



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey my friend, what's up? How are you doing? I may sound just a wee bit stuffy today and my apologies for that. I picked up another little virus. I think I told you on the last podcast that I was going to be going on a trip with my younger two children who are in first and second grades to a YMCA camp that my kids go to during the summer and absolutely adore. They have the best time there and part of school is that they get to go and for second and third grades and get to spend a day there and spend the night in the cabins and then spend another half a day and then go home in the afternoon. And parents are encouraged to attend and so I went with them and we had a great time. It was fun. It was tiring, camp is a lot of fun and also tiring. And it was not long, actually it was the next night after we got home that I started with a headache and a sore throat and you know how these things go. So I've just been nursing myself back to health, trying to take good care of myself. The euros is why it was so great is I had so much going on and it was awesome, even though I was sick.

Okay. Today I want to talk to you some more about food journals. It's been a long time since we've talked about this and I get this question all the time. All the time you guys are asking me about food journaling and how I want you to do it and you guys love to tell me why you don't like to do it. And trust me, I'm aware because I used to not like to do it either. I was on board with you. We could commiserate together. I thought that food journaling was basically punishment, because you know I strove to be an A student and I didn't like the fact that there was documentation of me not doing what I knew was good to work. Does that sound familiar?

This might resonate with you as you're listening, where you're like, "No, I'm someone who does a good job. I do what I say I'm going to do. Oh, but except when it comes to things like my food and taking care of myself." And we don't like to have that evidence right under our noses in a food journal. And so we resist it. We don't want to do it. We think it doesn't matter. We really convince ourselves of this, right? We start believing it really doesn't matter. I don't need to write it down. I can just keep it all in my head. Or I always eat the same thing. So what differences does it make, I don't need to write it down. But 100% it makes a difference. I've seen it time and time and time again. So let me first just remind you, or if this is the first time you're hearing it, let you know how I talk about food journaling. Because there's so many different ways of doing it and I like to keep it very, very simple, very, very basic.

Make it just very easy for you, especially in the beginning. We don't need to make this complicated. So what I ask that you do is you literally just write down what you ate and that's it. So it doesn't mean you have to do any kind of portions or weighing or measuring anything. You're not counting points, you're not looking at calories, you're not doing any of that. And that's why I prefer that my clients don't use apps like MyFitnessPal, because you aren't able to put food in there without putting some qualifiers on it, saying how it was prepared, putting down how much it was. And even when you're guessing, then it spits out all these macronutrients. You know, how many carbs you're eating, which some people can't help but believe that eating carbohydrates is a bad thing. It will show you calories. And even when we are totally convinced that calories don't matter, we see the calories and it still starts messing with our brain. A lot of us, right?

So I really want you to just write down what you ate and that's it. And so I'm actually recording this after my kids went to bed. And so I thought I would just tell you what my food journal looks like for my dinner tonight. And literally all I wrote down was grilled salmon, roasted green beans, Caesar salad, one bite of wheat berries. The reason for the one bite of wheat berries is because my friend who's living with us, who helps us with a lot of the meals, we had agreed that she was going to cook Farro, the grain Farro for dinner, and she got mixed up. And so cooking the Farro, she grabbed wheat berries. We now know this. At the time she didn't know this, so she had them in the instant pot cooking. And if it were Farro, it should have been done.

And she's like, "This Farro just doesn't done. I don't know. I mean there's all this water. I don't know what's going on. What do you think?" And she took a little bite and she's like, "I don't know. I mean, maybe this is wheat berries, maybe I got confused, try it." And so I took a little bite and I was like, "Well, that's pretty toothsome, I don't think that those are ready." So we did not eat them and we're going to figure something else out to do with them. But so I did still put that on there, right? I had this one little bite of that and then put that on there, but you can see that I just made it very simple. I didn't weigh out how much it was. I wasn't measuring it in some way. It wasn't saying like it was about this many ounces or the palm of my hand or anything like that.

Now, that kind of thing can be very useful for you in the beginning, but if you resist keeping a food journal, then this is how I want you to start, super, super basic. Now, one of the biggest reasons we don't like keeping a food journal is because once we see what we eat, then we tend to judge ourselves incredibly harshly. This is again what I was talking about. We want to get the gold star. We want to get the a plus. We want to do excellent work and really excel at what we do. And for many of us, what we see in the food journal is just evidence of us not doing that. And we don't like to see that because the way our brains respond to it is with beating ourselves up, with judging ourselves harshly, with a lot of negative self-talk, just not treating ourselves nicely at all.

