



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey my friend, how are you? So glad to have you here, so glad to be recording this for you today. Can't believe it's episode 125. Gosh, time flies, right? I feel like I was just doing a hundred for you guys not that long ago. This year is almost half over, what is happening? It's like my dad who is in his early 80s says, he's like, "Life is like a roll of toilet paper; when you get toward the end, it just spins faster and faster."

I kind of feel like you remember adults saying that when we were kid's like, "Oh gosh, the time just flies." I'm like, "No, it doesn't. Every day feels so long," and now I'm getting it. It's just the days fly, just getting work done and moving along, making big, big differences in women's lives and it's super, super, super fun.

Today, I want to talk about when it's really hard to lose weight, and I think all of us have been there probably at one time or another because if it was so easy, then we wouldn't still be talking about it, we wouldn't be having this problem anymore. And I think that when it feels really hard to lose weight, our primitive brains, that part of our brain that's just wanting to keep us alive, just really starts to go into overdrive. We can start to let it take over and run the show, and then it's all drama, it's all horror, it's all, "This is terrible. It's too hard, I can't do it," and then before we know it, we're back off our plan, gained the weight back and you know how that story ends.

I want to talk to you about what to do when the weight loss is really feeling challenging. When you're doing all of the things: you're eating on plan, you're processing your urges and your negative emotions, you're doing the thought work, you're planning your food the night before, you're trying to get as much rest as you can, and it is still just hard.

We often think like, "I thought by this point, it should be easier." We start thinking, "Something's going wrong. It shouldn't be this hard. It's easier for other people. I wish it were that easy for me. Look at that girl, she's eating candy all the time and look how slim she has. It's not fair. Why do I have to suck at making this easy? Everyone else seems to be thinking this is easy and it's still not for me. I've been at this a long time. It shouldn't require so much mental effort anymore. I shouldn't have to work so hard at this. It's really discouraging that this seems so challenging still. I don't know if I can keep this up forever."

These are the stories that our brain offers us. Oftentimes my clients will say, "I don't want to have to live like this forever. I want to be able to just have ice cream on a hot summer day. I want to be able to just have a margarita sometimes when I go out for Mexican." And those are our thoughts about our experience of doing what it takes to lose the weight and keep it off. We think we're just telling it like it is, "Like it is hard. I'm just being real. I'm just telling the truth. I'm just sharing what it's like for me," but in actuality what we're doing is we're stacking the pain, we're stacking the discomfort and the difficulty and the challenge. We're stacking the resistance and making the experience of weight loss even more uncomfortable with the way that we're thinking about it.

So many of us think that weight loss is too hard or not something that we can sustain. And if you've been listening to this podcast for a while or if you've known you needed to lose some weight for a while and you just haven't been doing it, I'm talking to you. We just have this idea of like, "It's going to be too hard," or "There's going to be a right time to do it," or "I just need to get through this difficult period, then I'm going to be able to focus on it."

But what's actually too hard to sustain is doing all of the things that help us to lose weight while thinking terrible feeling thoughts about ourselves and our bodies and the process of losing weight and what we're missing out on and how other people are responding to us losing weight and all of that. It's the way that we experience it, it's the actual part of it and then there's the additional thoughts on top of it. How can we interpret this instead?

One way of approaching this is encouraging yourself to say yes to the process, to all of it. It kind of reminds me of that show. Was it on TLC or something? Say Yes to the Dress. Instead, you're saying yes to the process. How about that? So you're saying yes to the process, especially the hard parts. This is how I like to think about doing hard things, but let's just talk about it in the framework of losing weight because I've been there with you. I lost 40 pounds so many times. Gained it back again, lost it again, gained it back. It was so hard to maintain. It was so hard at the end. I would just end up being like, "This is good enough. Like I really get it. Trust me, I get it."

