



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey my friend, welcome back. We are in triple digits now for podcasts, how fun is this? Man, oh man, once we get to quadruple, that's gonna take a while. 1,000 episodes. I'm gonna do it, just watch me. I have to figure out how many years do I need to do podcasts to get to that point. But I love them, they're so much fun.

Okay. Today, we're talking about imposter syndrome. And I've had many clients ask me about this, some of you have written in and asked me to do a podcast on this. So I'm finally doing it for you. So some of you may or may not identify with this term. This is kind of an interesting one, it sounds sort of like an affliction, right? If you have a syndrome then it's just kind of like who you are, it's in your genetic makeup. And that's not at all what this is.

Imposter syndrome is really just a collection of thoughts or thought habits and beliefs that you have about yourself. I actually didn't really think that I had this, but as I've worked with more people, I definitely have a little element of it too. And I've worked through a lot of it, but I still have some of that going on. And so I bet that most of you, if not all of you, will have at least some little element of this somewhere. So definitely worth a listen here, okay?

So, I'm gonna ask you just a few questions to have you think about this, see if you resonate with any of this or if any of this sounds like you. So, do you believe that your successes or accomplishments in life may possibly have been due to chance or luck, or connections that you have, or possibly your physical appearance, or really anything else that's not your own talent or drive or intelligence or work ethic? Do you worry that you'll be found out or maybe exposed as a fraud or somehow inferior to other people that are in a similar position as you? Are you anxious that someone might figure out that you don't really know what you're doing? Or that you actually aren't that smart or you aren't good enough? Or that you made a dumb mistake? Do you worry about these things even though you're really well established and experienced in your practice, right? Your current position or field of medicine. You have many, many years of experience and you still think that you're gonna be found out.

Do you have thoughts that all of your colleagues are smarter than you, have a better fund of knowledge than you? Keep up with CME better than you do? Work harder than you or do a better job than you do? Are you terrified of making a mistake or not knowing the right answer or not doing the right thing?

Does your brain collect evidence to support this belief that you make mistakes or probably will and you don't know the right things to do? And so think about these things. I see elements of this in my clients so often. So these are some things that come up.

"My partner comes up with a more complete differential than I do on a regular basis. So therefore, I'm most certainly going to miss something important some day soon. Or my partner does their checkups better than I do. They cover more anticipatory guidance than I do. Or their anticipatory guidance is better than what I offer." This was one for me. And here's the thing, your brain will want you to think that this is objective. "Like they follow more of the guidelines than I do. There's a list of things we should be talking about and they cover more of them than I do." But here's the thing, it's just a way for your brain to confirm more shortcomings that you have and continue to confirm your belief in them, right? It's more evidence of your shortcomings in thinking that way.

Another one is, "If my patients knew how I parent my kids, they would think I'm a horrible doctor and would never take my advice." Also, a little sub-set of that is, "If my patients knew how I feed my kids, they would think I'm a horrible doctor and would never take my advice. If my patients knew how I feed and otherwise take care of my own body, they would never take my advice. My surgical skills are subpar and always have been, I'm just lucky that nobody's reported me yet. I only got into that, you name it, college medical school because I had legacy there. I only got into that college or med school because I'm a really hard worker." This is one that I had too. And this is one is sneaky because it looks like you're giving yourself props for hard work, but really, you're saying that, fundamentally, you're inferior and always will be. Right? That's what I thought about the med school I went to. I just only got into it because I'm a really hard worker and it's sort of like they did me a favor.

Another thought might be, "I only got into that residency or fellowship because they had pity for me. If you did the couples batch, you might think I only got into that residency because they really wanted him or her and just accepted that I came along with the package." You might make minor mistakes that are irrelevant or not important, or you might have had an episode of innocently overlooking something harmless and then you make that mean that you shouldn't be trusted to provide medical care. Because, most certainly, you will be making a very big mistake soon. You might put a lot of pressure on yourself to look smart and capable. Lest anyone discover that you're actually not.

So, think about if any of those resonate or something similar. Ultimately, your brain will look for anything that is unique to your personal life or life story and turn it around to use it against you, that you're different than other people, that you don't fit in, that you're not as personable. Somehow, pointing out how you differ from everyone else, that you're somehow missing something that's important to have, or you're a fraud or you're an imposter. And many of you will likely be thinking that maybe this doesn't apply to you because you believe you've accomplished really great things and you're proud of what you've amounted to. But, imposter syndrome can still be present, just in a more subtle way. Especially for really, very high functioning physicians, which the vast majority are gonna be.

