



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey, friend, how is it going? Welcome back to the podcast. Really glad that you're here with me today. I'm really excited to talk to you about sustainable weight loss. And one way to think about sustainable weight loss is that that's also maintenance. Sometimes my clients will lose some weight and then they're kind of struggling with things but they're like, "Well, now I know exactly what I can get away with if I want to maintain this current weight." They're like, "I know what maintenance is. I just would like to maintain at a lower weight." So they're trying to work through that.

But it's almost summer now or it is basically summer and I was thinking about what we're doing as a family coming up. And we're going to be doing some different things but we really do love to camp and like full-on tent camp. It's a lot of work for the adults, but the kids have a super great time. It's great family time and we just really enjoy it. We have all the stuff and everything.

And the last couple of years, we just haven't really been able to get it together to camp. I think two years ago, the weekend we were going to go, it was just going to be thunderstorms the entire time so we went to Great Wolf Lodge instead, which is also fun but not the same. And then, last year, I think we had so many other things going on, one other travel that we just never really prioritized it or made it work. So this year, we said, "Okay, that's it. We're going to camp for sure."

I was thinking about camping and I was thinking about fires, and I learned how to actually make a fire this year. And that may not be of great significance to you but we do have a wood burning fireplace in our house and it's cold where I live in Wisconsin as I tell you frequently.

And now that our little kids are not so little anymore and it's okay to have a fire in the fireplace, we don't have to worry so much about them burning themselves or doing something crazy. We are now using the fireplace more and we're actually having some nice fires and everyone loves sitting around it and even puppies like loves it.

Anyway, I decided last year that I wanted to learn how to build a fire because before that, my husband just always did it. And I was completely fine with that. Like I'm totally okay with division of labor. I don't have to be able to do all the same things he can and we have never camped separately so he has lots of experience with that stuff so he always handled it. I just was not involved. The same thing with our wood-burning fireplace.

Well, I've decided last year ... Well, there might be some times when I would like to actually start a fire and have a fire myself and he's not home, and so I wanted to learn how to do it. So he gave me a little tutorial and it made sense and everything and it's totally fine. And then one night, he was putting the kids to bed and I was downstairs and I thought, "Oh, I'm going to surprise him. I'm going to start a fire. It's going to be great."

Well, I didn't burn the house down, so don't worry. But what I did do, we never discussed the idea that you do need to open the flue if you're going to start a fire. So it got really smokey. It didn't take any long and I yelled upstairs, "Matt, did you close the flue?" And he's like, "Yeah." I thought it was still open. And so I'm like, "Calm down, I started a fire." And he comes down and it's actually not that easy to open it because the house is built in the 30s and it's ...

Anyway, he knew what to do thankfully very easily and he got it open but still, for hours, we were not relaxing by the fire. We were instead opening all the doors and windows trying to get the smoke out, having the air purifier on. The best laid plans, right? But do you think that I will ever start a fire without checking the flue ever again? No, I will always be checking it.

But anyways, so let's talk about fires. Why are we talking so much about fires? I want to talk to you about different kinds of fires and if you've ever been camping or if you just imagine like some of you I know probably are not big into that or maybe you've never camped but you can envision. Like think of a camp fire like it's got some big logs and it's burning, and you're sitting around the fire and maybe talking or singing songs or telling stories or whatever but you're not really spending a lot of time necessarily having to tend to it or do a lot for it.

And that is what you want with a fire. Now, there have been times where we have been camping and it's been kind of interesting when you're camping with other people to find out how they build a fire. So we were at a camp, and we were with some friend. And we had been away and we came back and we saw that the other family had built a fire. Well, they hadn't lit on the fire yet but they had built up all the wood in preparation for it, and there's different methods like different theories on the best way to do it.

But what I thought was so interesting was that they had the big logs at the bottom like you normally do but they had an incredible amount of kindling on it, a newspaper. I mean, like as tall as I am like really, really high. And then to light it on fire, they totally put lighter fluid all over it. So you can imagine when this thing started, it was just like this huge, huge, huge fire. Of course, to my kids, I'm like, "Back up, back up." Of course, the pediatrician in me especially is like, "Fire and children, you need to be extremely, extremely careful."

Anyways, so some people do that like full-on lighter fluid or people pour gas or kerosene on it to get it going. And anyone who knows how to build a fire know that that is ... You can use that but it's really not required. If you build a good fire and a good setup for it, you don't need that. And then there's people who just throw a ton of kindling on the fire and they just keep throwing more kindling on the fire. And then it kind of starts to die out, but the logs never really get going burning so then they throw more kindling on and more kindling on and more kindling on and that's basically their whole fire. It's just lots of attention. The fire kind of burning out. Then adding more kindling, fire burning out, on and on.

