



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey, my friend. How are you? Welcome back to the podcast. This podcast will be airing the day after Memorial Day, so I am just kind of thinking about that coming up, and hoping that you had a great, long weekend, kind of the start of the summer, right, and really kind of heading into the fun summer months. I know we have a few things planned. I am taking my oldest son on a service trip to Peru for two weeks in June, so that's going to be really exciting and interested, because it's winter there. So we're going to be leaving summer in Wisconsin and going to winter in Peru, but it sounds like it's going to be an amazing trip. He and I did a similar trip to the Dominican Republic last July, and that is going to be an opposite weather experience, or was an opposite weather experience, because it was hotter than I don't even know what when we were there. Holy moly! That's when I finally confirmed, for myself, that I am a total fragile flower in the heat, and I live in the right place, living in Wisconsin, for sure.

So anyway, so we really enjoyed that trip, and I just think that offering experiences like that to kids is just potentially life-changing for them, and even when I sometimes just kind of think like, "Wouldn't it be easier to stay home?" I just think, you know what I tell myself? I go, "You know what, though? He might write his college entrance essays on one of these trips. It might seriously leave such an impression on him that it totally drives him to do whatever is his passion in life," and he is just a total lover of travel. He seriously, when he was three years old, came up to me and said, "Mommy, when are we going to go to Japan?" I was like, "I don't know the answer to that. Maybe someday! That sure would be cool!" He just loves geography and maps and travel. My mom is very similar. I think it just skipped a generation. I don't mind going places, but I'm just much more of a homebody in general. So he and I are doing that, and that's going to be really fun. That's our big trip for the summer.

So anyway, let's turn this into what we're talking about today, which is kids and eating, so I've had some requests to discuss kids and eating and how all of this work that I've been talking about applies in terms of giving the whole family a food makeover, because I think a lot of you are realizing, "Okay, sure, I need to change how I eat, but how can I keep offering and serving my family these foods that I know are ultimately going to cause a problem for them?" So I thought that it was a great idea to address this issue for a lot of reasons, so let's dive into that topic. I also thought it was a really good idea, because the day this podcast airs is my youngest, my daughter's fourth birthday, so I figured that, for sure, we should do a podcast on the topic of kids. That would be perfect. Now, I do want to start off this podcast by giving you a little bit of a disclaimer. So even though I'm a board-certified pediatrician, I am not acting here on this podcast as your pediatrician, even though that would be fun.

I'm also not a registered dietitian, so I want to make it clear that I'm not offering medical advice here, and that you should use your own judgment, and that of your own doctor, before making any drastic changes in your family's eating. Okay? A few issues seem to come up pretty regularly for a lot of my listeners and clients in regards to their kids and eating. One issue is how we get our kids off of eating snacks all the time. Another is how we get our kids off of eating sugar and flour all the time. So many of my clients tell me that their kids get simple carbs as the mainstay of the vast majority of their meals, so they have no idea how to even start to revamp that.

Another issue is the kids being resistant to eating different foods, or in a different way, and even another issue is us, as parents, not wanting to inadvertently end up transferring the thoughts and belief systems we have around food over on to our kids, because so many of us have struggled with our weight because of belief systems we picked up from our families growing up. We want to do our absolute best to make sure our kids don't have to do the same work that we're doing on themselves in a few decades. You know that we got very little nutritional training in medical school, and what we did learn was about super rare diseases like beriberi and kwashiorkor. Remember memorizing what those were? But I think I know a little more than most because of my own learning and research that I've done. When I was in practice, parents often had so many questions about nutrition and what their kids should eat, and I, of course, was interested in knowing the answers, not only so I could advise them in a thoughtful way, but also so I could know how I should feed my own children.

So I've spent a considerable amount of time over the years learning about nutrition, especially for children, but like I said, I am by no means a nutritional expert here. What I want to offer to you are some ideas and advice about how to make changing up your family's diet a lot easier, so that not only is everyone getting the proper nutrition they need, but it's super easy on you to prepare and serve it. The last thing we want to do is create a system where you're making multiple meals for different people, and finding that you just can't keep up with all the planning. So I'm going to tell you a little about what I did and what I do for my own family, and then I'll address some of the issues I mentioned above. So I have never been a mom who has a million snacks in her bag for the kids. I think this kind of naturally happened only because of who my first son is.

