



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey, my friend, how are you? Welcome back to the podcast. I feel like I'm sounding particularly gravelly in my voice today. Gosh, we've had such nice weather warming up and then now it's snowing, and it's just spring snow, and it won't last for a long time, but I'm managing my mind around it because my brain really wants to feel a little bit demoralized. It's all going to be fine. Spring, welcome. This is what happens in the great white north. It's just crazy, right?

But I've got some beautiful flowers sitting on my desk today, and I am so excited to share with you what I have planned for this podcast because this is something that I think so many of us do. We don't even realize that we're doing it. And I think that this can make a really big difference for you. So what I want to talk to you about today is thinking in absolutes. And what I mean by that is thinking thoughts that have the following words in them. So words like; always, never, everyone or everybody, no one or nobody, ever, everything, nothing. You know what I mean, right? What I'm describing is things that are just totally black and white, in absolute.

So here's some examples of thoughts that include these. So one example is, "I always have to do everything around here." Have you ever had that thought? "I always have to do everything around here." How about, "Nobody ever helps me?" Have you ever had that one? "Nobody ever helps me," or, "Nobody can ever help me in the way that I need help."

Another one is, "That person," somebody is always a problem. That can be your medical assistant, that can be your boss, that can be your spouse, that can be your child, that can be a family member or your sister-in-law, your sister, your mom, your mother-in-law, father-in-law. "This patient/nurse always gives me a hard time," or maybe it's one of the physicians who is more senior to you, always gives you a hard time, or maybe it's again, a family member, especially an in-law family member, "Always gives me a hard time."

"Nobody ever does it that way." Ever have that thought? "Nobody ever does it that way." "Everyone always does it this way." It's the flip side. "Everyone always does it this way. Everybody knows that." Have you ever had that one? "Everybody knows that. Everything in my life is going wrong." "I always end up screwing things up, eating off my plan and failing at weight loss." "Nobody else ever struggles with their weight, and the food the way that I do." These are just a few examples. So what's happening when we think these thoughts is that our brain is just compartmentalizing an area of our lives about someone or something, ourselves and it just wants to fit our beliefs about that situation into a neat box.

If we think about something in absolutes, then we don't have to decide what we think about it moving forward, right? "I've already decided that everything in my life is going wrong, so I don't need to keep conferring with myself to determine whether things are going right or wrong in my life. If everything in my life is going wrong then it just is. That's just the way I think about my life. Or, "If nobody else struggles with their weight and food the way that I do, then I'll never see that somebody else might be struggling in a similar way or in a different way, but also struggling." So if we think about something in absolutes, then we don't have to decide what we think about it moving forward.

This is a really efficient thing that our brains do. The brain really doesn't care if it serves us or not. It's like, "Hey, let's just decide that we believe a certain thing and then just keep believing it because then we can think about other things. We can get to work on other things." But here's the thing about a lot of these absolutes, they are not even true. So let's just talk about the untruth here, right? I mean truth is up for discussion, but so is believing that something that doesn't serve you is true. So, "I always have to do everything around here." So many moms think this, "I always have to do everything." "Nobody ever helps me." Those are the two that kind of go together.

So we have this belief and so when people do things to help us, we can't even see it. So that's not true though. "Nobody ever helps me," is such a great one, right? Because I often think like, "You know what, though? Even if you felt that legit, nobody in your life would help you. If you call 911, paramedics are going to come help you, the firefighters are going to come help you," that you can count on. The police are going to come help you if you need them, that you can count on. The military is going to be present in our lives and in our country like that. There are definitely helpers always there. If you go to the grocery store and you need some food, the checker is helping you. The checker is helping you to be able to take that food home, right? So anything that you buy, right? The gas station is helping you by having big tanks full of gas available for you to put into your car, so you can keep driving.

So if you really spend some time thinking about it's not true at all that nobody ever helps you or that you always have to do everything around here. If you take a look, I mean there's going to be something that your kids do, or your spouse does, something. If you have any kind of roommate or somebody else that you live with where they help you or you hire something out. If you hire out cleaners, or you hired someone to help with your laundry or yard work or anything like that, you totally have help. You have tons of help. If you ever hire a roofer or painters or a plumber or an electrician? You totally have help. You don't have to do all that stuff for yourself. So there's so much evidence to the contrary, right?

When we believe that a certain person is always a problem, I mean always a problem, especially with a medical assistant or a nurse. When you're always thinking about it that way, that's all you'll see. You won't see that actually, "No, this one time they actually weren't a problem. They didn't create a problem for me. They actually just handled that one thing." But when we believe that they're always a problem, our brains just won't even look at that. "This patient or nurse or whoever always gives me a hard time," right? We have that thought, sometimes we've interacted with the patient enough times that we can anticipate what the interaction might be like.

