



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey everybody. How are you? Welcome back to the Weight Loss for Busy Physicians podcast. I'm Katrina Ubell, so excited to have you here today to talk to you some more. Before I get started I want to ask you guys, who amongst you is obsessed with the Hamilton musical the way my family is? We can't be the only ones.

We basically have it on continuous loop in the car. We have about a 25 minute drive to school for my kids, so we get plenty of opportunity to listen to it. It's so funny how you start to really learn all the lyrics. The first act, I am pretty close to having the entire thing memorized. I'm like rapping along. The best part though is my little kids learning the lyrics. My five-year-old knows a lot of them. It's really pretty impressive. I'm like, "God, I didn't know your mouth could move that fast." It's kind of crazy.

We listen to the clean version. We listen to it on the Amazon Music App, which I highly recommend. If you are an Amazon Prime subscriber, you have Amazon Music. A friend of mine had no idea she had this and I was like, "Are you kidding me? You're paying for it already. You need to be using this." Tons of music on there and you don't have to pay any extra for it. It's just part of your membership that you already have. Pretty much, I mean, is there a doctor that doesn't have Amazon Prime? I mean, most of us, right? It's just a lifesaver. We just have to do it or we're just so dependent on it, I guess, because it just helps us so much.

Anyways, so on the Amazon Music App they have the Hamilton album. They have the regular one, the explicit one, and then they have a clean version, which still has some words that aren't maybe so great. Certainly there's no F-bombs going off or anything like that, so we definitely listen to that one. Then in my head I'm just pausing when I'm rapping along or singing along when those words come up.

Anyway, my husband and I are planning on seeing the musical in April. We are going to go down to Chicago and see it there. We're super excited. I'm sure it's going to be amazing. I know people who have seen it said that it's amazing. I'm sure some of you have seen it and think it's amazing. Those songs get so stuck in your head, oh my gosh, all day, all the time. I

love them, it's such a great, great musical.

Anyway, just let's get on to the topic today. Last time we talked a lot about confusion and being really confused about how to eat and what to do. We talked even about getting out of confusion and just picking something, or learning more. Doing some more research, actually figuring out what we need to do, asking questions like what would be the best thing for us. Sometimes we still are kind of like, "Well, that's all fun and good, but can I have the cliff notes version here? Can you just kind of tell me what you recommend for your clients? What's kind of the latest and greatest in terms of the research and things like that?"

I wanted to go over some of that with you guys today. These are going to be the basic framework, really, for what I have my clients do when I work with people one-on-one to lose weight. The basic fundamental things that pretty much everybody, no matter how you're eating or what type of eating, whether you're doing raw vegetarian or vegan, or you're doing more of a Paleo type of thing, or just somewhere in the middle. These, I don't want to say rules, but these suggestions apply to everybody. I just want to review some of that for you here, especially for those of you who are really raring to go, want to get going with your weight loss right away.

The first thing I want to talk about is awareness. In episode two of this podcast I talked a lot about awareness, becoming more aware of your thoughts and what your feelings are. Today I want to talk about awareness about what you're actually eating. Many of us like to just slip right into unconsciousness about that. Again, not meaning literal unconsciousness, but not have conscious awareness. Kind of deciding, "I'm going to eat that and I'm going to promptly ask my brain to forget it, so that at the end of the day if I look back and think, oh what did I eat, I'm just not even going to recall that. It's just gone. It's not tucked into even my short term memory, let alone my long term memory."

The way to start becoming more aware of what you're eating is to start food journaling, which don't start throwing the tomatoes at me. I know nobody wants to do that. People really groan and kind of roll their eyes at the whole food journal. This is the thing, research has shown time and again that people who food journal have more success with their weight loss and with weight maintenance. The good news with food journaling is that I'm going to be able to help you to do it in a way that is just about effortless, really, really, easy. It takes almost no time at all. It's very, very simple for you and it doesn't have to be such a difficult thing.

Now, of course, what makes it difficult or not difficult? How we think of it, of course. Right? What our thoughts are about it and those are optional. We get to choose what we think about food journaling. If it's something that we know could help us in the long term get the results that we want, it would make sense to maybe adopt a mindset about food journaling that would make it so that we are consistent with food journaling, so the result is that we actually do the food journaling and have the food journaling help us to get the other results

that we want with our weight.

