



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there my friend. How are you today? So glad to be back here. I have just completed a little series of bonus episodes for you. I hope they've been helpful for you. I know that sometimes right now there's just a lot to consume, and so I would just suggest that if you missed those or haven't had a chance to catch up, all those are me coaching on issues that all my clients who are all physicians have brought up recently. So I want to suggest that you go back and listen to those for sure.

This episode as well is going to be very helpful for you, I think, in terms of your thinking and your experience of the pandemic that we're experiencing right now. I do want to say that I am recording this on March 26th. There is a lead time to getting podcasts produced and up and ready to go. So if something changes massively, then this may not be super up to date, but that's the world we're living in right now. I think it's still going to actually be super helpful for you, no matter what is actually going on.

Okay, so what we're going to talk about today is emergencies and non-emergencies. And we're going to talk about things that are emergencies today, things that are not an emergency. And what I want to offer to you first is that a pandemic is not an emergency. And I found out about this quote, "A pandemic is not an emergency," from actually one of my clients. And she had posted it as a thought that had really been helping her a lot, and when we asked her more about it, what she said was that actually one of the other members in our program had offered it to her. And I have to say, I did go to the internet. I went to Google to try to figure out who actually said this, who was quoted as saying this so that I could give them credit. And I spent some time there, did not get even anywhere close to finding out who said it. So I cannot give proper credit, but if it's you, if you're listening, then thank you so much for saying this and offering this idea.

But this is what my client said about this thought, a pandemic is not an emergency, and how it's been helping her. She said, "This is a quote from one of the doctors on the front lines of the Ebola crisis in West Africa. The concept is that pandemics are slow by nature, so there's no need to panic and worry and go into crisis emergency mode. Just keep one foot in front of the other. It works for me to calm myself and all the actions that follow calm emotions."

So as you remember, your thoughts create your feelings, your feelings drive your actions. So what she's saying is once she can get herself into that calm place by thinking this thought, this pandemic is not an emergency, she's able to take actions from a place of calm and not from panic and not from worry and not from crisis emergency mode.

So first of all, Mia, thank you for posting that. Thank you for sharing it. I think that this is super helpful and that's why I wanted to share it with all of you as well.

So let's just talk about how we define all this stuff. I think it's easy to say, but we have a national state of emergency right now, or your state might have declared that, or your province might have declared a state of emergency. And it's important to recognize that when a state of emergency is declared by politicians, that is simply something that they do just so that they can release funds that are specifically designated for aid in this kind of a situation.

So it's not like, "Oh, but they're saying it's an emergency." It is, it's just something that they have to declare so that they can get the money and then the local government, state governments, provincial governments, they can then use this money to increase their response efforts. So they can pay for supplies, pay for additional staff to help and just all the equipment that they need and things like that. So when you think about something being an emergency, if you believe something's an emergency, we really do respond in a pretty predictable way. There are so many things that we think are emergencies, but I think a great one to think about is thinking about a trauma coming into the ER or a patient coding and requiring resuscitation. So even if you're a physician who doesn't come across those things on a regular basis, you can at least remember during your training what that was like.

In those situations, a trauma coming into the ER or a patient coding, that is an emergency because seconds count, right? It's something where you have to just leap into action. Our adrenals give us a little squeeze, our heart rate goes up and we go into action and we start doing stuff. So it's fully fight, flight or freeze mode. Hopefully, if we're in those situations, we're the kind of person that goes into fight so that we can help keep the person in front of us alive or do our best to do that.

But here's the thing with this. This reaction is not sustainable. You cannot be in a fight or flight mode nonstop the whole time. You cannot look at COVID as an emergency and keep up that level of sympathetic response longterm. You simply you cannot. You might need to go there at times as people in your ER or your ICU are trying to die. Of course, right? There's going to be people that you're taking care of and you're going to have to go into that at times.

Now, even if you don't work in an ER and you don't work in an ICU, if you're a physician who is brought in, maybe you have a different specialty, but you're brought in to help in whichever way you possibly can, or maybe even coming out of retirement as I'm preparing to do if it's needed, then they're going to be times where that's required. But you have to make sure that you don't live in this place for the next number of months or however long we're dealing with this. You have to create a parasympathetic balance for yourself. There's a reason that we have our sympathetic and parasympathetic balances and you have to make sure that you're going to that parasympathetic place.

So one of the very best ways I think to do this is by looking at your thoughts and then processing your emotions. I've taught you so much on this podcast about looking at your thoughts. Today I want to delve a little bit more deeply into processing your emotions because there are a lot of intense emotions that everybody is experiencing right now. Really truly everybody, I think, but especially in the healthcare world and so there's going to be a lot for you to process.

