



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there, my friend. How are you? Welcome to the podcast. I'm so excited to talk to you today. I know I always say that, but literally, today, I'm super excited to talk to you. I have not recorded a podcast in a little bit because I was just on vacation with my family. We went to Colorado and went skiing and it snowed so we had some good snow. That was super fun. My little kids did so much better this year than they did last year in terms of the altitude. We're always just kind of tweaking how we handle being at such high altitude. They did so much better, which made it a much more pleasant experience for all of us. We just had a great time and we watched some of the Olympics, which I love, and had some really good family time together, which is really, really great.

So today, I want to talk to you about how to deal with urges to eat. This has come up recently for a few of my clients. One of my clients was just recently telling me how, at night, she just has so much chatter to eat. We call that brain chatter where your brain is just constantly offering up ideas like, "You could have this. You could have this. You should go get a glass of wine. What about this? Maybe just a little of this. This wouldn't be a big deal." She was saying it's just so exhausting. It's so much to deal with in her brain. When she really does a lot of thought work, she's trying to do some thought downloads and trying to do some models, and it just didn't seem like it was really helping.

She's having a hard time coming up with what the underlying thought was. Ultimately, all she noticed was that she just had a lot of desire. She just wanted it and that was the main thing. There was no other emotion that she was trying to buffer away. She's like, "I just want to have it." She was sometimes giving into the urges and feeling like it was so exhausting for her, that she was just using so much energy. She wanted to know what to do. Now, she has been working with me for quite some time and she's had great results. She's kind of like, "Why am I still dealing with this part? I've gotten so good at handling all the other things." I wanted to help her to understand what was going on.

Then, just recently, I have a client that I used to work with. She's had great results. She and I were having coffee. We were talking and just talking about the differences in people and what different people need in the coaching process. She was sharing with me how she really felt like, sure, she got some coaching on some different issues in her life, but really what was the big issue for her was what she describes as a sugar addiction.

It was much more of an addiction model that she really finds resonates with her when she thinks about what was going on for her. Sure, she worked through a lot of her thinking and that was really, really helpful, but there really isn't always this underlying thought or emotional reason as to why she wants some food.

For her, sugar and, it was so interesting, she was saying how some sweet foods are okay. She was saying that the ones that have more fat with them seem to be better, but the ones that are much more like straight up sugar like candy, tend to be just kind of poison for her. It's like asking a heroin addict just to have a little bit of heroin. It doesn't work well for her. If she ends up having some candy, she just finds that the desire is totally right back again. The urges to eat it are right back there again. The chatter is right there again. What she basically had to do was break that cycle, let her body come off of that. Now that she has this idea in her head how her brain just wants to basically be addicted to something, she has a family history of different people being addicted to different things, she's like, "For me, it's just sugar. Once I recognized that that's what's going on, it's so much easier for me to manage my thoughts around possibly probably not eating those foods ever again or just understand if I eat them what ends up happening for me. It's so much more effort to manage it."

You know, many of you might be like, "Yeah, I don't identify with the addiction thing at all," but I think some of you really will. For those of you that do, that really is like you just need to stop eating it. This, today, what I'm talking about I think is really going to be very helpful for you. It was so helpful to have this discussion, a couple of these discussions, because when I really think back to what my issues were, even though I really didn't think that they emotional, they really were. It really was just wanting to feel better and asking food to help me with that. When I think back, I definitely had my times of just wanting food. There wasn't something necessarily underlying it. I just wanted it and I had that urge to eat it. That's the part that I really want to focus on with you today because, in these cases, more thought work, doing more thought downloads and doing more models, may help, but a lot of times, they don't really seem to make it better. Ultimately, you still just want it and your brain is telling you, "You just want it." You just have that urge to eat it.