What we don't recognize is that there's no moral value to what you eat. Literally all that happened was there was some food, you put it in your mouth, you chewed it up, and then you swallowed it. Like that's it, right? It's so neutral. But then we make all kinds of judgments about it that are negative and make us feel terrible. So of course we don't want to do the food journal.

So I find that most people when they start food journaling, they just kind of automatically start eating a little bit healthier, because they don't want to have to write down all the little things all the time. And if you go swinging by past the nurse's station and there's a bowl of M&M'S and you are thinking about grabbing some, if you've got to whip out your phone, the notes app or a little note pad or something and write it down, it's more than just eating it and trying to forget about it, right?

So in general, we just already start to create more awareness around what we're eating when we're food journaling, because of the fact that we've decided to write down what it is that we've eaten. So things start to clean up from there. But then most of us start getting into very much a perfectionistic kind of a situation where it's like it's got to be to the letter just really, really perfect, A-plus. It means that we can't ever eat anything off plan. We can't ever make a mistake and needs to be perfect. And that's of course how we get ourselves into so much trouble. Because that's just not what the process is. What I've learned after doing this for many years now is that there are times when it's very smooth sailing and things really are quite automatic and things are good and then sometimes just life happens, right?

Whatever happens, I'm not managing my mind as well, or there's just something different going on in my life and I end up struggling a little bit more. The urges are more intense. Maybe I start convincing myself I could have a little bit of this or that or the other thing. And then I've got to get myself back on track. But the way that I catch it before it turns into me gaining all my weight back is because of a food journal. Right? Because now I got to write that down. I can't just ignore it, and I can notice what my response is to it. Am I responding to myself in a loving, supportive manner, or am I responding to myself in a very judgmental, harsh, "I knew you can do this. I knew you were never going to keep it off." Just that negative, negative self-talk kind of a way.

When I am noticing that there's any negative self-talk that obviously means that there's thought work for me to do. I need to either be coached or coach myself. I need to really tap in to loving myself so that I can figure out what's going on. Because being harsh with myself is never ever going to create what I want. I have literally years and years of evidence for this. Yeah, my brain still wants to believe that it might be useful from time to time, and I'm sure you're the same way. This happens all the time. We don't do what we think we should be doing and that alone we're not pleased with. But then what ends up happening is we judge ourselves so harshly. We're so upset. We're so mad about it. Then we're like, "This is just so awful. Why can't I stop doing this?"

Because what we really want is a break from all the judgment, right? It feels so intense because there's the compounding effect that happens when we already are doing something we don't want to be doing. But then on top of it, we are judging ourselves so harshly. I think the judgment is often way worse than the actual thing that we're doing and what we think about them. So ultimately the way you respond to what you write down in your food journal is such an excellent eye opener. It's just such a good reflection of what your relationship is with yourself. And this is really what it comes down to. Your food journal is an opportunity for you to write a love letter to yourself every single day. Okay, so follow me on this. When you supply your body with food that is fuel for it in a loving manner, meaning you eat when it needs food, and you stop eating when it no longer needs more food, and you eat food that supports your body.

That is like writing your body a love letter every day. So you're eating all of those things. And then the food journal is just the love letter. It's the documentation. It's going like, "Hey body and self, look at what a good job I did today at taking care of you." This isn't about the gold star. This isn't about getting the pat on the back or getting some outside approval from somebody else. It's really just looking at it like, "Wow, I did a really good job loving on myself today. Look how I cared for myself." Right? And when you don't eat in a way that supports you, that's an opportunity for you to lovingly inquire about what is going on for you. Okay? So that you're not looking at it like, "Oh, I'm such an idiot. I shouldn't have done that." What you're instead doing is you're thinking, "Okay, well this is something that isn't my typical, or this isn't something that I know supports me, but I really want to support myself and I really want to love myself."