But this is the way I think is a really great way to think about it that can really serve you when it feels hard. Imagine you are getting a degree in weight loss at an Ivy League university. You're going to Harvard, you're going to Stanford, you're going to Yale... Actually, I don't think Stanford is an Ivy, but you know what I'm saying? A really, really top-notch high-end university. You're there for the weight loss degree, and you're going to have to take some classes because this is how it goes. You take a certain number of classes every semester or maybe you're just taking it one class at a time, which is totally fine.

And your current class might be Processing Urges. Last semester maybe you took Planning Your Food in Advance or maybe you took Fully Dialing in the Hunger Scale. So if you were taking these classes at Harvard to get your degree in weight loss, would you expect it to be easy? Would you be like, "Oh, I thought this was the community college level," not knocking community colleges, but I actually think they're amazing. But you know what I'm saying? We wouldn't go into these high end universities and be like, "What do you mean this is challenging? I thought this was just going to be something I was going to completely coast through."

Like I'm completely shocked. Why is this so hard? Why isn't it getting easier? I mean, Gosh, now I'm doing this thing and this seems hard too. Now I'm in this class, this class seems even harder than the classes I took last semester."

They get harder as you go along sometimes. Of course, we would expect it to be hard. We would, of course, expect ourselves to work hard. I went to Johns Hopkins for undergraduate and the organic chemistry classes there were just notoriously difficult and were a huge way that they filtered out people who thought that they wanted to be premed, and nobody walked into orgo and was just like, "Yeah, I got it. Piece of cake. Haven't ever learned this before. Completely new to this, but this should be easy. No problem." Everybody went in going like, "Okay, this is the real deal. Like I'm going to have to buckle down. I'm going to really have to make sure I focus and study." Like even the smartest people, nobody was blowing this off.

What if that was the way you approached your weight loss as though nothing was going wrong when it was hard? When organic chemistry is hard, you're like, "Yes," yes to this, because you know why? Because I want the results of having gotten a good grade in this class so that I can reach my other goals, get the results that I want. Like going to medical school. In this case, "Yes, I really want to master dialing in my hunger scale, I really want to master processing urges. I want to get an A in this class so that I can achieve that goal of permanent weight loss."

When you just like cheat off your neighbor and get the notes from someone else and then you find out what the test questions were from someone who took the class last semester and then you just kind of memorize them but you don't like really learn it and internalize it so that it's a part of you, it's so much less effective. You're not later going like, "Oh my gosh, I totally know that stuff. I can really build on that knowledge." You were just trying to cheat the system, trying to sneak your way through and that never ends up resulting in what you're wanting longterm. You have to say yes to the hard work. Yes to all of it.

You have to say yes to the days when the scale drops and yes to the days when it goes up. You have to say yes to the days when your urges are pretty easy to process and they're pretty mild and they're really not that strong and yes to the days where they feel super intense. You have to say yes to the days where you are so restless and all you want to do is eat to just calm your body down and yes to the days where it was really a great day and it was really pretty easy and things were simple for you. You have to say yes to having your food totally dialed in and yes, to creating a creatively constructed meal in a restaurant in order to stay on plan. Probably not your first choice or third, or fourth or seventh choice, but you made it work.

You have to say yes to getting enough sleep when you can and yes to sleepless nights and exhaustion the next day. By saying yes to all of it, we're dropping the resistance, we're dropping the belief that something is going wrong and then it should be different than it is. It shouldn't be any different than it is okay. The belief that it should be different, it should be easier, it shouldn't be so challenging is what's making it so much more challenging. It's the opposite of what we think. We think we're just telling the truth, but if it was supposed to be different, it would be different. It's not different, so this is how it should be.

In fact, the harder it is, the more of an amazing accomplishment it is on the other side when you've achieved it. The more chances you have to evolve as a human being into your highest and best self. This is how you really grow. And think about it. Like I know for some people med school really was relatively easy. I mean it depends, but yeah, they had to put some work in, but it really wasn't overall that challenging. And so they graduated and that's great and they feel accomplished, but it doesn't feel like that much of an accomplishment. Like, "Oh my gosh, look what I did. This was amazing."