I know I have this sometimes, especially with my families that were vaccine refusers, I always felt obligated to at least bring up the discussion. I didn't always feel I needed or that I even had the time to really delve in and dig in and make an argument. Of course, I did that initially, but didn't always do that with every visit, but when I had the thought that they're going to give me a hard time about vaccines, you can imagine that I showed up differently and that whatever they would say was interpreted by me as them giving me a hard time. The same with the nurse who maybe is always questioning what your orders are or anything like that. They always give you a hard time. If they don't give you a hard time, you're like, "Oh, well, that was the exception."

"Nobody ever does it that way." This one comes up a lot, especially I think for younger physicians, you know how that is. You finish up medical school, and you're like, "I'm kind of amazing. I'm kind of hot stuff." And then you're heading into a new residency at a different hospital system, maybe a different part of the country, and you've been taught that there's a certain way to do things, and I mean it can be as simple as how to submit an order, or it can be just a way of managing something or even just certain techniques or just ways that we approach a certain illness or certain circumstance. And then we go to a different place, and we find out that they do it differently, and we're like, "No, but nobody ever does it that way," right? Or like, "No, nobody does it that way." Like this is, "My way's the right way, the way I was trained is the right way."

This happens when you move from residency into attending life too where you're like, "Whoa, they do things totally differently," and it's easy to go to like, "No, no, no, that's not the right way. Everyone always does it this way. This is the right way." Or, "Everybody knows that. Everybody knows that this is the right way to do something." Sometimes we think everybody knows that in regard to our children, I'm guilty of this being like, "How come, through telepathy, my beliefs, and thoughts about things didn't just transfer over to my children? I think that everybody knows that and therefore they should know that." But maybe it turns out that I actually never told them or never made it clear to them, are actually taught them whatever it is that I thought that they should know. It's just not true at all. Right?

"Everybody always does it this way." Not true at all. I mean by saying everyone, that means everyone in the whole planet. There's probably not one single thing that everybody does the same way. Right? We don't even breathe the same way. Having the thought, "Everything in my life is going wrong." I mean if you're sitting here listening to this podcast, there's a lot of things going right in your life. You have electricity, you have clean drinking water, you have food. You, if you're listening to podcasts, probably have shelter. You probably have a job so that you have the money to pay for all of these things. You have some sort of device to be able to listen to the podcast. You have enough education to be able to understand what I'm talking about. I mean, there are a lot of amazing things going right in your life. So interesting, right? But we're like, "No, everything's going wrong."

Here's another one, "I always end up screwing things up, eating off plan and failing at weight loss." But here's the thing, you have to think about, that really is not true. If you've ever lost weight ever, even unintentionally, you have not failed at weight loss. When you have that belief, "I always end up screwing things up and eating off plan," you're not at all allowing yourself to see the times where you have eaten in a way that's healthy for your body that serves you.

Or maybe you've come up with a plan, and you followed it, or you've had some success even if it was fleeting. So that one's not true either. "Nobody else struggles with their weight and food the way I do." And I always love this one because we all think that we're the special snowflake.

Everybody thinks that, "We're the one that's different from everybody else." And it's that belief in our difference from everyone else that isolates us and ends up making us do the same things that we always have been doing that don't give us the results that we want. But here's the thing that's so interesting, when people think nobody else struggles with their weight and food the way that they do. I mean, look around, there're so many people who are overweight and obese, morbidly obese, who really, really struggle with their weight and their food. So our brains just decide, "No, no, no, you're different. Something's wrong with you," and let's just look at it that way without even questioning like, "No, I'm pretty sure there's a lot of people out there who really struggle in a very, very similar way."

So here's the thing about thoughts. When we think a thought over and over again, it becomes a belief. We start to believe it. And when we think this way with these absolutes over and over again, they become beliefs too. We truly believe deeper in our core that nobody ever helps us or that we always have to do everything. When we believe something, our brain shows us more evidence to corroborate that story. It will even ignore evidence to the contrary. So somebody helps you and it's like, "No, not taking that into consideration. Nobody ever helps me. I always have to do everything around here." It will truly ignore that evidence.

