



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey there, my friend. What's up? Welcome to the podcast. Guess what I am ramping up to do with one of my kids? One of my kids has to get a tonsillectomy. Fun, fun. That's coming up here, so I'm actually batching a few of these podcasts so that when he's home and recovering, I don't have to be recording. I want to believe that he's going to be totally fine in terms of his recovery, but I do know that it can be pretty brutal, so I'm kind of opening that week up, the first week afterwards up a little bit to be able to give him any extra attention that he might need.

Poor guy. None of us on either side of our families have had anybody who's needed their tonsils out, but he has been snoring a lot. You know how it is when ... I mean, maybe you're not an under-reactor physician the way I am and my husband is, but our two boys sleep together, and the older one said, "Oh, this guy, he's really been snoring a lot." We're like, "Oh, yeah, mm," didn't really think much of it. Then we went on vacation, and he was sleeping in the same room with us. My husband actually was sleeping in the same bed with him, and he was like, "It's like I couldn't sleep. I just felt like he wasn't breathing, like I had to be awake to wake him up." He's sleeping in his sniffling position. We're like, "Mm, nope. This is not good."

My husband is ears, nose, and throat, so he went in there even once we got home thinking, "Maybe he's just sick or something," and went in and listened to him, and it wasn't good. It's just something that we had to do. My husband's partner is going to do the surgery, so that'll be good. She's awesome and great with kids, so I think that will be fine, but still be kind of an experience for me as a parent. I just haven't really had to go through this kind of stuff with my kids. Hopefully, he'll love being able to have as much ice cream as he wants. I don't think he quite understands or really gets yet how much his throat's going to hurt. We told him, "You get to have all the ice cream you want. You can have it even for breakfast," and he was like, "Yay, that sounds great."

Then just recently, our older guy was like, "But you know you're going to have that because your throat's going to be hurting," and he was like, "Oh, oh, oh, okay, yeah." I thought, uh-oh, he doesn't quite get it, but we've been around the block enough times to know we just have to make sure he takes his pain medicine so he can drink. He should be fine. He's going to get through it.

I want to talk to you today about happiness. Been thinking a lot about happiness and the word happy.

If you are a fan of Oprah as I was back in the day watching her show whenever I could, she has actually said that after all those shows that she recorded, she would often just stay and talk to the audience for a while and just try to get to know them better, and I think for a while when she had her own network, she even published those as shows, separate shows, like after the show or something like that, but she has said, I've heard her say this a number of times, that she'd often ask her audience members what it was that they wanted from their lives. The vast majority of these audience members would say that they wanted to be happy.

Then her follow-up question to them would be, "What does that mean," meaning being happy, "What does being happy look like for you?" She said that most people had a hard time answering that question. They really didn't know how to articulate it. They didn't know what to say. For me, that means that they're not happy because if they were happy, they would know how to articulate the life that they're currently living.

I think that having the belief that we just want to be happy is actually detrimental to us as humans because it separates us from our happiness. Think about the Declaration of Independence. There's that part that says that people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I think that the idea of pursuing happiness is a problem. It immediately puts our ability to be happy outside of us if we're pursuing it. It becomes external to us. The mental image that I have is of a carrot dangling in front of a horse, you know what I mean? The horse is pursuing that carrot. It's trying hard to get the carrot, but it's at the mercy of someone else to determine when it gets the carrot.

The other area we get tripped up with in terms of happiness is knowing or not knowing what actually makes us happy. Ask yourself that question: What makes me happy? For so many of us, one of the first things we think of is, well, when our kids are happy. Isn't that fascinating? Or maybe if it's not your kids, maybe it's when your spouse or your partner is happy or when your pet or relative is happy. We think that someone else being happy makes us happy. In order for us to be happy, they then need to be happy. Then we try to control them so that they're happy so that we can be happy. We're like, "I did this great thing for you kids, so you should be happy," except what happens when they're not happy, even though you did the great thing? You took them to Disney on the trip of a lifetime, and all they did was complain the whole time. Then what?