When you are journaling, this means that of course you're writing down every bite, every morsel, every sip, every crumb, and how to do that is up to you, ultimately. I get a lot of questions from clients asking if they can use some of the apps that are already out on the market. One that's really popular is MyFitnessPal. Another one is the Lose It! app. I really don't recommend using those. Not that I really have anything necessarily against them. If it's working for you, great, go for it. If it's not really working for you then I'll explain to you why I don't love those.

The main issue that I have is there is generally going to be some sort of calorie recording involved in that. You put your food in and then it assigns certain calories to that. We are no longer interested in calories. That might be feeling a little bit blasphemous for some of you guys because so many of us for just the last number of decades and the way we were raised was that calories are important. It's the way that you figure out how to lose weight. You have the calories in, calories out, and you need a deficit in order to lose weight. The fact of the matter is it's just way more complicated than a simple math equation like that.

Of course, if you are eating 10,000 calories a day, that's too much food. You're going to gain weight. In that case, sure, the calorie content or the calorie count at the end, the total, is helpful in knowing, yes, that's way too much food. For what we're doing, we're just going to not even think about calories at all. It's just not useful basically. If you think about it, if calorie counting was useful, why do still so many of us have weight issues? Why isn't that just the solution? You just do some simple math and then you lose the weight and then you maintain it forever. Except, who has that happened for? Less than 1% of people.

I don't want you to use any kind of app or program that gives you any kind of calorie count. I don't want any app or program that is somehow judging what you're eating in the sense that some of them will say, "Oh, if you keep eating this way then you should be losing a pound and a half a week and you'll get your goal weight in 14 weeks" or something like that. I don't want there to be any of that in there. I want you to literally just see what you're eating.

The easiest thing, if you're more of a technological person, the easiest thing to use is just the Notes app on your phone. You can also just use a notebook or pen and paper if you're a person who prefers to write things down longhand. That's completely fine too, but it's just completely neutral. It's just this empty sheet of paper, empty screen, and you're just writing in what you are eating.

Now, one way that I make food journaling a lot easier is I don't have my clients write down volumes to start with. We don't say, "Oh, I had about a cup of rice," or "I actually had to measure my food in any way." You really don't have to do that. You can say, "I had a bowl of chili with cheddar and sour cream on top, and a salad with ranch." Really, you're writing; bowl of chili, sour cream, cheese, salad with ranch. I mean, how easy is that, right? That takes a very

short amount of time to record that.

Later when you're getting down to, say, the last ten pounds, last five pounds, we potentially do need to get more precise. We do maybe have to start actually applying some sort of unit of measure to that food. For the time being, when we're just getting the habit going and we're just developing that habit of food journaling and then being able to look back and see what you ate, I really want you to keep it very, very simple for yourself.

I think it's important for you to know that you're not going to want to do this. Probably because you're going to have to write things down really often, especially if you're a snacker. You're grabbing a handful here and your kids grilled cheese crusts here. Just kind of like the cleanup crew, right? Instead of feeding it to the dog you're kind of like a little bite here.

The big thing I would do is I'd eat a whole dinner and then I'd be making lunch for the kids. Putting some crackers or something in a container and then like, "Well, I mean, they're Wheat Thins, they're good." A couple for me here, a couple pieces of fruit there as I'm putting it together. Just because it tastes good and I want to eat it. That's such a habit. That all needs to be recorded in the food journal.

Just recognize you're not going to want to do it. If you're eating frequently, you're going to have to write things down frequently. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. The only way you're going to see why you weigh what you weigh right now is when you see what you're actually eating. That's, again, that awareness of it. We have to become so much more aware of what we're eating.

The other thing that can come up for people when they start food journaling is feeling graded, judged, or having a perfectionistic viewpoint going into it thinking, "Well, if I can't write down an ideal eating day in my food journal, then I don't want to write it down at all. It needs to be perfect or I just don't do it." All I can say with that is perfectionism is never useful. When you adopt that kind of mindset about it, you're just not going to get the results that you want.

Again, the great news is that you get to decide what you think. You can really look at it like, "This is just me taking on that same watcher, or observer role. I'm coming at this from a place of curiosity, from a place of interest. I just want to know the reality of what I'm feeding my body, so that I can start making better choices to get the results that I want with weight loss." Nobody is judging you. Nobody is giving you a grade. You're not failing if you eat one thing or drink something else. You're just writing it down so you can actually see what it is that you're doing.

Once you have been doing that and you're really consistent with that, then we start adding a new level of awareness to how you're eating. That is how your body is feeling before you eat and after you eat. That's when we start applying what's called the hunger scale. Let me just explain the hunger scale for you a little bit. The way I use it, there are so many different kinds of

hunger scales out there.

