



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, Hey there, my friend. How are you? Welcome back to the podcast. If you're new here today, I just want to extend an extra special warm welcome to you.

Okay. Today I want to talk to you about what I'm calling the pandemic pass, and I think it's really, really, really similar to what I call the pregnancy pass. So we're going to be talking about both. So if you're listening to this well after the pandemic is over, I want you to know that this is also going to be a good one for anybody who's going to be pregnant because we're going to be talking about the same things.

What I've noticed is that there's for sure a way that so many women go through pregnancy and how they approach their eating when they're pregnant. And so many women, when they eat that way, are not happy with the results on the other end when the baby has been born. And the same thing is what I'm seeing so many people doing right now with what's going on with the pandemic. So we're going to talk about that.

Let me first talk about the pregnancy pass. This is going to be more familiar to a lot of you. And if you haven't been pregnant before, if you've ever known a pregnant person, or you can just even imagine, I think you're going to be able to pick up on this. You do not have to have been pregnant yourself to understand. So here's the deal. Here's what happens when you become pregnant. And as I'm giving examples, I'm going to be talking about my experiences. You know, I've been pregnant, I've carried four full term babies, and so I had a whole gamut of different experiences, but I can tell you that the way I approached them with my eating was more or less always the same. So I didn't seem to learn my lesson either because I didn't know how to manage my brain back then.

Okay, so what happens is you get pregnant and you think, "Oh my gosh, this is so great," you're happy, this is wonderful news. And then you decide to just commit to yourself you're not going to be that person who's going to gain a bunch of weight, you're totally going to keep it in check, it's going to be totally fine. And a couple of weeks pass and you start feeling nauseous and you just feel ick. And I never had a lot of vomiting, but some people really do, right? So much vomiting. And they find that if they don't eat, then they vomit more, or they're so scared of vomiting, that they're trying to eat things constantly to try to settle their stomachs.

I had just terrible heartburn all the time because I have it anyway. And especially with my first pregnancy, my OB would not let me take my acid reflux medicine. That's changed now, how they approach things, but back then, that's what was recommended. So I basically just had the most sour stomach all the time, and also, eating food frequently would help to dilute that and make it so that it wasn't so uncomfortable.

So before you know it, you're just kind of nibbling on things and eating. Not everybody. Some people lose weight during the first trimester or don't gain a ton. Some people are just all about eating healthy food and the greasy stuff sounds terrible to them. I was the opposite. Anything that was like a vegetable literally turned my stomach so badly. I remember my husband, we had grown a whole bunch of fresh basil and he was turning it into pesto, which is pretty much the best smell in the whole world, that fresh basil pesto smell. I walked into the kitchen and I could have just thrown up in my mouth right then. It was so repulsive to me. The smell of the refrigerator was awful. Like I couldn't take it. But you know what I loved? Greasy food for some reason. It makes no sense.

So all I wanted was like a cheeseburger and fries and onion rings, and top it off with some frozen custard, which is basically ice cream. That's a special thing in Wisconsin here. It's all I wanted. I just wanted all of the food. So it was very easy for me to gain some weight. And I felt like it was reasonable. I didn't feel well, I felt sorry for myself, and it made sense. "Well, I just have to get through this first trimester, then I'll dial it all back once I'm not feeling so nauseous anymore." So I was giving myself that pregnancy pass. It was giving myself a pass to just eat whatever I wanted because poor me, I was pregnant and I wasn't feeling well.

Well then what happens is you move into your second trimester. And some people start to feel better, probably most do. And there are definitely some people who don't feel well and they're sick the whole entire time, but for a lot of us, we're starting to hit our stride. We're starting to get a little bump and we're feeling good about it. And we have our energy back and we're able to get some things done, and that's all exciting. And you might've dialed your food back a little bit. You're kind of like, "I probably don't need to have all the things," but still, come on, you're pregnant, it doesn't happen that often. You're eating for two. Why not have some little extra things, right? Like no problem.

So you do that for a number of months and then you start hitting your third trimester, and this is when you are just not feeling that great anymore. You're feeling really tired. You might be feeling really huge. In my case, with each pregnancy, my sciatic issues became worse and worse and worse, to the point that walking was really painful unless I was... I always said I was like holding myself together with my sciatic belt, just literally holding my pelvis together so that I could walk. Sleep isn't so good. You might be up going to the bathroom multiple times a night. For a lot of people, the heartburn is getting really bad at this point. And you just feel so sorry for yourself that you just are not thinking about eating healthy food, you just want to eat the things.

I know for myself, I had one pregnancy where I just ate a whole lot of dark chocolate M&Ms. I don't know if those were just new then or what it was about those things, but I loved them and I ate a lot of them. It just made me feel better. It really did. This is what we talk about, right? You're not feeling good because of the thoughts that you have, and then you eat the food and it really does give you a dopamine hit. It really does make you feel better in the moment.

But so of course I gained and gained and gained. And especially with the M&M pregnancy, I remember I gained 45 pounds. And my babies were not big. My biggest baby was seven pounds, four ounces, and I'm 5'9. So that was a small baby for someone as tall as me. And so, you are just eating whatever you want, whenever you want. If it sounds good, you're having it because you're just miserable and you're giving yourself the pregnancy pass. Like, "It's almost over, just get through it. Who cares? You'll deal with it on the other end. Once the baby's out, then you'll lose weight."