When you're living in a personal state of emergency all the time, you're not going to allow yourself to slow down long enough to do this. You're just going to rush from one self imposed crisis to the next, to the next, to the next. So there's going to be the ones that work, but then you're going to come home and your brain is going to still think that everything at home is a crisis too. That having the kids home is a problem, that you're homeschooling. That's a crisis. That the finances and the situation with the stock market and things like that is a crisis. Your brain will just interpret everything as a crisis. It's like a snowball effect. So we have to work on this.

Now, you may agree with me now that this pandemic is not an emergency on an intellectual or a surface level, but the way you'll know if you really believe it deep down is by checking in on how you feel. Your emotions are going to give you this information because you can be thinking things, but deep down, you disagree with yourself and you could tell because of the emotion in your body. So what this means is taking a few minutes to move out of your head and into your body. I suggest that you do this regularly. You may want to do this just before you're even going into work or before you're dealing with patients through telemedicine or however you're handling the situation right now. Getting really clear on what you're feeling and processing it.

I suggest that you do it afterward as well as often as you really can, especially when you're feeling intensely negative or uncomfortable emotions. So this is what you do. You move out of your head and into your body and then you think of a word that you would use to describe what you're feeling. Now, some of us struggle with this, especially if we're not used to getting in touch with our emotions. I want to encourage you to not rush to pick what that emotion is. If you go to something like mad or sad or afraid, think about if there's something that's even more descriptive that you can use. Also sadness, fear, that might be as descriptive as it needs to go, but are you frustrated? Are you feeling worry? Are you feeling guilt? Are you feeling hopelessness? Are you feeling panicked? What more specifically is that emotion that you're experiencing? Just one word, right? Pick one word to describe it.

Then ask yourself, what does that emotion feel like in your body? Where is it actually in your body? Is it in your chest? Is it in your throat? Is it in your shoulders? Is it in your stomach? Where exactly is it? And then describe it to yourself. Does it move? Does it change? Is it slow? Is it fast? Is it rough? Is it smooth, hard or soft? What color is it? Get to know it really, really well so that you know all the parts of it. You know exactly what it's doing there in your body.

Now, some people are truly, truly terrified to spend time with their emotions, especially intensely negative ones. They're so afraid to feel them that they'll do anything to avoid them. And you might be feeling this way too. This is typically where food and alcohol come into play because food and alcohol are a reliable way for you to push away your emotions, to distract yourself with something else, to distance yourself from them so you can get away from them and get, honestly, a little dopamine hit so that you feel better for a little while.

But what's happening when you do this is you're making a trade with yourself. What you're doing is you're trading some pain now for more pain later. It's not an equal trade. You're taking the pain that you have now and you're saying, "You know what? I want to put it on layaway and I want it to actually intensify and get worse when I come back to it later." You don't realize that's what you're doing, but that's what you're doing. And this is not just because you're overeating and you're overdrinking and you'll end up either gaining weight or feeling terrible physically or both.

When you don't feel your emotions now, they will wait for you. You cannot skip this part, okay? So I will repeat that. Your emotions will wait for you if you do not feel them now. Skipping this does not work. Trust me. If there was a way to avoid feeling your emotions and it had no downside, I would be the first person to tell you about it. I'd be shouting it from the rooftops, okay? I promise you. You cannot skip this part.

So if you are terrified to feel your emotions, set a timer for 30 seconds just on your phone. Set it for 30 seconds, then move out of your head into your body and breathe deeply and slowly in through your nose, out through your mouth. Allow that feeling to be there. Stay with yourself, relax your muscles and you keep breathing until the timer goes off. So there you just felt your feelings for 30 seconds. It's amazing, right? So next time, try 45 seconds or maybe even a minute. Build up your ability to do this. Build up your endurance, but not endurance in resisting, endurance in feeling, allowing, being with it. With practice, you will find that your fear of feeling the emotion becomes weaker and weaker. It becomes less and less. So what's happening is you're realizing that you can feel this emotion and still be okay on the other end. Eventually, you're able to feel the emotion for as long as it's there.

I'm laughing because my daughter has the loudest feet in the history of the world, and even though she knows I'm recording a podcast, she just stomped up the stairs and is stomping above. There she goes. I don't know if you guys can hear it, but man, oh man, a six year old girl. She's not quiet or graceful at this point. Okay, let's move on.

Okay, so since a pandemic is not an emergency, that means that we'll be dealing with this for quite some time. This isn't the kind of emergency that we have under control within a couple of hours like we're used to and then we go back to normal again. If you avoid feeling your emotions, they will simply continue to stack up higher and higher for you waiting for you, which will ultimately feel more and more overwhelming to you. You'll have to eat more and more food and have more and more drinks to keep it in check and to avoid feeling it and you'll start feeling really out of control. Avoiding feeling your emotions now is a really good way to set yourself up for burnout and weight gain a few months down the road. And that is not what we want for you, right?