But those who really had to work hard, it's so much more of an accomplishment. And you may recall long time ago I did a podcast about the natural pleasures that we experience as human beings and how those are the ones that we really want to focus on, and one of those natural pleasures is a sense of accomplishment. It's pleasure and natural pleasure that goes on and on and on. It's not something like eating a cookie and for five minutes you feel good and then you feel bad about yourself, it's this sense of accomplishment that never leaves you.

Think about how great that will feel when you've come through this class. Like you've gone through this process, this program that they have at this weight loss university and you're going to come out on the other end feeling so accomplished, but this opportunity is only there for you if you say yes to the experience. What many of you do is you take a couple of classes or maybe you start your first class and then you're just like, "This seems hard. I'm just going to back out of it. This isn't a good time. I can't focus on this." And then you have to start again. Your credits don't transfer. You have to start all over again.

Some of you make it to second semester, senior year, and then you go, "You know what? Forget it," and then you have to start at the beginning again, and that's completely fine, but just recognize what you're doing when it's second semester, senior year and you're just going, "Yeah, screw it." You're not saying yes to the experience, you're not saying yes to those last couple of pounds and losing them and everything that goes into it. You have to say yes to the easy and the hard, the wins and the losses, the failures upon failures, the mistakes upon mistakes. It's all part of the process. It's like taking the midterm and getting a C and going, "Whoa! Okay. Turns out I really need to buckle down because I need to do better than a C because a C is not going to be evidence that I've learned what I needed to learn in this class."

But besides saying yes, what else can we do to keep ourselves going forward in the face of incredible challenge? Sometimes it's really, really hard. Things are happening in your life or you're trucking along and now there's some significant challenges. Maybe you've had loss of a close family member or friend, maybe it's something really big is happening. Maybe you're having a big relationship change. Maybe there's some big-time stuff happening at work and it's so easy then to be like, "I can't take on one more thing. I barely was holding it together with this weight loss thing anyway. I'm just going to have to take a break," and you know what taking a break means, it means just getting in the way back.

This is another tool that you can use, and trust me, hang in there with me, you take it a day at a time. This can sound trite, but it's actually something that I borrowed from Alcoholics Anonymous. I do just want to say that I'm not an expert in AA or really any 12 step program for that matter, but I do know that taking your recovery journey a day at a time is a core principle of recovery.

Those of us who are trying to lose weight or even working on maintaining, especially when you're working on maintaining, we can really take advantage of this tool too.

Because when it's hard to lose weight and it feels that way, we can tend to catastrophize about the challenge. We think, "Well today was really hard, so there's no way I'm going to be able to keep this up long term," or "This whole week has been hard," or "This whole month has been hard. There's no way I'm going to be able to keep this up on going." "I can't see myself being able to do this month after month, week after week." "I don't know how I'm going to hold it together while I'm on vacation," or through the holidays or over the summer or whatever is a challenge.

What I want to offer to you is that you don't have to entertain any of those concerns in your head. They seem really important and necessary to think about, but I promise you, you really don't. All you need to think about is what you're going to do today. One day at a time; what are you going to do today, and tonight you can plan what you will do tomorrow. You're planning your food in advance. Then tomorrow all you have to focus on is following that plan for one day, just one day. That is the plan for the day and that's all you need to think about.

And when your brain tells you it's too hard and you'll never be able to keep it up, you can just agree with this. That's again saying, yes, you're not it, you're not going, "Oh, I shouldn't be thinking that I'm not going to be able to keep it up," instead going, "Yeah, maybe I won't be able to keep it up forever, but I will keep it up today." That is saying yes to the hardship and the difficulty. It's acknowledging your experience and not asking yourself to think any differently about the future. You're not saying that the way that you're thinking about it is wrong and she'd be different. Instead, you're just reminding yourself that you don't have to make any of those decisions today.