And then, when you get it set up properly so that you have the logs set up, so that they can get the oxygen in there that they need. You put some newspaper in. You put some kindling on there and you light it properly provided that your wood isn't wet or things like that. It starts to catch fire. The kindling gets things going. The logs ignite and then just periodically, you throw a couple of more logs on and then you get to rest. And it just kind of does its thing. It's kind of on autopilot. All three of those different kinds of fires are like different ways of losing weight. So there's a point to this, I promise. So the lighter fluid people or the gas or the kerosene. This is like they want a huge flame, a huge fire right away and so they pour the lighter fluid on it and they light the fire and it goes up in huge flames but it doesn't last long. It completely burns out quickly. And if you throw some more lighter fluid on it, it flares up for a short period of time, but then before you know it, it's done. And just nothing is happening.

And with weight loss, the analogous version of that is extreme fasting, weight loss pills, overexercising, quick weight loss shakes and drinks, shots like pill ... All that stuff that people do to really try to get the weight off fast. They're like, "I've got this wedding coming up, or I'm going on vacation. I'm just not going to eat. I'm going to do all these extreme stuff like really get this weight off."

And then what do they always do? After some short period of time is they burnout. They binge or they eat all the off-limits foods and they gain all the way back and usually some more. And that is exactly the lighter fluid version of the fire. It's a complete flash in the pan. It's not anything that's going to be sustainable or ongoing or long term. It's not actually helping you get weight off of your body. It's totally just a means to an end. It's just a way to get that weight off fast which is probably just water loss honestly, and punishing yourself in the meantime because you're not going to have the benefit of that longer-term fire keeping you warm and having that nice result, long term. You got fire for short period of time. You got weight loss for a short period of time and then it's gone. Obviously, this is no good. We do not want to set up a system like that for ourselves.

Now, let's talk about the people who throw kindling on the fire. So they've got the fire going and the logs were like kind of trying to burn but they're not really. And then they throw more kindling on and then it's kind of dying out, and they just throw more kindling on. So you decide you want to lose some weight, so you get yourself ready and you're focused, and you're all in, and you're doing what you need to do. And you're probably seeing some results too. But then you go on vacation or you go to an event, or you eat out a fair bit for a while and you gain some back. And then it takes you awhile to get back on track.

And what happens for so many people is after that has happened, you're never back the way you really were at first. You're never as all in as you were in the beginning. You make exceptions regularly. You tell yourself that eating a little something you hadn't planned for won't make a difference. You have a spurt of a few on-planned days and then the weekend comes and you're back to overeating again a little bit, and the cycle continues. But your results are not what you're wanting. You're probably just hovering around the same couple of pounds. You go down a few, and then you go back up a few and you're just not really making traction or progress.

And that's like throwing kindling on the fire. You're like, "Oh, I overate a little bit. Okay, let me throw some more kindling on the fire. Okay, then I'll just follow my plan for a couple of days."

And then I do that but then I start overeating again, starts to burnout like, "Oh, let me just throw some more kindling on it again." You're not actually establishing the systems and the setup for yourself to support yourself to make your weight loss sustainable. You're just kind of constantly throwing kindling at the fire.

And that requires a lot of work, a lot of effort. You don't get to sit back and just enjoy the fire. It's not just happening kind of in the background. It is a big focus of yours. Maybe you get a little break and then you're right back into it again, wondering why you're not getting results. Often, throwing kindling on the fire also looks like, "I'm going to try this diet plan." And then two months later, "Oh, my friends said this is good. I'm going to do this instead." And then a couple of months later, "You know what? That's it. I'm trying keto. I'm just going to do that."

It's like there's this kind of kindling and that kind of kindling and there are all different kinds of weight loss programs that we're trying but we're not actually setting anything up that's going to be long term and successful for us to getting us toward that goal that we want and then have it be maintainable. So many of us are so focused on just getting to that goal weight and what I can tell you now having been a few years out on this, maintenance is a whole different bowl of wax. It's very simple just like weight loss is simple but it's got its own set of things that you have to work through. And those are different for everybody and it's not good or bad. It just is.

So, when we have this idea that we're going to lose the weight and then that's going to be it and all the problems will be solved, it's like we know intellectually not all the problems are going to be solved, but deep down, we're kind of like, "No, I kind of have a feeling that a lot of the problems are going to be solved." We don't realize that there's still going to be more work to be done. As we want to set ourselves up to be in a position where whatever that work is, we just keep trucking along. We keep doing it. It's not a problem.

Let me describe to you this fire that is set up the proper way. It's a solid fire and it sustains itself for a long time. This is the kind of fire that you're like, "Gosh, I'm ready for bed but this thing is still going like is this safe for us to even go to bed? We got to maybe spread it out a little bit, let it start burning down," because it's really just going on and on and on. It has all the fuel it needs.