Resisting the urges is what most people do. That's what my client was telling me. She said, "I'm having so much chatter and I'm having to use so much willpower. I feel like I'm white-knuckling it every night. It's so exhausting. Sometimes I go to bed early just because I don't even want to deal with this anymore. Then the next night, it's totally right there again. Sometimes it's so strong and it's so overpowering that I just give in and meet the urge and have a glass of wine or eat the food. Then, the next night, I'm right back at it again." For some of you who have been listening to this podcast for a while like, way, way, way back, you might remember me talking about resisting emotion and how one way of thinking about that is like what it's like to push a beach ball down under the water. It's very easy for a beach ball to just float on top, but to really take a big beach ball and hold it under the water takes a lot of effort. That's that resistance. That's the problem that we're having when we have these urges and we're feeling like there's so much tension and so much effort required in managing them.

Resistance is the main way that people deal with these urges I've found, but there's other ways that people deal with them as well that aren't very much the way that we want to. They don't give us the results we want. That is reacting.

When you're reacting to an urge, most of the time you're going into emotional childhood. You're blaming the food plan you're following, like, "This stupid food plan. If I could just eat what I wanted to eat, then I wouldn't have to deal with all this nonsense in my brain," or blaming your husband for opening a bottle of wine. Now you've got this wine sitting in front of you. You weren't even thinking about the wine until he did that. Now you've got to do all this white-knuckling and willpower and deal with all the chatter about having some more wine so that you don't have it.

Maybe you blame your kids for bringing home the Valentine's candy or whatever kind of candy or you blame the Girl Scouts for producing such damn delicious cookies. What's wrong with them? Just going into that state of feeling like you're the victim, somebody or something else in the villain, and you're just at the effect of that. The other thing or person is the cause. You're at the effect. It feels very powerless. It feels like you're just at the mercy of what's going on around you. Reacting sometimes can also look like yelling at people or being really short with them or not being very nice or sometimes just totally checking out, kind of thinking like, "I just can't even deal right now. I can't talk to anybody. I can't help anybody. One more kid asks me for one more thing, I'm going to lose my mind." That's all that reacting.

What we need to learn to do is allow these urges. I talk with so many of my clients about this concept and it really can be a challenge to figure out how to do this. I'm going to talk you through how you allow an urge and then I'm going to tell you the steps that you need to take to figure out how to do that for yourself because this is one of those things where I can give you all the guidelines. I can tell you step-by-step exactly what to do, but ultimately you're going to have to do it for yourself. Once you go through that process is when you're freed from basically the tyranny of these urges. I know that sounds a little bit dramatic, but for some people who really struggle with these, it really does feel like that. It feels like you're out of control. It feels like there's this internal battle going on inside of you and you just want it to stop and you don't know how to get it to stop. That's what I'm going to teach you how to do today.

The first thing you have to do is you have to recognize that it is actually an urge. I want you to label it in your brain. You have a thought of, "My brain is telling me that I should go into the pantry and eat a Thin Mint. My brain is telling me that I should get a glass of wine. My brain is telling me that I should go eat the caramel corn that's sitting in there." Just let that be okay. Start just recognizing, "My brain is telling me this information and that's okay. That doesn't mean I need to act on it, but my brain is offering me this information. It's very neutral. My brain is telling me that I should go in the pantry and eat a Samoa." If you're on this side of the country, that's called a Samoa. What do they call it? Caramel Delights, I think, in the rest of the country.

Recognize then that your brain is very confused. It really thinks that more food or sweet food or alcohol or even just more unplanned food than your body needs for fuel is what's a good idea right now. In its confusion, it is strongly suggesting that you consume the food or drink the alcohol. This does not mean that you have to do that. It is just a suggestion. You've heard me talk about how hunger is just a suggestion. This is the same thing. Your brain is just offering you that eating that food or drinking that alcohol is something that you could do. It doesn't mean you have to do it. When you get into this state immediately of just recognizing it for what it is, you are aware.

You've heard me talk about this before, getting into that watcher or observer role, creating that awareness of what's going on in your brain. This keeps you in your prefrontal cortex, which is that part of your brain that's the rational part that can help you make good decisions. It's the primitive brain that is the one that's telling you for sure this is a good idea. It offers you urges and tells you to do things that you rationally know you don't want to do.