Since the day he was born, he was never a guy who ate very frequently. I remember being in the hospital working on nursing him after he was born, and him sleeping four or five hours before wanting to eat again. As a pretty new and green pediatrician, I, of course, thought that this wasn't right, and he should be nursing every two to three hours, because he needed it, and I needed it, so that my milk would come in. So when I couldn't get him to do anything until four or five hours after he last ate, I was stressed and worried. I remember this older nurse coming in and me telling her that I was concerned, because I tried to feed him, and he didn't want to eat anything at all. He didn't want anything to do with it. She just smiled and said, "Honey, he'll eat when he's hungry. It's okay." Isn't it funny how we know these things, but we just need someone to tell us? So after that, I didn't worry. My milk came in.

He was a volume eater, and what I mean by that is that he would eat for a solid hour and then be able to go at least four hours or more between meals, even as a tiny baby. This sounds great, but honestly, if he decided to eat, and we needed to be somewhere, I knew I was screwed, because there was no giving him a snack, like, "Let's just nurse for five minutes and go." He was mad. He was like, "No, I need to eat for an hour," so it was actually kind of stressful at times.

So he just naturally started out not needing or wanting snacks. Then we transitioned him to solids and then table food, and we never really got in the habit of offering snacks.

I used to think that this was wrong, because I had been taught that kids get three meals plus snacks, and all the moms coming into my office were feeding their kids constantly, but I decided to let him be, because he would eat so much at his meals, and his growth was good, so I knew he was getting enough. He's always eaten a really big dinner. Small breakfast, medium lunch, and a huge dinner. It's just how his body works, and now, at 11 years old, he's still growing great and with a perfect weight. I do want to just mention that it's not like I never offered him snacks, though. I did, but not for the reason of him being hungry. Like so many moms, I used food to bribe him. We started trying to go to church regularly when he was three years old, and the only way I could get him to make it through a service was by giving him fruit snacks. I bought those organic Annie's brand ones to make myself feel better, in case you're wondering.

But we're creatures of habit, right? So it got to the point where we'd sit down before the service even started, and he'd right away tell us he was hungry. Now, he'd just finished his breakfast like 30 minutes prior to this, so we'd always roll our eyes, knowing that he just wanted his glorified candy, i.e., the fruit snacks, and we'd give it to him, and there were plenty of other times where I needed him to be occupied so I'd offer some fruit or crackers or things like that, but he never actually needed it as such. It was my habitual method of keeping his behavior in check, and I never questioned it, because it's what everyone does, right?

I also want to touch on the issue in today's society where children are given candy or sugary snacks every single place they go. I'll spare you a whole tirade on this subject, because I really could go on and on, but I can't be the only parent who's noticed that every single place kids go, they're offered food. Had a good piano lesson? Have a Life Saver. Improved your swim stroke? Have a Starburst. Finished your gymnastics class? Have a popsicle. Yes, they give out popsicles in the winter in Wisconsin at 10 in the morning at gymnastics. My personal favorite is the soccer snacks. When we were kids, we had orange wedges, right? Everyone always brought that. When my son was doing soccer, it was really common for the kids to get a huge cookie or Flamin' Hot Cheetos or something like that, plus a big bottle of Gatorade after a game. I remember thinking that there was no way those kids expended that much energy on the soccer field to make up for eating that stuff, and most parents would bring enough so that the siblings could have some too, so the kids who were just playing with the sticks on the sideline now get a bunch of sugary stuff too. In my opinion, all of this constant treating with food is just an attempt to keep kids' attention and focus and to make them like the activity. It can't just be fun enough to play soccer with your friends. You have to get a huge snack right after it, too, and it obviously works, because people keep doing it.

It's just more evidence of our food-obsessed culture, and then we turn our kids into food-obsessed people as well. So I'll tell you how we handle this in our house. We never tell the kids they can't have something. We just tell them that we'll bring it home, and they can have it as their dessert with dinner. If it's a huge cookie, we might say that they can have half tonight and the other half the next night. If you've been a regular listener of the podcast, you know how our insulin responses are the main issue when it comes to being overweight, so just combining the sugary food with a meal is really helpful. That way, they're already experiencing an insulin spike from their meal, so the treat can just be a part of that. Now, as my oldest has gotten older, I've sometimes explained to him why I'd prefer it if he didn't eat something. The main thing that comes to mind here is Gatorade.