It does not need a lot of attention and when you first start this fire, you do need some kindling, like any fire. You need to get excited and focused. You need to spend time thinking about your food and keeping yourself on track and you might have to use some willpower for a while until things start to feel more routine. That might even be a little bit of kind of the lighter fluid in the very beginning but you probably don't need that. You probably just need some newspaper.

Newspaper is like your information and your plan and you're kind of excited. You get some kindling going. Yeah, you need that, but you're always working toward that goal of having a fire that's burning from the logs. You're never thinking like, "Oh, I'm just going to burn a bunch of newspaper and we're going to sit around in that."

When you're setting yourself up for this kind of success, you set up routines and systems in your life that make following your plan easy. You manage your mind by doing thought work every day and you know that sometimes the flames will fizzle a little bit and you might need to add a little more kindling or blowing the coals a little bit to get things going again and that's completely okay. It's not a problem at all. You don't have to make that mean that the fire is going out and you're going to freeze all night. It just requires a little bit of work and attention to get it going again. So nothing is going wrong.

So you can imagine or think about that. You're following along. You're doing your weight loss. You're following your plan. Everything is going well and then before you know it, like you've gone on vacation or something is changed and then you're like, "Oh, my gosh. Okay, I'm a little off track here. What's going on?" Yes, so maybe you have to get a little bit more focused on it again, a little bit more planning. You just got to make sure that you're focused and doing all those things that you need to do again that were maybe a little bit more autopilot before.

And now, you have to focus on them again. But that doesn't mean anything is a problem. It just means like, "Oh, okay. It turns out I need to focus a little bit more attention on this." But you're not waiting until the whole thing burns out and then starting from scratch again building a new fire. That would make no sense. As the flames are starting to fizzle, as it's starting to go out a little bit is when you give it some attention.

But you have to be paying attention. If you're in the house, not looking at the fire, you're not noticing that it's going out. You need to be ... Or in your tent or wherever. You need to be paying attention to it. Just fostering it, making sure that it's doing what it's supposed to be doing. It's the same thing for your weight loss. You do need to put a little effort into it even when things seemed kind of easy.

And in my mind, the way to make your weight sustainable is you need to create that fire with the logs doing the work, so this takes effort and commitment and some attention so that you're setting yourself up for that success, so that you are making sure that you have the food in the house that you need, or you're making sure that you have that planned for when you're going to be running around and things are kind of crazy, or you just kind of pack your food to just make it very simple for yourself so you don't even have to make those decisions. You have that plan and you just follow it.

But most importantly, you are managing your mind. You have to be doing that thought work. You have to be checking in with yourself. How is it going? What are my thoughts about this? Where might I be getting stuck? Where are things getting a little slippery with me? And I'm not actually focusing on the things that are giving me the success that I want. Where am I not as all in as I used to be? Maybe I need to look at that a little bit more. Where am I still unwilling to feel the emotions that make me want to overeat? Where do I still have more work to do in understanding how hunger feels in my body and managing my thinking around hunger so that I can make it more tolerable.

There are so much work that can be done. I find this with my clients. I now have this program that's a continuation program. It's called the Weight Loss for Doctors Only Masters Group. These are all amazing women who have gone through my regular Weight Loss for Doctors Only program at least once and now they are just continuing on with the work on themselves.

Some of them are still losing weight. Some of them are working towards getting to maintenance. Some are in maintenance and are working to do that but they're also focusing on other areas in their life that they really want to make massive progress in. So for some of them, that's going to be the relationship with themselves. For some of them, it's their other relationships. For some of them, it's what they're thinking about work. There's so many other things that we're focusing on.

And what I'm helping them to do is to make sure that this is all sustainable for them, that they are creating this program for themselves that is something that can keep going on and on forever. And what's so interesting is talking with them. They are really understanding how much that daily thought work is so critical. It's so important and they start to notice like, "Oh, see, I did it and then I didn't. And then, look, I did all those things that I used to do that I don't want to be doing anymore." And then they make sure to get themselves back on track again.

Like I said, when you have that fire set up properly, it actually doesn't take that much time or space in your life. You're just trucking along. Your food is very boring. You're just kind of doing your thing, rinse and repeat. Planning your food is just a very simple process. The next day you eat it, done. You have so much more time and space in your life to do other things. That's exactly the way it's supposed to be. If right now, you've been at weight loss for a while and the weight loss, you focused on that and how your clothes fit and what the scale says and all the drama and everything, it's taking up so much of the space in your life, there's something that needs to be changed there.

What I want to encourage you to do is have a look at what you've been doing. What kind of a fire are you building? What do you have burning right now? Is it something that's going to be able to be sustained long term, and what do you need to do if that's not the case to change things a little bit for yourself?

All right, have a wonderful week, you guys. I will talk to you very, very soon. Have a good one. Bye-bye.