So, what happens is that you can see that you have this external evidence that you're successful and skilled, that you have the degrees and you have the job and the income to prove it, but inside, you don't really believe that you're that successful and skilled. So it's just like how Brooke, who I had on the podcast last week was saying that if she were a doctor, she'd walk around every day, just exclaiming to the world, "I'm a doctor." I mean anytime she introduces me, she's like, "Okay, we're gonna get Katrina up here. Did you guys know she's a doctor?" I mean, she's just so in love with that accomplishment. So if you can see that this is an accomplishment but you still don't believe that you're that skilled or that successful or that you did that good of a job, you may have some imposter syndrome thinking going on.

So when other people then have a very high opinion of you, and are impressed with your success and accomplishments, but then this is in direct conflict with that you think and feel about yourself, you really can find yourself in a cognitive dissonance. And so remember, cognitive dissonance refers to a situation where you have conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. So in this case, it's conflicting beliefs about yourself. You rationally know one thing, but you are feeling another thing. So you rationally know that you've succeeded and you've done well in your life and you have lots of evidence for that, but you also believe that you're a failure or you'll never be good enough, or deep down you're lazy. So it's a disconnection what others see about you and what you can rationally see about you, and how you actually feel inside.

So this is that difference where we are intellectually understanding something and then being able to tap into what intellectually might not make a lot of sense but it's still how we're actually feeling, the true, authentic emotions that we have about ourselves. So this can bleed over also into people pleasing because then we have this deep fear that someone is going to reveal our shortcomings, right? Then we're gonna be found out as being undeserving, somehow, or unqualified in some way, or that they may see us as a fraud, like we've just been duping everybody into thinking that we're smart and good. And we think that we don't deserve to be in the position that we're in, right? Like if they knew, they would definitely not keep me in this position.

And this can happen even when we haven't lied or even when we have not blurred the edges on anything. We're totally upfront, we have nothing to hide, except our own opinion of ourselves, that we're not good enough. So what's so fascinating is how often we think that if we get a promotion of some kind or we get hired by that really prestigious hospital or practice, like our dream job, that then we'll feel deserving. Like we've made it, like we've accomplished something and that we're worthy. But, as you know, your brain just follows you to that new job and you'll just continue to think the same way about yourself, even when you're chair of your department or chief of staff, or head of the medical school. In fact, oftentimes, what ends up happening is you end up getting that promotion of going to that prestigious hospital and then your thoughts about yourself are even worse. Right? Because you're thinking, "Oh, my gosh. Now, look where I am. If they discover who I really am, it's gonna be even more embarrassing, it's gonna be even more horrifying."

So as you know, feeling deserving of something is an emotion, and it's not created by our job, it's created by our thoughts. Right? It's created by our brain. And the same goes for feeling worthy. So what I have found in my clients is that they're usually the ones who bring up the imposter syndrome to me.

They seem to know, at least on some level, that they have imposter syndrome thoughts. But, it's not leading to any change in their thinking, so that awareness, they know. They're like, "This doesn't make sense that I think this about myself or believe this about myself, because I have all this other evidence, this objective evidence that that's not the case for me. But I can't stop from living out this belief." And they often feel pretty bad about this, because they know what they're doing but they don't know how to believe something differently about themselves and how to get off that sort of imposter syndrome merry-go-round. It's like this cycle of thinking.

"I'm not good enough in some way." Then experiencing a negative emotion, then possibly eating to feel better or if they're not eating, the response is often to do the opposite of what might actually improve their skills. Right? They hide instead of learning more or reading about their patients or asking for help. And then this results in more proof that they're not good enough and the cycle continues. So thinking you're not good enough does not lead to you doing things that make you better. Like what if you think my fund of knowledge is really subpar, and maybe it's true. Like you really do need to learn more things and it would make you better able to offer excellent medical care if you had a better fund of knowledge. Well, constantly thinking about how awful you are tends to not drive you to go read and learn more, right? We tend to hide, maybe eat, avoid doing what's required. It's really interesting. Right?

So before you just turn off this podcast thinking that this issue doesn't apply to you, understand that self-critical thinking can be such a long standing habit that we really simply just take those thoughts as just the fact or the truth. So here's an example. Like my sister has always been smarter than me, or I didn't learn enough in med school in residency. Or, I don't have skilled hands for a surgeon. These are all optional ways of thinking about ourselves. So the key is to determine what the results are of thinking this way about yourself. Right? If thinking, "My sister's always been smarter than me," serves you, okay, great. But if the result is that you don't do things to advance your knowledge base, to show up in the way that you wanna show up in your life, then telling yourself that story, comparing yourself to your sister might not be something you wanna continue doing.