This is called confirmation-bias in the psychological literature and this is when it's well described. What the brain does, when there's a confirmation-bias, is it actually stops gathering more information that goes against the belief. So you have this belief, and it's like, "Yeah, we're done. We believe this. We're not going to look at anything else," so you won't be as aware of somebody helping you, of a problem person not causing a problem, of the things that are going right in your life. A prime example of this is people who are not a fan of our president right now. They decide that he is a problem person. He is lots of adjectives, right? Not a good person, doesn't do good things for our country. And so it literally doesn't matter what he does, confirmation-bias will confirm that belief and it will not allow you to gather information or interpret anything he does as being beneficial for the country at all. It will just confirm your belief that he is bad and wrong.

Now, maybe you're fine with that, but it's just interesting. That's why you're not able to see that like, "Well, most of the things maybe I wasn't really pleased with, but there were a couple of things." It feels so bad for us. It feels strongly counterintuitive to look for evidence that contradicts our beliefs, especially when the beliefs are very strongly held and are paired with strong emotion. So for instance, an example of our president, there's a lot of strong negative emotion that typically goes along with what he's doing, what's going on with him. And so then it feels, I mean sometimes people describe this feeling like really icky or just feels awful inside to even look for evidence that might contradict that belief. Even though the belief that he is a terrible person also feels bad. That's so interesting, we're just arguing for that negativity for ourselves.

So we just are not as aware. We are not able to see things, right. We think that everybody should know something, but some people don't know what you know. Lots of people don't know what you know. I had to always remind myself of that when I was on call back in practice where it's hard as a doctor when you know certain information for as long as you know it, you start thinking, everybody knows it. You really don't think that it's different or special or unique or anything like that.

And so these families would call on the weekend or at night or something and ask some sort of question. And my brain really just wanted to be like, "Everybody knows that. Are you kidding me right now? You're seriously asking me that. You woke me up to ask me that at 3:00 AM, really?" But then I always had to bring myself back to like, "Lots of people don't know what I know." I've known it for so long that I think this is just common knowledge. It's not common knowledge. These people are coming from the purest place. They just want to help their child. They're just scared and afraid that they're going to screw something up. I'd rather they call then not call and do the wrong thing. There are lots of thoughts that I'd have to remind myself of, but my brain right away it was like, "No, if you know these things than everybody knows them and someone who doesn't know them, what's wrong with them, something's clearly wrong with them?"

So you can see how powerful confirmation-bias is in our lives. I mean this is some serious business here. This is something that's happening for all of us and in a lot of areas, we don't even know it's happening at all. But here's an example that I think is really easy for us to understand. Think about when people thought that the world was flat. People legit believed this. This was the way it was. They weren't like, "It's a belief," they're like, "It's a fact the world is flat." So then it was proven that the world is round. So people started suggesting that the world is round and people freaked out. Even if they could understand the science to show that the world is round, they were like, "No, it's not." Because confirmation-bias is so powerful. Their belief is that the world is flat and so confirmation bias would not allow them to even entertain the idea that the world is round. And it took a long time for people to really get on board with what we all now believe and all can agree on that the world is round.

So when these thoughts are so efficient to think and believe it's going to require a little bit of sleuthing on your end to uncover them. Now, some of the ones that I gave you as examples, you might be like, "Yep, totally. Yep, that one. Yep, that one." But there might be other ones. There probably are other ones that you have that you don't even recognize as a belief or as a thought. You really think it's just a circumstance. It's really just a fact. So you're going to have to do some sleuthing to figure that out. So how do you do that? When you do your thought downloads, you see these kinds of thoughts written down. So these are going to be the thoughts that have these kind of absolutes in them; always, never, everybody, nobody, ever, everything, nothing, right? So you start noticing those, and you just question them a little bit.

So I want to make it clear, you're not aggressively confronting yourself. You're not asking yourself to believe anything new or different in that moment. You're not trying to force yourself into believing something that you think you should believe that's different. Instead of you're just open and curious and interested in whether that thought is actually true or not. First, you have to recognize that's a thought, right? Then you're just open and interested in exploring it. "Maybe it's not even true. Maybe it is, I don't know. But let me just find out.

If I'm going to continue to believe this way. Maybe I should just confirm that that's actually true and that believing that actually serves me." I think it's great to question all of your beliefs periodically, and some of them you're going to want to keep, and some of them you might find, "You know what? Actually, that's not really a great one. I'm going to choose something else."

So if you have the thought, "Nobody ever helps me," you can question that. So questioning it looks like this, "Where in my life does someone help me? Is it possible that someone does help me, and I'm not noticing it right now? Where in my life is that happening? What do these people do for me?" And then you can ask yourself, "What does it mean to me to have someone help me? Why is this a big deal?" Right? Because here's the deal. There are people who live out, have you ... I haven't really watched these shows, but my parents tell me about them. The shows about people who live out in the Alaska frontier, in the middle of nowhere. And they are just homesteaders and living off the land. And some of them are truly living by themselves. They're living off the land. They have very little money. They don't need the money. And that's what they want. That's what they're choosing. They're not excommunicated and forced to do this. This is what they're choosing to do.