So what might have been going on for me that drove me to take the action of eating in this way. What instead we like to do is beat ourselves up, vow to do better the next day, but don't actually even figure out why we did it in the first place. We think that we're just deficient in some things, some sort of willpower, discipline deficiency. We need a vitamin supplement for this, right? We aren't recognizing that it's our thoughts that create our feelings that are driving our actions of eating off plan or eating, overeating, eating something that isn't supporting us in some way. And so when you are documenting your food, no matter what you eat in your food journal, you are lovingly supporting yourself. You are lovingly saying, "I want to be aware of what I'm feeding myself because literally that documentation is just an avenue to me understanding what's going on in my brain."

I tell this to my clients all the time. I always tell them, "Listen, this is not about the food and the ... I think, I mean I know in the beginning I was like, "No, no, no, no. I kind of think it's about the food." And they're kind of like, "I think it might be about the food for me." But it's so interesting for me when it's months later and they're like, "I think I'm getting it. I think I really understand now, it really isn't about the food. The food is just the canary in the coal mine." You're not like. "Stupid canary. We need a new canary in here that's not going to die, right?" Instead of you're going, "No, my gosh, the Canary is dead. Something else is going on." Maybe we should figure out what it is, right? So when you're looking at your food journal like it's some sort of thing that is working against you, or some sort of punitive action that you take every day, then you're not going to have access to all this wisdom that lies within you.

This wisdom that you can develop and create and access when you know what you ate and then you lovingly inquire in a curious way about what's going on for you, what is actually happening, what is it that you're not willing to feel? What is it that's happening right now that seems so intolerable that food or alcohol is the solution and the answer for you right now. Not judging yourself negatively. That's the part that so many of you really need to practice is the action of inquiring with curiosity and love and interest and fascination, and not with beratement and judgment and harshness. And sometimes I like to think of it like you have some patient coming in, some sweet little old lady who's coming in and she needs some help. You're likely not judging her harshly about everything she's telling you. All of her problems and her whole history.

You're open and interested and wanting her to tell you what's going on so you can figure out what to do moving forward. What if you approached your own brain in that way and you just use the food journal as the avenue inside? It's just the canary letting you know, "Hey listen, there's work to be done here." And when things are going great, instead of thinking of it like, "Okay, I get the gold star or the pat on the back and I should be getting some approval from somebody." Instead, think of it like a love letter to yourself. I did a really good job loving on myself today. This feels amazing because I get to feel love. I get to feel love for myself and I get to create that every single day if I want to. Even when it's kind of disappointing because you wanted to eat more food or you'd planned on eating more food and now you're not hungry.

I'm telling you, tonight I had thought I would have a piece of fruit too. Then I was done. I was at a plus four, I checked in, now my body didn't need more food. I was a little bummed out. We have some fresh apples from the orchard and I thought it would be nice to have one. But you know what? The apples will be there tomorrow. I maybe like one tomorrow. Maybe I won't, depending on what my body needs, but it's such a peaceful interaction with yourself when you come from that place of non judgment and loving acceptance. So I want to encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities that lie within keeping a food journal. I know it doesn't sound sexy. Maybe we should come up with a better name for it, but what I want you to really think about doing is focusing on writing that down and letting it be a window to what's going on in your brain, like what's happening in there.

Look at how I'm judging myself so harshly, so interesting. I wonder where else I judge myself so harshly probably in other places. And then don't judge yourself for judging yourself harshly. Okay, you see this? We're like stacking and stacking and stacking. Lovingly support yourself and the food journal is amazing for that. So just start off with writing down what you ate. Very, very simple. You don't need to write even what size of coffee you had or anything. Just write down that you had some coffee and whatever else you put in it.

And even if you are able to eat in a way that you think would support your body better, at least start off with just honoring yourself enough to write down everything you ate. Even if it's all the Cheetos and tons of sugar in your coffee and the Oreos at night. It doesn't have to be a shameful thing, right? It's only shameful when you think thoughts that make you feel shame that something is wrong with you. Instead, you can look at it like, "I am learning to figure this out, and the first step is going to be seeing what I eat, understanding that it's neutral, and having love and compassion for myself as I move forward in investigating this." And finding out more about myself and these habits that I have. With that, I'm going to leave you for the week.

Have a wonderful, wonderful week and I'll talk to you next time. Take care. Bye-bye.