I mean, you can do whatever you want, but the way I recommend doing it is thinking about a horizontal line. On the left-hand side you have a minus 10. On the right-hand side you have a plus 10. Right in the middle you have a zero. The minus side is hunger and the plus side is satiety, fullness. When you're zero you're neither hungry nor full. You're just completely content, in the middle.

Minus 10 is dying of hunger. You're just ready to gnaw your arm off. I mean, it's unbelievable, so hungry. Plus 10 is Thanksgiving and then some where you're kind of wishing you could throw up to relieve yourself. It's just you're so overly full. What we are wanting to eat on the hunger scale, is we want to start eating when we're minus four and we want to stop eating when we're about a plus four. Then the question is, what do those numbers mean? Isn't this completely subjective? Well, yes. Of course it's subjective.

You're going to have to tune into your own body and become aware of what a minus four, a minus three, a minus two, a zero, a plus three, a plus four, what those all feel like in your body. It's going to take a little practice at first. Just tuning in, what number would I assign this? The more you practice that, and the more you start to actually become aware of the signals your body is naturally giving you about when you should eat and when you shouldn't eat, the better off you're going to be. You're going to be just so much quicker and more adept at figuring out where you are on the hunger scale, so that really at any moment you can tune in and go, "Oh my gosh. Okay, yes. I'm a minus three right now," or, "Where am I? I'm getting to be about a plus four here. I'm going to take a couple more bites and I'm going to be done." It becomes very, very quick for you.

I'll tell you how I explain this to my clients, so that you know what that means. As far as hunger goes, so a zero is no hunger at all. Minus one is the very first whisper of hunger, just like, "Mm, I might be getting a tiny bit hungry." Minus two is like, "Hmm, I'm a little bit hungry." Minus four is like, "I would like to eat. My stomach is grumbling or growling. I'm definitely hungry. It's certainly not an emergency. I can wait, but I would like to find some food and eat it." That's the hunger side of it.

On the fullness side of it, plus two, the way I describe plus two is that I'm not hungry anymore and I could still go and take a jog around the block. Then plus four is, I'm not hungry anymore and I couldn't really run around the block, but I could take a walk around the block for sure. Then anything higher than that is when I start feeling a little bit overly full. You don't want to get to a point where you feel like you have to roll yourself around the block or something like that. We're looking for just a nice contented full feeling, but not feeling really bogged down, not feeling heavy, not feeling gross, not feeling that gut-bomb sensation in your belly. You're not having that at all. That's what we're aiming for. The thing is though, I want you to eat from minus four to plus four, but only if you're eating just three meals a day. If you are eating five to

six meals a day, or three meals a day plus two to three snacks, then I want you to eat from minus two to plus two. You're making sure that you're not overeating at each of those meals.

I do want to just recommend though that some people do fine on the five to six meals a day, but for most of us as we get older, it just doesn't work as well anymore. Maybe you've tried that and you find that you're just not losing weight, or maybe you've even gained a little bit. There's really a good physiological reason for that, and so for the most part I really do recommend my clients work at first on just eating three meals a day and no snacks. It's just so much better for weight loss. I'm going to do another podcast next week about the science behind this a little bit more, but I'll just touch base on it a little bit for you right now.

The thing to recognize is that when you eat, your insulin levels go up. We all understand this, right? If you are eating meals and snacks every couple of hours, or really even grazing throughout the day, you are constantly stimulating your insulin. You're stimulating your pancreas to increase insulin. The insulin levels in your bloodstream are more elevated than if you don't for four or five hours.

Insulin, by default, is a storage hormone. We know this, right? If you always have elevated levels of insulin, then you're always in storage mode. The only time that your body even has a chance to get down to a low insulin level is at night when you're fasting, when you're sleeping. For some of us, we eat so late at night, maybe until 10, 11, midnight, and then we're up again and having some breakfast or having a mocha or something by six or seven in the morning, that amount of time where we're not eating is actually very, very short.

When we are constantly feeding our bodies like that, it's going to be very difficult to release that fat because we're always in storage mode. When we do basically reduce our intake, which is the classic calorie restricted low-fat diet, it's going to be pretty uncomfortable. Our bodies are just going to be like, "I'm never really full, yet I'm not even losing weight that quickly." It's just, physiologically, it just is not the best way to release body fat.