So for them, "Nobody ever helps me," wouldn't be a painful belief, right? They'd be like, "No one ever helps me. And that's exactly how I want it." So that's a belief that might serve them, right? "I have to do everything and that's exactly how I want it. I want to be able to do all these things because these are the things that are important to me. So what does it mean to me to have someone help me?" Someone in the Alaskan frontier is like, "It means that I'm not living out my highest potential as a human being because this is what I want to do." But for some of us, it might mean that someone cares for us if they help us, or that we're taken care of, we'll always have what we need. It's important to understand why this is even a problem for you. Like what do you make it mean?

I hear this frequently when I coach my clients on their husbands. This is a thought that comes up pretty frequently for them. "He does nothing to help around the house. He does nothing around the house." But I've coached on this multiple times and once we dig in, it's really never true at all. It's just not true. It turns out that this husband always does tons of things around the house, really contributes to the household on multiple, multiple levels. So that thought, "He does nothing around the house," it is just flat out false. What's really true is, "He doesn't do the additional things around the house that I think he should do," and that's totally different. And it feels totally different once you really recognize like "No, that's actually what it is. I have a list of things that I think he should be doing in addition to all the things that he does, and he's not doing those, but I think he should." Totally different than, "He does nothing around the house."

I've even had clients tell me like, "My husband's basically useless." That's an interesting one. Especially when he has a full-time job and brings home money. I wouldn't say that he's useless. Right. That's just really not true. So in the case of, "He does nothing around the house," and then recognizing, "Oh, it's actually he doesn't do the additional things around the house that I think he should do," this is actually a manual issue. So let me just briefly describe the manual. I've described it earlier a long time ago on these podcasts, but in case you're new or haven't listened to that one, let me just explain what that term means.

The manual is kind of this invisible operation manual or instruction manual on how you think other people should act and behave and things they should say and do and not do. So if you buy a new washing machine, you get an instruction manual. All of the things that you should do, what you shouldn't do, it completely tells you how to operate the whole thing. Well, we're just like, "Hey, listen, I've got a manual for you and this is exactly how you should operate. You should be doing all these things. You shouldn't be doing those things. When I think that you should be doing these things around the house, and you don't do them you're violating my manual for you. This is how it's supposed to work."

So when we have a manual for someone else, and we think they should act a certain way, and they don't, as humans do, then we experience a lot of discomfort because we think that they should be following the rules that we've set forth. That's what the manual is. So in this case, it's a manual issue. She thinks he should be doing these things around the house and when he doesn't do them, she thinks that something's going wrong and then she gets upset with him rather than recognizing, "Well, I have a belief about what he should do, and he disagrees or maybe he doesn't even know about it."

That actually happens a lot where we just think that they should, again, through telepathy, just know these things. But when you drop the manual, and you go, "The reason why I want these things done is because it's important to me, and he doesn't even care about it. Well, then I might as well just work to get it handled. However, that looks like, whether I do it myself or hire it out or delegated out to somebody else in the family, then it just gets handled," is totally different. So once you see that it's your manual from to do these things, you can decide if you want to think about it differently.

Now, I would always suggest that in manual situation that you would do your best to drop the manual because the manual only creates negative emotion and pain for you. And once you recognize all of this, you can just drop that absolute belief and absolute thought of, "He does nothing around the house." Now, your brain, because again, it's so efficient and thinking it may offer that up from time to time, but you just remind yourself that it's just really not true, right? And believing that, thinking he does nothing around the house. All it does is create a log of negative emotion. It certainly does not get more things done around the house.

Another example is, "I always end up eating off plan." So we think that we're literally just letting people know or just conveying the news, telling it like it is being honest, being realistic about what our experience is, but we're really not.

It's worth it to question this. You can ask yourself, "What are examples of a time where I did eat on plan? Maybe even for just a minute or five minutes of eating on plan before I then decided to eat off plan." It cannot possibly be true that you always eat off plan. If you've ever had a plan, you've at least followed at some of the time. And if sometimes you eat according to your plan, then this thought, this belief is just not true. But believing the thought, "I always end up eating off plan," ends up resulting in the action of eating off plan, right? Think about that.