Some people will say, "Well wait, if I decide that I'm not going to really drink anymore, seriously, I'm not going to like have champagne toast at my daughter's wedding?" Well, considering that she's three right now, we probably don't need to worry about it. It's probably not something that you have to decide on right now, but your brain is going to go to that. Like, "What about this? What about that? You're never going to have this. What if you go to Italy, you're not going to have any wine?" I don't need to know. I don't need to decide that today. When that opportunity and that experience arises, I will make the best decision for myself for that day.

Many of us talk about living in the present and all you have is the present moment. And there's a lot of truth to that, and we can apply that to our weight loss experience too because so much of what feels the most uncomfortable is when we're looking into the future and creating a story of how awful it's going to be and/or when we look to the past and we tell ourselves a story of how awful and horrible and difficult it was and uncomfortable. And then we project that into the future and go, "Well, that's exactly how it's going to be. I wasn't able to keep it up then so I won't be able to keep it up in the future as well."

I heard a story of someone who did go to Alcoholics Anonymous and used it to become sober and she was saying that there was somebody who came to all the meetings or many of the meetings and he would introduce himself and say, "I'm John," or whatever his name was, "And I'm alcoholic." And I think what they do is then they say how many days or weeks or months or whatever they've been sober.

And he said something like, "I've been sober 33 years and I'm definitely going to drink tomorrow, but I'm not going to drink today." And what she said was that at the time, because she was young, she was in her, I think, early 20s, she didn't understand it. She was like, "What's the student's deal like? Why is he constantly saying he's going to drink tomorrow? Like how is that helpful?"

And what she realized over the course of time was he didn't ever have to tell himself, "You're never going to drink again." What he kept telling himself was like, "You totally can drink. You can drink tomorrow, but you're not going to drink today." And here's the thing, tomorrow never comes. If every day you're like, "I'm not drinking today, but tomorrow I will," then the next day it's today again. You see that? And so for 33 years, this is how he was keeping himself sober and keeping himself on track.

I think we can use that same tool for ourselves in weight loss. You can decide how you're going to deal with that vacation once the vacation is tomorrow. Don't make it mean that like, "Oh, I just make decisions in the moment." No, it doesn't mean that. It means that the night before you planned with your prefrontal cortex, but then the next day when your primitive brains like, "We need all of the things," you're like, "Not today. Today, I'm just going to be focusing on what I planned, but maybe I can have it tomorrow."

You'll decide what you do for holiday when it's time to decide that. Right now, when I'm recording this, it's May, I don't need to worry about Thanksgiving today, but when your brain has this freak out worry storm, it thinks that you need to make all of these decisions for all of the stuff all at once right now and then it just feels so much easier to just quit or eat off plan, to relieve the pressure and the discomfort and the overwhelm and feel better for a little while. To just give ourselves this kind of calm within the storm. You will feel an incredible amount of relief when you implement this tool. You only need to decide what to do today.

Will you follow your plan today? Yes. Feeling desire for one of those cookies in the cafeteria that's as big as your face is normal. Say yes to the desire. Of course, you have the desire, but today, cookies aren't on the plan. Maybe I'll eat a cookie tomorrow, but not today. Maybe I'll have a handful of M&M'S tomorrow, but not today. Maybe I'll have snacks after dinner tomorrow, but not today because like I said, tomorrow never comes. All we have is today, but in the moment, it does help you like, "Oh, okay, I can have it tomorrow, but I'm just not having it right now." It allows us to wait, it allows us to be patient with ourselves.

This way you don't have to resist your experience so much. You say yes to today. Today is an unplanned day. The end. That is what you're doing. Combine saying yes to all of it, the whole experience, to dropping the resistance and then to just committing to doing what you said you were going to do today and knowing that you don't need to worry about the rest of that. When your brain offers up, "What about this? What about that? What am I going to do here? What am I going to have then?" Just remember, "I don't need to decide that right now. I will decide that when it's necessary for me to decide that."

This is huge, huge stuff. Really, really helpful.

Have a wonderful week and I will talk to you very soon. Take care of bye-bye.