It's just straight sugar, and he's not doing anything, physically, that's so strenuous that he really needs those electrolytes to be replaced, so we usually just hang on to the bottle of Gatorade for when someone has a stomach bug, or we might donate it or give it to someone else, but if he adored Gatorade and that was a treat for him, I'd let him have it with a meal. As far as our regular meals are concerned, as a family, we used to consume a ton of flour. I made bread, and homemade pizza, and muffins, and pancakes, and waffles, and all that good stuff, and it's interesting to point out, though, that at the time, I told myself that I was doing a really nice thing for them, and showing them love, and letting them have good memories that involved yummy food.

But what I was really doing, if I was being really honest with myself, was, I was satisfying my desire for those foods by making it all about them. I really wanted the pancakes and the pizza, so I made it under the guise that the kids loved it and wanted it, but they would've been equally fine with other non-flour-based meals, too. They just wanted to be full, and they wanted the food to taste good. So you know from my podcast about constraint that I completely whittled down the number of family meals that I had on my list in a regular rotation. If you haven't listened to that podcast, it was [number 10](#). So when I did that, I made a list of about 20 different meals that were either by default free of sugar and flour or were pretty easy to adapt so that they became free of flour and sugar, but I only picked recipes that the kids found to be perennial favorites. I didn't pick anything that they really gave me grief over, except maybe one kid, and that's my egg hater, but I can easily work around that.

And I cooked those meals over and over again, and I still do. I think we can create a story for ourselves about how the kids won't like it if we change all their food, and that all they'll do is complain, and on and on, but your primitive brain is just trying to get you to not change anything because it hates change, and it hates confrontation, so we just assume there will be confrontation from the kids, so there's no possible way we can change the way the family eats. They just wouldn't tolerate that. But ask yourself, is that even really true? How do you know? Have you tried? Have you made a concerted effort to make the transition as smooth as possible? This is called math versus drama. The drama is that the kids will be screaming, and crying, and starving, and CPS will come for us because the children are wasting away. The math is that when kids are hungry, they'll eat, right?

There for sure are foods that don't contain flour and sugar that your kids will eat, so when we get over ourselves and stop believing the crazy stories that our brain offers up, we can actually rationally create a plan for moving forward. I do want to mention that my children do still eat some flour and sugar, but way less than they used to. When kids eat a ton of flour and sugar, they respond just like we do. They get hangry. They need to eat all the time, and they don't have consistent energy, just like us. The good news is that we can change that so that they feel better and have more even energy by reducing their sugar and flour intake as well.

My oldest likes to eat eggs for breakfast, and my little kids like what we call banana boats. That's where you slice a banana the long way in half and smear a good amount of peanut butter on both cut sides. We used to slice the bananas like wheels and put peanut butter blobs on each piece, and that was just taking way too long to make in the morning, so making them into boats is way faster for us to make, and then for them to eat. But sometimes, they still have toast, always with a fat, like butter, or peanut butter, or full fat cream cheese. Sometimes, they still take a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to school, but not that often.

I often send them to school with dinner leftovers or leftovers that I reworked into something else that they like. So if you're interested in more lunch ideas, definitely let me know in the comments for this episode, which you can find at katrinaubellmd.com/20.

I can even go into more detail on this in a future podcast if you guys are interested or have more questions. So let's talk now about getting your kids off of snacks. My two younger kids are still in kindergarten, and they get snack every day at school. The school provides it, and it's generally pretty healthy, but for sure, there's more starches and sugar than I would prefer. But rather than getting upset about it, I make up for it by what I send for lunch. In general, I know they're getting plenty of grains and other carbs there, so I focus on protein and fat, and I always send vegetables and fruit. Our school doesn't allow us to send lunch desserts, so luckily, I'm off the hook there, but if your school does, you could tell your child that you'll send something like once a week, like a special thing on Fridays, and you can make relatively healthy things into a treat, too, like Medjool dates. My kids love those. Even though they're basically straight sugar, there's at least a little nutrition to them, and some fiber, and we only give them dates as a treat, so in their minds, getting a date is special. They don't need a bunch of other junk. And if you're laughing and going, "There's no way my kids are going to think a date is that good," just give it a try. Have you offered?

See if they like them. Get the good kind that are nice, and soft, and yummy. When my kids are home, we never, ever have a morning snack, and only very occasionally will they have an afternoon snack, so even though the little kids get a snack at school every day, five days a week in the morning, I never, ever give them one on the weekends, and they never even ask. I never make a big deal out of not offering it. I just don't offer it, and if they happen to ask for something, then I always encourage them to drink some water and let them know when the next meal is coming.