If you're not reacting, you're not avoiding by meeting the urge, and you're not resisting it, then what? What do we actually do? You've recognized that it's just a thought, that your brain is very confused. Next, you have to let yourself feel the urge. Often, when people are avoiding the urge, they just eat to make it go away. In this case, we have to learn that the urge goes away on its own. We just have to allow ourselves to feel it at first. The way that you start doing this is that you open up to it. You physically relax your body. Now, when you're first learning to do this, it might be very helpful for you to go into a room by yourself or just kind of get a little privacy or go into the bathroom for a few moments if the kids are all around and you have nowhere else that you can go. Just give yourself a moment where you can really focus on feeling this. If you have a lot of distractions, it will be harder.

Now, eventually, you're going to be able to do this while you're carrying on throughout your whole life. It's going to be no big deal, but when you're first learning, especially if your urges are very strong, you might find that a little privacy is helpful. You physically relax your body, relax your muscles. Open up to it. Be willing to feel it. Tell yourself, "Okay, right now I'm going to learn how to feel this urge. I'm willing to feel it." Then I want you to get out of your head, get away from all those thoughts and chatter, and go into your body and focus on what it really feels like. Describe the feeling of the urge like you were telling a martian who had no idea what an emotion was. Think of somebody like a robot. They're completely unemotional. What is an emotion? What does this urge feel like? Where is it in your body? Is it in your chest? Is it in your head? Is it in your shoulders? Is it in your stomach? Is it in your groin or your back? If it's in multiple places, focus on just one place at a time. Pick one place like your chest and focus on what it feels like in your chest first. Then you can move onto another area.

What does the urge feel like in that place? Is it like a buzzy vibration? Does it feel like you've got a merry-go round that's going around and around in your chest? Do you feel like your chest is heavy, like your chest is dense or thick? Do you feel a tightness or a tension? Assign a color to it. What color is it? What shape is it? Get to know it really, really well. You don't need to overthink this. This is when some people like, "This sounds kind of woo. What color is it?" Just, when you're getting in touch with it, just assign it a color, assign it a shape. This is all about you getting to know it very, very well. Tell yourself this is what an urge to eat or drink feels like in my body. It feels like this. It's in this location in my body or these multiple locations. It feels this way here and that way there. It has this shape. It has this color. It has this sensation. Be willing to explore it and feel it and get really good at feeling it so that you're like, "I'm an expert in feeling urges," just like you could be an expert in feeling grief.

If you've ever gone through something that is very, very sad and you're grieving, you kind of get to know grief really, really well if you let yourself actually feel it. I want you to feel the same way about urges.

You want to get to know it so that you don't have to avoid it and immediately meet it with the food or the drink that your brain is suggesting because that's just running away from it to make it go away. It does make it go away, but then it's right back there again. Being willing to feel this takes some courage. Some people are very, very fearful of their urges. It might be very uncomfortable at first. I want you to recognize that but understand that this commitment to feeling it is what helps you to overcome it in the long run. Just like any other hard thing that you've ever done, when you push through this and really teach yourself this skill, it's unbelievable the results you get on the other end.

What happens when you don't meet urges over and over again? You have this feeling, you have this urge, you let it be there. You get really in tune with it. You let it come. Then what ends up happening is it actually goes away even though you didn't eat the food or drink the alcohol. It's really amazing. Many of us think that the only way to get to the urge to go away is to meet it, is to give it the food or the alcohol that it wants. What I want you to understand is that, first of all, in the short term, the urge goes away and you're right back to where you were. Look at that, you actually didn't consume the food. Over the long haul, over the long run what ends up happening is that your brain stops offering those urges.

It's basically like a Pavlovian response. If every time you ring the bell then you feed the dog, they are salivating when they hear the bell. They are expecting that food. When you don't give them food and you ring the bell, it stops. The dog stops salivating. They stop making that association and they don't expect food to come. Your brain will stop expecting you to meet the urge when you commit to not meeting the urges. Over the course of time, the urges go away. They become much, much quieter, much less intense, and they go away quicker. Then, before you know it, they're not there anymore. The way that you really get good at feeling them is by feeling them. This is the part that's kind of the hard sell for some people, like, "I just want it go away."