So if this is not an emergency, then we cannot sprint through this time. We have got to pace ourselves. You need to have times where you're working hard and you're helping people as best as you can. And then you have to, you must create times where you're refilling your tanks. This is not optional if you want to come out on the other side with your mental and physical health intact.

So here's what I know. No matter how bad this gets, the way we are going to get through this is one day at a time, one shift at a time, one patient at a time. Bringing yourself back to what you can control right now. Who are you seeing right now? And if you're not seeing anybody, what can you do to support yourself right now? How can you process what's going on for you so you can move on and add more value and truly fulfill your life's purpose by helping take care of people during this pandemic?

Now, as I was thinking about emergencies and what's an emergency and what's not, it's helpful to think about what else is not an emergency. So let's just touch on those things. I want to talk about homeschooling. Homeschooling is not an emergency, but the way that a lot of people are treating it is as though it's an emergency.

So I want to offer to you that your goal for having your kids home or homeschooling them, no matter what their age is that your goal should be to emerge from this situation, however long they're home, with your relationship with them intact. How much work you get done and how much school work they are able to submit and how much they know at the end is totally irrelevant, okay? Your relationship with them should be of primary importance.

Now it's important to remember that teachers are very skilled at assessing where kids are and their abilities and getting them up to speed. This is what they're trained for. If you're not a teacher, you are not trained for this. So it's okay that you may not be doing as good of a job as a teacher might. Kids are resilient and they can bounce back. This happens all over the world, all of the time.

Not learning anything for few weeks or months or even a year or longer if that's what it comes to, is truly not an emergency. Your kids will not remember all the details of what happened during this pandemic, but you know what they will remember? They will remember how they felt during this time. That is what we remember when we think back to being children. We remember how we felt. So of course, remember you're not in control of how they feel because remember their thoughts are what is creating their own feelings. But if you are riding them about school and getting on their case and getting frustrated with them and having a strict schedule that they don't want to adhere to and ordering them around in a less than loving way, it will be very easy for them to think thoughts that create negative emotions for them. This is what they are going to remember.

So I want you to just get some clarity on this and realize this is not an emergency. You do what you can do and you do not sacrifice your own mental health and your own physical health in the name of trying to get some worksheets done, okay? It does not make any sense. When you think about how important it is for you to be at your best and healthy and able to assist in every possible way you can in your medical life, literally think about how amazing it is for you to have that great relationship with your family, your great relationship with your spouse rather than it's a you know what show at work and the same kind of show at home. I'm thinking a lot of people might be listening to this with their kids around, so I edited myself, censored myself. So I wanted to offer you that on homeschooling.

You know what else is not an emergency? Boredom, not an emergency. I know a lot of you are feeling really bored at home, especially if you live alone, especially if you maybe don't have kids around or your kids are grown, you might feel a lot of boredom and a lot of people are eating and drinking to try to fill that boredom. Boredom is not an emergency. Allow yourself to stay in the boredom and just feel bored. What does it feel like to be bored and allow your brain to come up with some solutions, some answers for yourself? If I had anything that I could do right now within the confines of what I'm allowed to do, what might it be? Not how can I get away from this boredom by eating or drinking something? It's okay to be bored. What I find is that a lot of physicians feel like if they're not doing something that's "productive", whatever they deem productive to be, then it's not worth it. So then they're sitting around maybe trying to do some hobbies or things like that, but they still don't feel productive.

They're like, "This is dumb. I'm bored." Well, I want you to work on recalibrating your thinking around how you use your time. Again, if you're using your time in a really useful manner to help people and possibly help your family, it is totally okay for you to be bored and allow it to be there and not immediately try to chase it off with some other productive thing. That's, again, how you burn yourself out.

What else is not an emergency? Loneliness, not an emergency. Again, if you live alone, you might be feeling pretty lonely. You might actually look forward to going to work just so you have somebody to talk to. And of course, people are doing Zoom calls and they're getting on FaceTime and they're doing all the things that they can. I know a lot of people are just setting up chairs on their sidewalk and all the neighbors are doing that, so everyone's staying apart, but they can still talk and still interact. So that's all great.

But again, if you're feeling lonely, this is not an emergency. This is not something that needs to be solved with the companionship of food or alcohol immediately, okay? You can work on feeling lonely. Being lonely is okay. It's okay. Now, longterm, is it something you want to deal with? Maybe, but a moment of loneliness, weeks of loneliness, months of loneliness, this is something that can be dealt with. This is okay.