This is the very beginning of a manual for someone else, my friends. Any time you think someone should do something, think something, feel something, say something, react in a certain way or act in a certain way, that's your manual for them. Have you heard this saying, "You're only as happy as your least happy child." What a terrible belief. If you have this belief, please erase it from your brain immediately. This thought sets you up for a lifetime of misery, but if you keep it, you'll definitely be pursuing that happiness by trying to control your children, even when they're adults.

I hear this from my clients all the time. Their parents, or their in-laws, want them to make certain decisions so that the parents or in-laws can be happy. For instance, don't buy too big of a house or don't get a new car because you might live outside of your means and get into financial trouble.

The problem here though is that the parents or in laws have no idea what my clients' actual financial situation even is to be able to make a determination on whether they can afford it or not, which is totally just a thought anyway, what you can afford and what you can't. They just know that if their adult child does what they think he or she should do, then they can be happy, and if they choose something else that they don't approve of, then happiness is not available to them. It's a set up for truly a lifetime of worry and stress and trying to control other people, which doesn't work.

Let's back all of this up here. What is happiness? It's an emotion, a feeling, and follow along with me, what creates our feelings? Our thoughts. Only and always just our thoughts. What other people do, our kids, our spouses, our dogs, our moms, is always a neutral fact or a circumstance. We choose thoughts about them, which create our emotions, emotions like happiness. Sometimes, we choose thoughts that create the emotion of happiness, but very often, our thoughts create some other emotions, often ones we'd prefer not to feel, like irritability, frustration, annoyance, anger, impatience, et cetera.

Going back to Oprah's crowdsourcing, according to her audience members, most of us just want to feel happy, but we don't even know what that would look like. How would we know we're happy? What does a happy life look like for us, because it's going to be totally different for different people. How do we measure success for ourselves in the realm of happiness. Isn't it interesting that we spend so little time thinking about what we do want and how to create it, and instead, focus more of our attention and energy on what we don't want and how other people should be different so that we can be happier? I mean, it's so fascinating, right? We've set up this mental construct in a way where we believe that our happiness comes from outside of us. Then this perpetuates our attempts to people-please and to control other people so that we can be happy.

This is what I always tell my clients. The only reason we ever want anything is because of how we think it'll make us feel, so we want other people to be happy so we can be happy. We are just so mixed up, us humans. When I see it all laid out like this, I have so much compassion for us, all of us, every single one of us humans. We've struggled for so long because we just didn't understand how the world works. We've been trying so hard to please people and to control people so that we can get what we want without realizing that there's any other way that would not only actually work, but would be a lot more pleasant of a process to go through.

What should we do instead? First, we need to recognize when we are actually feeling happy. What thoughts are creating the feeling of happiness for us? This requires us to be aware and in touch with our emotional lives. What are we actually feeling at any given time? What does it feel like in our bodies when we're happy? How can we physically recognize happiness for ourselves? These are the magic questions. This can be what you feel when you walk outside in nature, connect in a meaningful way with your kids or your spouse or your partner. It can be how you feel when your dog welcomes you home, that unconditional love. Then what we work on next is expanding this happiness. Rather than thinking of happiness as something to pursue, something that's external of you that you need to chase after or look for, you tap into the happiness you are already experiencing, that you're already creating with your thoughts, and expand it.

For some of you, this might be pretty easy to do. For others, you might have to think a bit to find a time in the recent past where you've been happy so that you can tap into that emotion and what that felt like for you. If happiness feels pretty foreign to you right now, just please know that that's okay. Nothing's going wrong with your life. You shouldn't be ashamed or embarrassed or beating yourself up or feeling bad about that. All that's happening is you're getting more in touch with what you've been creating in your life currently instead of living in a kind of fog where you feel like you're unaware of your various emotions or you're at the mercy of them, at the effect of them. They're just happening.

