or what would be a good place.

What I want to suggest is that you pick a weight that puts you in the middle of the normal BMI zone. There's the BMI range. I want you to pick a weight for your height that puts you in the middle. Now I know some of you now are thinking of sending me hate mail because I just said that, but hear me out on this. So many of us have beliefs about our bodies that create our beliefs about what is possible. I used to have these beliefs too. Let me share some of them with you. I'm tall and broad with wide hips and I build muscle really easily.

There's no way I can ever have a BMI in the mid-normal range. My shoulders are so broad. I'd wear a size large top no matter how much weight I lost. My thighs are so muscular and my hips are so wide that the smallest size pants I'll ever be able to wear is size 10. I have man calves and I'll always have to buy the wide-calf tall boots.

Insert your beliefs here, okay? I'm sure you have some. All of these beliefs are rooted in the past, in what we've known to be our experience of our bodies up until this point. We don't question these beliefs. We just believe them as though they're facts. We even get upset when someone suggests that we could weigh less, like I'm doing here. We dig our heels in and have an adult tantrum, but what I want to offer you today is that you get to create whatever body you want, even if you have no evidence that it's possible when you look to your past. Think about that thought model. The circumstance can trigger your thoughts. Your thoughts create your feelings. Your feelings drive your actions and your actions determine your results.

If you have no idea what I'm talking about right now, you're like, "Say what?" Then head back to the first couple episodes of this podcast and you'll hear a much more in-depth description of this thought model and then come back here. You literally can put anything you want in that R line. Any result you want. Now someone might say, "Well I couldn't weigh 80 pounds." My response to that is that actually, you probably could. If you were willing to do some really, really extreme things. Do you even want to weigh 80 pounds? What you put in the R line is something that you really want. Say you put 130 pounds in the R line. That's the result you want. Your body at 130 pounds. Now visualize your body at 130 pounds or whatever a stretch goal weight might be for you. Ask that future self what you had to do to get that body.

This sounds a little silly, I understand, but it's an amazing exercise. Stick with me here. You can write a letter to yourself from your future self. What would your future self tell you? Would she tell you to stop screwing around with your eating, to stop cheating on yourself behind your back by snacking and not food journaling? She probably would tell you to stop stressing out and being so impatient, because it's going to happen as long as you keep moving forward. She'd say that it's so fun to shop now since clothes fit so easily in regular stores. She'd let you know how much better you sleep and how much more energy you have. You can ask her how she lost the weight.

This is really just an exercise in tapping into your inner wisdom. Not letting your brain block your problem solving abilities by firmly believing old beliefs. One way that you can see how this works is if you were to think about writing a letter today to yourself five or 10 years ago. You might tell yourself, "Look, just keep on going on those dates because you're going to find Mr. Right. You're going to marry him and you're going to have an amazing life." You might tell yourself, "Just keep working hard. Keep applying to med school. You're going to get in. You're going to end up being the doctor that you so desperately want to be." There's so many things you could tell yourself. All the great things that you have now, you'd tell yourself in the past, your past self, "Just chill out. It's all good. Keep doing what you're doing. You're going to get there."

You can channel that in terms of your future self telling you the same thing. Giving you advice for your life right now. You pick a new goal weight that feels like a reach and your brain immediately brings up every reason why that's impossible. Every reason why it won't work. Because of your job, your body, your life in general. That's its job, to protect you. Your primitive brain thinks things like, "Why would we do something so extreme? That sounds really uncomfortable and dangerous."

Let's just stay home and watch Netflix and eat some popcorn." You don't have to believe that story. I like deciding to commit to achieving a normal BMI and then doing what it takes to get there. Once you're there, if you think you're too thin, then you gain some back deliberately and on purpose.

You then know what it takes to get your weight to that goal. My coach had suggested a weight for me that was five pounds less than what I weighed in ninth grade and was active on the swim team. I hadn't even fully gone through puberty yet at that point. I thought she was insane. I didn't see any way for that to be possible, but I agreed to have that be my goal and to get started losing weight pretty much begrudgingly. I think I figured, "Well she probably knows what she's talking about. Fine. I'll do that." As I got closer, I started to believe that maybe that weight was possible. Once I was about 10 pounds away, I could see it. It was going to happen. We like to say it was like ordering something on Amazon. You don't actually have it yet, but it's on its way. You've hit the Buy it Now button and you know in two days, it will be on your doorstep. It's in the mail. You're confident that it's coming.