Like I said, in the next podcast I'm going to touch on that in a lot more detail. I just want you to start thinking about that and next time I'll talk to you about the best ways to reduce insulin and why we want to do that, why that's a good thing for us.

The hunger scale is something that I want you to think about every time you're food journaling then, that you add that on to what you're eating. I want you to start thinking about, where was I when I started eating on the hunger scale? Just right before you start eating, just a quick check in. Was I just only a minus two and I was just eating because this is the time I had to eat? Did I really get a little too hungry because I had a long case in the OR and I didn't have a chance to eat, and by the time I did eat I was really ravenous and I really much more of a minus six? Then, where are you when you stop eating? You stop eating and then another quick check in. Where am I? Did I overeat a little bit and I'm actually at a plus five and I feel like it was a little too much?

Again, we're not judging this. We're not then going into beat up mode, the negative self-talk of, "Why do you always do this? Why can't you get this together? Why am I not perfect at this after only two times of trying it?" Something like that. That's not what we're doing. We're just looking at it, "isn't that interesting? I got really hungry because I couldn't eat all day because I was operating so much, and then at the end of the day, when I did get to eat, I ate for that hunger and then some. That excessive hunger from not eating all day ultimately resulted in me overeating and feeling kind of gross at the end of the day. Overeating and then having, maybe, three glasses of wine, when one or none would've been adequate, would have been plenty, and maybe I shouldn't have had that much."

When you're looking at that and evaluating that you can look at that and say, "Oh man, I shouldn't have done that." Then just keep repeating that process over and over again because it's such a habit. Then keep wondering, "why do I keep doing this?" You can learn from it. If we're not winning, we're learning. We're not beating ourselves up anymore. We're learning. If we're going to learn then we have to actually take the opportunity to actually learn. The way you learn is by being able to have the information in front of you in your food journal, so you can go back and look and go, "Okay, what was going on for me here? Was I actually eating all this food in front of the TV and I was so checked out that I was just not even in tune with what was actually going on in my body? I was not paying attention to the natural signals that my body, god bless it, has that tells me when I'm supposed to stop eating, so I ended up overeating. Maybe that's the reason that I keep gaining a couple pounds every year. Maybe that's why the weight keeps creeping up. I'm just so out of tune with what's going on."

Okay, great news. Let's learn from that. Okay, maybe eating in front of the TV, as nice as it seems, it seems like it's this great experience and it's really relaxing, maybe it's actually hurting me in the long run. It's making me not get the results that I want. Maybe what I'll start trying to do is just sit at the table or sit in the kitchen and just eat my meal there for 15 minutes. Then when I want to go sit down and watch TV, I'll go and do that. Just start developing that new habit and see what happens when you do that, when you do that habit. When you start changing that.

I just want to tell you guys. I lost my first 10 pounds on this journey by only following the hunger scale. I was not even food journaling because I didn't want to. Like I told you, you're not going to want to either. That's okay. Just start doing it. It's okay. You can do it. You'll see how much it helps you. Just following the hunger scale was the very first 10 pounds for me. I was so out of touch and out of tune with the natural signals my body was giving me. I was eating for so many reasons and almost none of them were because of what my body was actually asking for. I just want to offer that to you that that's something you can start implementing today. You always have it available to you. You never are without it because it's innate in your body. You can always, always, always check in. It can make a big difference, make a huge difference for you.

I do also want to mention that when I started doing that, I started realizing that there were times, depending on what I had for lunch, that I was not hungry for dinner when the food was ready for my family. I would be preparing dinner, dinner was ready to eat for my family, and I was legitimately not hungry. Then what do I do?

This was a big thing. It's funny, I can laugh about it now because it just seems kind of silly that it was such a big issue for me back then. It really was an issue because I had all these thoughts about not eating with my family. I'm a pediatrician. I'm all about family dinner and it's so important for the whole family to get together. This is when the family connects, over dinner, over a meal. This is when you connect and talk about what's going on and it's so great for kids as they age. I had the whole story in my head about why this was so important, so I seriously was just not going to eat with them?

It's just so funny, I had this big story. Finally, I just thought, "Well, okay. Before you start thinking that this is terrible and not possible, how about you just try it? How about you just try serving dinner and then just sitting down and not eating and just see what happens? One time isn't going to hurt." The day came around. Dinner was ready. I think I was a zero, I was just not hungry at all. I thought, "Okay, I guess I'll just eat a little bit later when I get hungry."