But look for a little seed of happiness somewhere in there. Maybe it was just a quick joke with a patient or your office staff. Maybe it was when you left work super late, but the days were long enough that it was still light out. Maybe it was hearing your favorite song that you'd forgotten was your favorite. Just a little minor thing can be the starting point. I was thinking about it being a seed, and I was like, "It could be just even a sesame seed. Don't have to be a huge mango pit. It could just be a tiny thing."

Now, think about how you can expand on that happiness. You could look for a "joke of the day" website that you can share with your staff to expand on the happiness you got from that joke, or you can decide to purposefully smile a genuine smile at three of our patients every day. You could expand on the happiness of it still being light outside by going for a quick walk when you get home or even just grabbing a lawn chair and sitting outside for a few minutes to breathe in the fresh air. You could make an effort to listen to more music that you really enjoy.

In fact, this is something that I did. I often talk about having your food be boring and your life be exciting, and that can be hard when so much of your excitement in your life came from your food. I really had to think, what else can I do for entertainment for excitement in my life? I decided to get back into music more so. We invested in one of those Sonos systems, so we have those in our main floor, and then we got one of the outdoor speakers installed too so that we can listen to music when we're outside. We have really used that thing.

When we first signed up for it, I thought, "Ugh, I hope we use this. I hope this isn't just a complete waste of money." I find that that music, just listening to music that I enjoy, brings so much happiness to me. It really, really changes my mood. I don't have the exact research to cite for you, but my understanding is that there is research on how people's moods can be elevated, how much happier we can be just from listening to music. That could be something you could consider too, just not always listening to podcasts, although don't miss mine. Tuesday mornings, we can still hang out together, but maybe listening to a playlist that you really like from time to time.

I actually did this when my daughter when she was three and then the beginning of age four when she would just sometimes really struggle to be in a mood that was in any way conducive to getting in the car to go to school on time, that I would just, rather than hearing her scream in the car, I would just turn on whatever Amazon music most popular playlist was and just blast the music because it just made us all feel better.

It really did help her. I would say, "Okay, someone's really upset. Sounds like we need a dance party," and I'd just crank the music and drown out her screaming, but at the same time, it really made me less frustrated with her. In a time when even when I was trying to manage my thinking about her, I was really struggling to get out of frustration and annoyance with her. Something to consider.

What I want you to remember is that nobody else can determine or decide what makes you happy. You create that happiness with your thoughts. Once you can access what those thoughts are that are making you happy, you can expand them, so think them more often. When you're rounding and your patient is getting better, give yourself a little credit. This doesn't have to be out loud. This can just be inside your head. Let yourself be happy. Maybe at first your thoughts will center more around being happy for them, but that still creates happiness for yourself as well.

Then expand on that and be happy that you were able to help this patient and happy that your treatment plan worked. Be happy that your brain is still so sharp that you can tap into your vast medical knowledge and produce incredible value for those you take care of. Be happy that you work with a team that can all come together and help this patient, or if you feel like your team is not so good, then be happy that despite all the shortcomings of your team, you still were able to help this patient get better. You can expand on that happiness, no matter what the circumstance is. Take that little seed of happiness and expand it to create the life you want, even if it's just a little sesame seed.

Now, of course, you will not be feeling happy all of the time. If you've listened to this podcast for any length of time, you know that I teach that about 50% of our emotions will be negative or uncomfortable, and that's if we're doing this right. It's the idea that we should be happy all the time that ends up making us so miserable because we try to buffer away the negative emotions with food and alcohol and shopping and all sorts of other things that ultimately result in us feeling worse.

I'm definitely not proposing that you should be happy all of the time, but some intentional happiness is something that's available to you now. More intentional happiness is available to you now. You can start having that one thing that Oprah's guests all said they wanted, to be happy. You are in control of your happiness. You are in charge of this. All it takes is some dedicated effort, the willingness to explore your emotions, and to understand what thoughts create which emotions for you. That's when you really can create this amazingly happy life that you want, no matter what else is going on for everyone else around you.

On that note, my friends, I hope you have a very happy week, and I'll talk to you next time. Take care. Bye-bye.