Now, sometimes, they're extra hungry because they didn't eat a great lunch or something, and if that's the case, I might offer them the rest of their lunch, but not a snack, because a snack generally means some sort of snack food, but think about snack foods, right? Granola bars or other bars, pretzels, chips, yogurt, fruit snacks, and things like that. What do they all have in common? Sugar and flour. All of them. Even eating some fruit is almost like giving them straight sugar. I saw that as a pediatrician so often. I'd ask the parents how the child ate and they would say that veggies weren't so good, but the child could eat fruit all day, and that child's insulin levels are up all day, then, too, so it's no wonder that the child is overweight.

Sure, they're getting some vitamins and fiber, but fruit by itself, as a snack, is totally giving an insulin spike. We have to get off the snacks as much as we possibly can. So a much better choice, if you have a fruit lover and he or she needs something to eat, is to eat the fruit with some fat, like some cheese, or nuts, or nut butter. My kids actually love avocado just cubed up with a tiny sprinkle of salt on it, so you'll have to start getting a little bit creative in ways that you can add fat. It's important to note that, just like us, our kids' ghrelin is programmed based on what they currently eat. If you're eating small meals all the time, your ghrelin, which is the hormone that makes you hungry, is programmed to make you hungry every couple hours, so that reinforces the need to eat so often.

The same is true for your kids. If they're snacking all the time, they'll be hungry at all the wrong times and then not hungry for the true, nutritious meal. So for about a week, while you're cutting back on the snacks, they'll be hungry, and they'll complain, and that's okay. We can explain that we've learned more about healthy eating, and feeling good, and that this hunger will only last a short while, and then you distract

them with something else until mealtime. Yes, this is more work for you in the short term, but it's totally worth it if they don't have to struggle like us, right? Just keep that in mind and plan for it. Know that they'll complain. Expect it. It doesn't mean that you have to do anything differently. So now I'm going to give you a little tough love here as a pediatrician. Those of you who used to have me as your kid's pediatrician know exactly what this means. It's tough, but it's love. So many parents can't handle their kids getting mad at them, so they just end up giving in and giving them what they want. Does this sound like you? The kids know that if they whine, and cry, and complain long enough, you'll eventually give in, so they keep at it.

I always told parents that the quickest way to make sure your child continues to tantrum for every little thing they want is to give them what they want when they act like that. The same goes for older kids. This is where you have to get stubborn and decide that you're not buying granola bars or sugar cereal anymore no matter how much they complain. They'll learn that it doesn't make sense to keep complaining because you aren't going to give in, period. The end. Then the magic happens. When kids don't snack anymore, they actually are hungry at mealtimes, like really hungry, so when you offer them vegetables prepared with tons of fat so they're delicious, they'll gobble them up. That's really the main point here. Constraining your food options doesn't mean that your food tastes bad. The food can still be prepared in a delicious manner. You're just making the same things over and over again. When they're very simple and very tasty, nobody minds eating it over and over again. Now, like I said, my kids will still eat some flour and sugar.

For example, if I make tacos, they'll have a tortilla, and I'll skip that. I'll either make a taco salad or eat everything out of the bowl, so it's just some minor tweaks for me. It's super delicious, and I don't mind. Could I have a tortilla for a joy eat sometimes? Sure, but I just don't want a tortilla bad enough to do that. If you do, then you just plan for it sometimes, but it's not how you eat all the time. If your kids are eating almost all pasta, and bread, and other carbs, then you'll have to switch things up for them. Here's where it gets brilliant. When they're really hungry because they haven't been snacking, they're more likely to try new foods. This is when you get them eating other things, and let them dip stuff into full fat ranch dressing or full fat hummus to make it taste even better. Make sure you're reading the ingredients on every food that's in a package or a container, because you will seriously be shocked at the added sugar in everything, especially sauces like ketchup and barbecue sauce.

So to sum it up, you absolutely can significantly reduce the amount of snacks, and sugar, and flour your children are consuming. Make sure you're honest with yourself, though. Is all that stuff being served to them because you secretly want to eat it, too? If so, recognize it and start making a plan to change things up so that you all are eating the way you know you should be. Okay, my friend, bring all your questions and comments to the show notes page for this episode at katrinaubellmd.com/20, and I'll be sure to address all of them. All right, you guys. Have a wonderful first week of summer, and I'll talk to you soon. Take care. Bye bye.