Well, when I started this my kids were 10, 4, and 2. The two-year-old is still just in her own world. Four-year-old pretty much also in his own world. It was the 10-year old that I thought, "Oh man, what's going to be his thought process on this? Is he going to think something is weird, really disordered? What is he going to be thinking?" I thought, "Okay, I'll just get my glass of water, serve everybody." We sit down, everybody starts eating. My 10-year-old says, "Hey mommy, why aren't you eating?" I was just like, "Oh, you know what? I'm just not really hungry yet. I think I'm going to eat later. I just don't want to eat right now." He was like, "Oh, okay." I mean, that seriously was the full extent of how much this affected my family. It was so funny to me. I was just laughing to myself.

This is the thing, right? Children are the best about not overeating, especially when they're little. You give them a cookie and they leave three bites because they're full. They just don't want to eat it anymore. Of us adults, right, who's leaving a couple bites of cookie? Nobody because there's always room for a little bit more cookie, a little bit more ice cream. We always say, "There's always room for ice cream, it fills in the cracks." They don't. They're done. They don't want to eat it anymore. That overeating and that ignoring our fullness signals is a completely learned behavior. The great news is that we can get back in touch with that again and start being so in tune with our bodies that we don't have to overfeed it. This is how naturally thin people eat. We need to start doing this.

I started realizing that it actually was super pleasant to eat with my family. Well, not eat with my family. Sit down with them while they're eating and me not eat because I was able to be so much more relaxed. I wasn't hurrying and shoveling my food in my mouth so that I could get up

and get someone some more water or pick a fork up off the floor, or something like that. If somebody needed something I was very happy to go and get it and get them seconds or whatever they needed. We had great conversation. I was so much more in tune and in touch with them and it was actually super, super pleasant.

That's all I really needed to convince myself that you don't have to eat with everybody. You can still have that same experience, that same connection that you want out of the family meal without actually putting any food in your mouth. This is an actual possibility. I was so grateful to myself for allowing myself to just try it and just see.

You might look at it like, "Well yeah, I just want to clean up the kitchen though and I don't really want to be eating later." That's totally fine. What you can maybe do then is realize when you look at that you can go, "Okay, well what did I eat for lunch and how can I tweak my lunches so that for the most part I am actually hungry and ready to eat at the time that I want to be hungry and ready to eat?" If my family eats at a certain time most of the time, then I can eat this certain lunch with some trial and error. You figure that out and then generally for the most part I'm hungry right at the right time.

Say your clinic runs over a lot and you are staying and having to do a lot of phone calls or you're finishing up all your charts, so you're not really getting home and eating dinner until seven. The problem is that at 5:30 you're starving and so you're eating a whole bunch of snacks, or kind of a mini dinner at work, and then coming home and eating a whole nother dinner again. Then maybe what you need to look at is, "Okay, what can I do for my lunch? What can I eat to make my lunch last a little bit more? Maybe I need to add a little bit more fat to what I'm eating, so that I'm a lot more satiated so that when the hunger comes at 5:30 it's not really a big deal. I can just drink some water, make sure I'm really hydrated. Blast through the rest of the work that I have to do. Get home and eat a nice meal when I'm hungry, when I want to be."

You can see how this information from the hunger scale and the food journaling is so crucial to your success. If you don't have actual data points, actual data to look at, then you're relying on your memory, which is terrible. You have so many other things you have to remember, you're not going to remember this stuff, or your memory is going to be inaccurate. You're going to think, "I barely eat anything. I don't eat anything." Except for all the snacks that you just choose to not remember, something like that.

I want you guys to give that a try, not even give it a try. Just say, "I'm just going to do this." I want you to commit. I want you to commit and say, "I'm going to start food journaling. I'm just going to see what it is that I'm eating. I want to actually become more aware and I want to become more aware of my innate body signals that our human bodies are so good at telling us. I want to stop ignoring those signals. I want to start paying attention and applying that information to the choices that I make."

If you have any questions about this you guys, I want you to for sure head over to the Show Notes page and put your questions in the comments. I will address those questions either there in the Show Notes or on here on a future podcast to make sure that everybody gets that information. The place you can find the Show Notes at is at <http://www.katrinaubellmd.com/6>.

Next week we're going to be talking about more of the science behind the three meals a day and a little bit more guidance as to which foods to avoid and which foods to run towards and eat more of. Hope you guys have a great week. Check out the Hamilton soundtrack. See if you love it as much as we do. It's so good, so, so good. All right guys. Talk to you soon. Take care, have a great week. Bye-bye.