So, from there, when you are evaluating these thoughts, then you can decide if that way of thinking about yourself serves you moving forward, if it's something that you wanna do, or if it's something you wanna change. So many of us physicians, the imposter syndrome thoughts began early in life. And, you know, often we have these amazing families and they really meant well by encouraging us to do well in school. And many of our parents, most likely, really thought they were doing something really good and empowering for young women by emphasizing academic achievement and intelligence rather than physical looks or who you'd end up marrying, or things like that. But for many of us, this inadvertently set us up for having this ongoing concern that we're not smart enough or we don't measure up, no matter how much we achieve or accomplish. And if in your family, intelligence was considered your greatest asset and measure of your worth, it really could feel really terrifying to think that other might discover that you're not as intelligent as they thought you were.

So, imposter syndrome is not an affliction, I want to make that clear. It's not like if you have this, like I said, it's not in your genetic makeup, it's not like all hope is lost if you have it. It's really just a description of a collection of your own critical, self-talk thoughts.

Let me just repeat that. Imposter syndrome is just a description of a collection of your own critical, self-talk thoughts. And they're often old habit thoughts from way back, from your family, from society, or just from your own negativity bias pointing out your shortcomings. So, like any thought, it's worthwhile to examine the imposter syndrome thoughts and decide if they're ones you want to keep.

So first, when you're still believing these thoughts as the truth or facts, it can feel really, pretty bad to live inside your head. Imposter syndrome thoughts hold you back from achieving what you want or you know you're capable of. And you'll always be looking to get that gold star from other people, which is just prioritizing what other people think about you over what you think about you. I see that so often, right, where wanting validation from somebody else to determine whether we can feel good about ourselves or not. Instead of just deciding to feel good about ourselves. You also will tend to possibly avoid change or avoid taking any risks because that might create the opportunity for someone to find out the "truth about you", right? That you're a fraud, that you're not good enough, that you're actually not as smart as they think you are. And this insecurity then leads to shying away from negotiating for your salary or putting your hat in the ring for a promotion, or contributing to group decisions. You just play small in your life.

And in your personal life, it can look like not making an effort to lose weight, not going out on dates even though you really want a meaningful relationship, or not showing up as an emotional adult in your relationships. So ultimately, you undermine your own success and happiness because you don't think you deserve it and it would be taken away at any moment if the truth about you was discovered or uncovered. So, what's so interesting here is how these thoughts about ourselves become the results we don't want in life. That's why it's so important to examine your thoughts and see what they're creating for you in your life. You may think that you're just telling the truth about yourself, but that thought is creating the facts about your life. It's creating the results you have right now. So if you aren't happy with your current result, whether it's with your job or your eight, or your relationships, you have to be willing to think something new about yourself in order to create a different result.

So you may think, "If I were a good doctor then I'd be thin and I would have no food or alcohol issues. But then since I overeat and I do have an overweight body, it's further proof that I'm not good enough as a doctor." But here's what's interesting, nothing external will put the mute button on those internal voices. You can lose the weight, but then your brain will just latch onto something else that proves that you're not good enough. So, the first step here is working through these thoughts and recognizing that they are thoughts, they're sentences in your brain and they are not facts. What you need is some separation or distance from these thought habits. So, you work on awareness of what you're thinking and a thought download, of course, is perfect for this. Just emptying out what's in your brain so that you can actually look at it and evaluate it. Then you might start noticing some trends in the way that you think.

And when this happens, and you distance yourself from these thoughts, then you can choose new thoughts like, "I'm noticing that my brain is having thoughts that I'm not good enough and other people are smarter than me." Or, "My brain is telling me a list of things that are wrong with me, I don't have to believe them if I don't want to."

Right? It's helping to take your power back or then the living from within every thought that your brain just pops out for you, it's having a little separation. And having a little discrimination, in terms of like, which of these thoughts are actually the ones that I want? and that alone can help so much because you're understanding that every thought is optional and every thought is open for evaluation.