Think about the model. We have our thoughts that create our feelings, feelings drive our actions, actions create our results. When you have the thought, "I always end up eating off plan, it drives a feeling, creates a feeling that drives the action of eating off plan. And the result is you eat off plan and confirm that this is what you always do. Plus, you gain weight, you don't move towards your goals. You're not building up a relationship with yourself and all those other important things. It's so interesting, right? What we end up doing is we defend our beliefs that create all the results that we don't want in our lives. So really think about that. Where are you defending your beliefs? You're arguing for your beliefs. You want to keep them except they don't create at all the results you want in your life and then work through that because it's so important.

So then I got to thinking, "Are absolutes always bad?" And the answer is, of course not because absolutes are just not true, right? Some absolute thinking can really serve us. So here's some examples of absolute thoughts that can be amazingly helpful. "Everything happens for me." This is a classic Tony Robbins quote, "Everything happens for me." Sometimes people get confused about what that means. When something happens for you that means that some people are like, "Oh, it's the silver lining." I mean, you can look at it like that, but in every single thing that happens, there's going to be something, some sort of lesson, some sort of takeaway, some sort of opportunity for growth that is available for you to take advantage of if you're looking for it.

So, "Everything happens for me, even the things that are super painful and uncomfortable, and I want to argue against, there's somehow a way that this happening for me and if I can find it, my life just totally opens up for the better." "I can always create what I want in my life." Totally true, you can always create whatever you want in your life. "There's always a way to make something fun." So many of us don't have a lot of fun in our lives. There's always a way to make something fun, to add a little game to it, to lighten the mood, to add some levity, to make it more enjoyable. "I'm always in control of my experience of my life." I mean, I'm telling you what, if you can work on believing that, "I'm always in control of my experience of my life," everything will change for the better. Everything. It's amazing.

"It was always going to happen this way because it did." This is dropping that resistance that I've talked a lot about. Stopping thinking that something went wrong because it happened a way that it did. "It was always going to happen this way because it did," and then it's sort of like, "Now what? What am I going to make it mean? How is this happening for me?" "I never have to worry about money because I believe in myself, and my ability to create value in the world." This is actually a belief that I have for myself, and it feels amazing. I just never have to worry about money. Indulgent emotions are always optional and as a reminder, indulgent emotions are emotions that never create anything useful.

So examples are doubt, guilt, worry, confusion, indecision and overwhelm. "I'm never a victim. I'm always in the driver's seat of my life." I mean talk about an absolute that completely draws you up into living your best life. I mean, it's amazing. There are always unlimited possibilities. So many of us, our brains want to just tell us that there's no way or very few ways or like, "The only way that I could lose weight is either to starve myself or cuddle them off." That's literally what our brains are telling us. There are always unlimited possibilities. "I always make friends everywhere I go." So consider choosing an absolute thought, like one of these that I described or something else and practice believing it.

People often ask me like, "But how do I believe something I don't believe yet?" You have to practice it. It's like, how do you get good at anything? I always ask my kids this when they're like, "How do you whatever?" Like, how do you get good at something? Practice, you have to practice. And by practicing it if you just think you're going to remember, I mean if that works for you, great. But what I find is that for most of us the next day, we've completely forgotten.

So you have to practice by writing it down every day, actually writing it out with a pen and paper. There's something about doing that. This has been proven in the research. It really changes your brain more than typing it out. You can put it on the lock screen of your phone. You can make a little graphic, Word Swag is a great app for that, and you can make a little graphic put it on lock screen of your phone and the home screen and then every time you're on your phone you're always seeing it. You're always sending that message to your brain. You can hang notes in places where you're going to see it. You can tape it to your computer, you can have it on your mirror in the bathroom. You can have it wherever you're going to end up seeing it, maybe by the kitchen sink. Because you ultimately have to remind your brain of it regularly, all the time and probably for a while. This is not like a three-day thing and then all of a sudden this just how you're living your life.

It's going to require some effort, but it's the best effort ever because right now you're just putting a lot of effort into believing something that doesn't serve you. So you need to ask your brain to show you how your new absolute is true every day. "Show me evidence. I want to see lots of evidence that this is true." And over time your new absolute thought is then what your brain is looking to confirm with more evidence. And then what it doesn't see is the opposite. So you can use confirmation-bias to your own benefit.

So this is super, super good stuff you guys. I notice this a lot with people. Of course, I've noticed it in my own thinking as well, but it's this absolute thinking often feels safe. It's like we would like to just know that we can count on this belief, but ultimately it doesn't serve us. It really can make us feel miserable. So I want you to spend some time thinking about where that's showing up, which are the absolute thoughts that you need to change and then deciding in advance now how you want to believe. How you want to think moving forward and then practice that and set that into motion. It's going to be amazing.

Have a wonderful week, and I can't wait to talk to you next time, take care.