Also, lack of sleep is not an emergency, so think about having a baby that is up all hours of the night. Think about having insomnia, your brain having a hard time shutting down and not getting the sleep that you need. You can turn that into an emergency. You can turn that into a total freak out mode or you can decide this is not an emergency. So I didn't get the sleep that I would have liked to have. The nap that I had planned for didn't go as I wanted it to. It's okay. It's not an emergency. I can still move forward the rational state of mind.

And then finally, I was thinking about what else is not an emergency and you know what else is not an emergency is the current state of your finances, what the stock market is doing and how are you going to pay your employees? Now as I'm recording this, the government in the US has agreed to a relief package where there's going to be a loan available to small business owners who can then use that money to pay for payroll. I'm hoping that by the time this airs live that that is in place and people are getting access to that money and able to do what they need to do. But as I'm recording this, this is a huge issue for physicians who are self-employed and run their own private practice.

And so I think that the way you can approach this is two different ways. It can be an emergency where you're panicking, stressing yourself out like crazy, frantically searching online for solutions while your brain just has the constant narrative in the background about how everything's falling to hell and you're never going to be able to figure this out and how awful everything is. Or you can decide, you know what? It's not an emergency because you don't have to make a decision within seconds. You have time. You have time to think this through and figure out what's going to be the best solution for your practice, the patients that you serve, the people that you employ and for you yourself as well, your own family.

My husband is going through this right now with his practice and I was actually talking to him about this and he's like, "Yeah, I feel like if I think about it too much, then I'm just spinning in the same thing. I don't have any information yet. I've made the decisions I can make right now moving forward in terms of payroll and then I'm going to have to wait for the government to approve what they're going to approve so I can take the next steps." So it's not an emergency. I'm seeing him actually able to read a novel and connect with our kids, helping them with schoolwork, which I'm super grateful for for sure. I don't have to do it.

And he's able to switch that part off knowing that when there's more information, he will get back to it and he will think about it. But allowing yourself to spin in panic like it's an emergency will not serve you. Same with the stock market. What happens when you think the stock market volatility is an emergency is that you make decisions that will not serve you longterm. If you're feeling like you're in panic mode about your money, you need to be talking to someone who can give you some good assistance and help you to stay sane and rational.

The last thing you want to be doing is potentially going to cash when the market is really down and setting yourself back massively. And I do also want to say that it's a possibility that if the economy really is sour for a long, long time, that physicians really don't have much money left. You might've been an excellent saver. You might've had all this money stockpiled away and now most of it's gone or a lot of it's gone or you're anticipating that it might be if you're having to live off of that money. And you know what? I have decided, I had this conversation with my husband a few days ago. I said, "You know what I've decided is that even if we ended up having to use up all of our money and we have to file for bankruptcy, which is why bankruptcy is there, it's a tool to be used when you no longer have any more money. I'm dads. We're going to make all that money back and then some within the next five years."

Now, do I know how we would do that? No, but I know that if I just decide that that would be the goal, then I don't have to worry because I know you know what? In five years, we're going to have even more money. So it's going to be okay. And the reason I know that is because my brain is intact and my husband's brain is intact. And our brains are our biggest, most valuable resource that we have. Not how many hours you can work, how many shifts you can work, not this time for money kind of trade that we often think we need to do as physicians. There's going to be some amazing opportunities available to us as we move out of this.

Think about all the different practices and forms of medicine where people thought telemedicine isn't possible. Well, guess what? People are figuring it out now. Turns out maybe it is possible. Maybe there is a way for you to maximize your time and provide more value and be able to make money. The only way you're going to be able to think about this is if you are not looking at this like it's an emergency. This is not an emergency. This is something that you have time to think about rationally and that rational thinking comes when you've taken the time to manage your brain, manage your thinking, feel your emotions, allow them to be processed so you can then start moving forward.

Okay, well, now that I've processed all that, I understand what thought I'm thinking that's creating that emotion, how do I want to think moving forward? How do I want to feel? Like me and my client who said that thinking the thought, pandemic is not an emergency, helps her to feel calm, then she's able to take actions based from that feeling of calm. How do you want to be thinking?

How do you want to be feeling? What emotion do you want to be driving your actions right now? That's a really important question for you to answer for yourself. Once you know the answer, you will feel so much more in control and that is how you don't need to overeat and overdrink, okay?

You're doing a really, really good job, okay? Even if you've been just screaming at your kids about schoolwork, I'm telling you, you're doing a really good job because you're showing up and at least you care, okay? So I cannot tell you how much I love you, respect you, or appreciate you. Keep it up. Keep coming back here. I'm here for you. I'm going to support you.

All right, I'll talk to you next time. Take care.