Well, the way that you get it to go away is that you allow yourself to feel it and not act on it. You get to be an expert in feeling these urges so that the next time you get one, you're like, "Oh, this is another urge. No big deal. I can feel an urge. I'm just going to sit here and let the urge be here and recognize that it feels this way in this part of my body and it's this color and it's this shape. Yep, there's my friend the urge. It will go away like it always does." Your primitive brain that is creating this urge might get really quite tricky though. I always say, "But my primitive brain often really sounds like me." It sounds like rational me sometimes. It's really important that you focus on those little justifications because it might start telling you, "Just have a little sip. It's not going to make a difference. You just taste this wine. It's not really like committing to drinking the wine, but it's a good bottle of wine and it was expensive so I should just have one sip." That sounds very rational, except it's totally driven by your primitive brain. "I'm just going to eat one handful of the popcorn. I'm just going to break off a corner of that cookie and taste it."

You need to be really aware that once you do that, the urge to eat more or drink more becomes so much stronger usually and so much more comfortable. Before you know it, most people just give in and then they have a whole bunch more. Many of us have had this. We just tell ourselves, "I'm just going to have a little taste." Then, before we know it, we're plowing through the whole thing.

I want you to really be on the lookout for those justification thoughts and really, really question them, knowing that if it's not on your plan to eat food and your brain is coming up with all these reasons why it's okay to eat that food or drink that wine, that the answer's no because it's not on your plan. Those are all just justifications. I want you to work on not acting on them and then seeing what happens, letting all those justifications be there, letting your brain be very confused and not acting on what it's offering you.

Then, the final part that I want to talk to you about is that some of us make the urge itself so much worse than it has to be because of our thoughts about it. We start feeling the urge and then we have the thought of like, "Oh crap. I'm having another urge." We're like, "Why me? Why do I always have to suffer like this with these urges? Why can't they just go away?" Or, "With the kind of day that I've had, there's no way I should just have to endure and feel this urge." Those thoughts can make you feel anxious in addition to feeling the urge because now you have an urge too and you don't want to have the urge. You might feel entitled to just give into the urge this time like, "Just this time I'll give in. The other times later I'll feel it," or you might feel a lot of self-pity, that this is your lot in life, that this is what you have to deal with. "Other people don't have to deal with this. Why do I have to?" I want you to know all of these thoughts can be managed.

This is the part of feeling an urge that does involve that mental management, that thought work. You have the urge and you're feeling that urge to overdrink or overeat. Who cares? Sometimes this happens. Sometimes my brain is very confused. It eventually gets over its confusion when I don't meet the urge. Watch your brain trying create a lot of drama around the fact that you have that urge and manage that thinking. "So I've got an urge. Who cares? Literally so what. What am I making that urge mean? Oh, I'm making it mean all these other things that make the urge so much more uncomfortable than it has to be." It's that management of the thinking and then the willingness to actually feel the urge that makes this a thing in the past for you. This work will seriously change your life. I really want to strongly encourage you to commit to working on this if it's something that you struggle with. It really takes courage and it takes resolve and it takes focus and determination, but when you become an expert in feeling this urge, that's when you have complete freedom around food. You never feel out of control.

I want to offer to you that if you have urges to binge, this is the exact same thing you need to do. If you have urges to shop, like you just want to go look at things on eBay or on Amazon or just urges to go check Facebook, urges to get on whatever social media, urges to yell at your kids, all of those urges are dealt with and managed in this exact method. Once you figure out how to do this with food, you can do the same thing with anything else. My brain is telling me right now that I should get on Facebook onto that flash sale page and see what the latest thing is that I should be buying. It's like two dopamine hits in one, social media and buying things. My brain is offering to me that that's a good idea but I don't want to be doing that right now. I'm going to let it be confused, thinking that I'm missing out on all kinds of amazing deals that won't be there tomorrow, and that is totally okay, having that compassion for yourself, letting your brain be confused, and just letting the urge pass, so, so good. This work, I'm telling you will really change your life.

All right. Have a wonderful, wonderful day. Can't wait to talk to you next week. Take care. Bye bye.