I got to a point where I knew that weight was in the mail so to speak. Lo and behold, it's actually a great weight for me. Had I been allowed to choose my old goal weight, I'd be weighing five or 10 pounds more right now, which is fine if that's what I wanted, but I like this weight better. Clothes fit better. Listen, you guys. About those clothing size beliefs that I had, I now wear medium and small size tops and size six to eight in pants. If the pants have vanity sizing, I wear a size four. That is freaking ridiculous. I still can barely believe it. It's so fun. It keeps staying fun. Eating a cookie is fun for five minutes. It's fun to be able to wear clothes that fit you and look good every single day. All of this is available to you.

I also want to mention something about failures, like what I was talking about earlier. How sometimes we screw up and even though we planned, we managed to overeat or we got so hung up with crisis after crisis at work that we grabbed the quickest thing we could think of to eat, even though it wasn't on our plan. We can look at this like a failure or setback. We can choose to look at it like we were moving a few steps forward and now we've moved a few steps back again. What I want to offer you is the idea that even the failures can propel you forward down the path toward your goal, but only if you learn the lesson you need to learn from that failure. What I mean is that after the fact, you spend some time evaluating what happened. You tease apart how the mistake happened. Then you problem solve and come up with other things you could have done and what you'll do in the future when something similar comes up.

Then you let yourself put it to rest. You no longer hold it over your head. You don't use it as further proof that you can't do this or that you're undisciplined. You can decide to look at the experience as a lesson you needed to learn in order to achieve that goal. If you needed to learn that lesson, then it's not a setback, is it? Then it was required learning. It's propelling you forward. If you don't learn from it, then you keep spinning in circles, repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Dan Sullivan says, "If you're not winning, you're learning." Keep that in mind. Make sure you actually learn. If you made a mistake in a procedure and didn't learn from it, then you'd potentially keep making the same mistake in future procedures. That's ludicrous, right?

We're always learning in medicine. We're always seeing what results we get and tweaking what we do in an attempt to get our patient care as excellent as possible. We need to do the same thing with our weight loss. I want to also encourage you to choose just one main goal for yourself in your life right now.

I don't want you to think that you're committed 100% to losing weight, fixing your marriage, building a new house, getting seven years of family photos into scrapbooks and submitting a new abstract for a publication. That's way too many things. What gives us momentum in our lives is accomplishment and achievement. That comes when you finish something. When you finish something, that gives you the momentum in choosing another goal and then finishing that.

If weight loss is your main goal, then you're not taking on any other major goals until you're finished. Of course you have your regular day to day things you need to do, but your main project for yourself that you're focused on every day is your weight loss or whatever your goal is. Then you take massive action to achieve that goal. Then imagine this: your mind is so freed up from constantly having to think about your weight and food. Think how much room there would be in your brain to create something else. That's equally amazing.

You choose your one goal and then you get to work. When you don't feel like doing the work, you remind yourself that nothing has gone wrong. Of course you don't want to do it. Then you do it anyway. When you mess up, you make sure you learn what you need to learn, so you don't keep repeating that same mistake. New obstacles will come up. Instead of using them as excuses, you problem solve them and you create the solution. You persist until you reach your goal. This is how things get done. The pleasure you get from that accomplishment is so amazing. There's no way I'd be able to run my business at the level I am and create these podcasts and coach my clients if I still had my brain all tied up in weight loss chatter.

Let's just dream a little bit here. If your weight loss and food struggle was gone, what would you do with all that time and energy? Would you finally get your house in order? Would you focus on strengthening some of the relationships in your life? Would you work on your productivity at work, so you can get as efficient as possible there? Really the opportunities are endless and all available to you. Just pick one thing and get it done. Then pick the next thing and get that done. Keep going. Your life will just explode in the best possible way. I promise.

Okay, you guys, love you so much. Have a great week and I will talk to you very soon. I'll tell you about Hamilton. Okay. Bye-bye.