So then as you experience your life, you get to decide how you want to interpret everything. If you have a lot of imposter syndrome thoughts, that interpretation is that something is wrong with you and something bad will happen if everyone finds about you and who you really are. So, that's just one filter to interpret your life through. You can also choose another filter, like think about the filters on Instagram or on any photo app. It's still the picture, right? If you take a picture of yourself and apply a filter, it's still you. It just looks a little different. It's the same thing when you have a brain filter of how you interpret your life. It's still your life, but a different filter, a different way of emphasizing or accenting things. And maybe emphasizing and accenting the things that you want to see that serve you and not accenting the things that are not helpful and don't give you the results that you want.

So the experiences will still happen, but you're choosing what they mean about you and your life with intention. You're making sure that you're not continuing to build evidence to support the imposter syndrome thoughts. So, if someone else handles a patient who comes in, in a way that you didn't think of, your current interpretation of that might be that you aren't smart enough or don't know enough, or you would have done the patient a disservice had you seen them. But instead, you can decide that it actually worked out perfectly because now you have an opportunity to learn something new for the future. Right? Like both can be true, which one do you want to choose for yourself? If a patient you cared for had an undesirable outcome, you don't have to make that mean that you're incompetent in some way and shouldn't be trusted as a doctor. You can instead focus on learning where things went wrong so you can do better next time. But all the while, loving and supporting yourself, not making it mean something bad about you.

So, I've taught you before, on a prior podcast, how to believe something new. But I'm gonna go through it again a little bit here. Some people call it like a bridge of thoughts, like you're starting in one place and you're moving to another place and you don't yet believe the new thought yet. But I prefer to think about it like the monkey bar rungs. And if you think about it, when you're first standing at the monkey bars, you physically cannot reach the other side. Right? You need those rungs in between to get there. And so you know you need the monkey bar rungs. When you have a belief about yourself and you want to believe something different but you just really don't believe it yet. So one thought might be, "I'll never be a good enough doctor." And you want to believe that you are a good enough doctor, but you just don't yet.

Then what you can do is choose the next thought that moves you just one rung closer to believing that you're good enough to be a doctor and still feels true and believable but moves you away from that current thought of, "I'll never be good enough." So, maybe that might be possible that I could be good enough as a doctor. Or it might be, "A lot of the time I'm not good enough, but every now and then I am." Or, my favorite when you really are stuck is, "I'm not good enough as a doctor and that's okay."

Like just softening it with acceptance. Stopping resisting that somehow something is going wrong. Then you move yourself forward. "I might possibly be good enough. Sometimes I'm good enough. I was good enough in these ways, I'm still working on improving in these others. Most of the time I'm good enough. I'm good enough." So that's just an example.

And what you do is you move to the new rung, thought, and you work on believing that thought and having that be just the way that you think about yourself. So this can take a little bit of time, 'cause it can take some time to incorporate that into the way you think and believe about yourself. But what's gonna happen is your brain is gonna wanna go back to the old belief that you've been thinking, "I'm not good enough," so every time your brain offers that up to you, you intentionally think that new thought. And you intentionally think that new thought and you intentionally think that new thought. And then eventually, that becomes the way you think about it, then you're ready for the next one. And you keep moving on.

But why is this worth it? You might be thinking this sounds like a lot of work. Because it completely changes everything, right? If you're good enough, think about what your experience of your life would be like, your experience of your career would be like. You know? Usually when we think we're not good enough as a doctor, we also think we're not good enough as a mother and as a wife and as a friend, and as a sister, and as a daughter. Like if you could learn to believe that you're good enough, it would change everything. And when you know you're good enough, then you no longer need to use food to make yourself feel better. You just decide, you know what? I'm not gonna live that life anymore because I know that I want to live a better life for myself because I'm showing up in a way that's authentic for me, in a way that really gives me what I want in my life. And thinking that I'm not good enough is not useful, it's not bringing me there."

So this is the work, it's the work of our lives. I hope that this has shed some light on imposter syndrome for a lot of you. Like I said, I used to think I didn't really have it, but there definitely were some things that I'm like, "Yeah, they just let me in to medical school for this reason or that reason." And that really doesn't serve me, it's like why do I tell that story about myself? Like, no, they let me in because I'm amazing and they knew that I would be a great asset to the class, which is also true. Right?

All right you guys, so great. Let me know your questions about imposter syndrome. You can always leave a comment on the show notes page, [Katrinaubellmd.com\101](http://Katrinaubellmd.com\101).

All right, you guys have a wonderful, wonderful Christmas and New Years, and any other holiday that you might be celebrating. And I will see you next week, take care. Bye bye.