So then here's what happens. You have the baby, and then you're really, really disappointed that the baby and the placenta and the fluid didn't weigh more. I was like, "What? It's only 13 pounds total. How is this possible? How is it possible that I have over 30 pounds to lose? That's crazy. How did I do that?" And then there's so much regret because you gave yourself the pregnancy pass. When you're in the pregnancy and you're not managing your mind well, you're thinking, "You know what? It doesn't matter. I'll just deal with it later."

And what you're doing is you're just allowing your future self to inherit the problems that you're creating right now. And you're thinking that your future self is not going to mind, your future self is going to be like, "Listen, I'm so grateful to you that you carried this baby, and that now I have this baby. And I don't really mind that I gained all this weight." Most women are thinking, "Ugh, I wish I hadn't done that." I've had so many women tell me, who were diagnosed with gestational diabetes, that they were actually glad because the diabetes forced them basically to dial their eating in so that they couldn't gain all that weight. And that, had they not had diabetes, they for sure would have been continuing to eat and continuing to gain weight, and then feeling like a slug afterward.

And then, if you're like me, you don't lose weight when you're nursing, unless you're really working hard. And so many women have trouble losing weight while they're nursing, and they think, "Okay, well, I'll just wait until after the baby stops nursing and then I'll get it all together." And then by then, you have a baby and you're working. You're tired, and it's just hard.

So this idea of giving ourselves a pregnancy pass means that we're just outsourcing, right? We're going, "Hey, I'm just going to delegate this to my future self and let her deal with this. And it's not going to be a problem, I'll be happy to deal with it then." Except you won't be. You absolutely won't be. It makes so much more sense to prevent the problem in the first place than to just let everything flow and just give in to all the practices that you know are not good and that don't serve you, only to end up having to undo all of the damage later.

So that's why, whenever I have a client who is interested in becoming pregnant or is pregnant, who wants to try in my weight loss program, of course we're not trying to lose weight while we're pregnant, but the way that I have my clients set up their own eating plan is incredibly supportive and healthy for them in pregnancy, it's wonderful for the baby, and then after you deliver, you keep eating that way. It's like the easiest way to just continue to support yourself so you're not doing this like gaining and yo-yoing up, and then going back down again and dieting, and having to really restrict while you have a baby and while you're tired, and all that stuff. You just keep it even. And then, once you have the baby, if you keep eating in that way, that you know supports you, whatever weight you did gain does come off.

So I always suggest, when people say, "Well, should I just wait until I have the baby to do this work?" I'm like, "No, because what you need to be working on is your brain." While you're pregnant, sure you're not going to be worrying about losing weight, but you don't have to be gaining a ton. And the way you don't gain a ton is you manage your brain so you're not sitting there in self-pity, you're not believing stories you tell yourself that it doesn't really matter and this is your chance, and who cares and you'll deal with it later.

So the exact same thing is happening for us in the pandemic. So many people are saying, "You know what? Screw all of it. Who cares? Everything is crazy. The whole world is nuts right now. I'm not going to worry about this. I'm just going to eat whatever. If I don't have food to comfort me, then what do I have? I have nothing else that I can do, and so I'm just going to eat all the food." I think what we've just been through in the last month, two months or so, has been like that first trimester, just like, "I don't know. I feel terrible. I'm totally afraid. I'm totally stressed. Everything is awful. I don't know what to do, and so I'm just going to eat all the things and just deal with it."

And now, we're kind of edging into that second trimester where it's like, okay, things have settled. We have this new sense of normalcy. We're kind of settling in, but our eating still isn't normal. We're not back to the way that it really should be, we're not really eating in a way that truly supports us. We're just having a lot of little transgressions with our eating, right? We're just going and having the things. And, "Oh, I was planning on eating in a way that really serves me today, but someone brought this by, and so now I'm eating that."

And here's the thing. Because we know that this pandemic is more like an ultra marathon rather than a sprint... In fact, I just read something in New York Times today saying that, if this were a baseball game, we're in the second inning. I don't know a lot about baseball, but I know that there's nine innings, right? This second trimester might be a while that we are in this kind of period of time where things are still not where we would consider them normal and we're not doing what we need to do to really be supporting ourselves. And before we know it, right, if there's like a big surge in cases near us, or, God forbid, if we get the virus, it's so easy to go into that third trimester mentality and just be eating all of the things, feeling totally sorry for ourselves.

In fact, one of my clients who I love did get the virus and she was saying how she'd gained a ton of weight because she was just completely like pity eating the entire time. She was very ill, and thank God she's okay and she got through it and she's fine, but she was eating and eating and eating and eating to just try to sooth herself, try to comfort herself because she felt so bad about having the illness, right? That's just the, "Screw it all, I'll figure it out later." Well, and what's great is, you know, if you make it out alive, hallelujah, right? We're so glad. We're so grateful. If all you have to do is lose some weight, that is great. That's no big deal. It's not something that we can't fix in the long run, but what I want to stress to you, the easiest way for us to not have to lose a whole bunch of weight later is to make sure that we don't gain a bunch of it now.

So when you're thinking about what your decisions are, day in, day out, what food are you buying? We had had some stuff to make Rice Krispies treats. I made them, I was noticing myself going like, "Oh, I should get more marshmallows." And I'm like, "Wait a minute. I don't usually make this stuff. What am I doing?" Right?

We don't need to have all those things in our house. We can really rely on our ability to manage our minds to create the experience that we want right now, to be able to look at everything and get it to not be this massive scary event so that we don't need food to make ourselves feel better, so that we don't give ourselves that pandemic pass and then having to, in the future, ask that future self of ours to lose all the weight and sort ourselves back out again, right?

And what I promote is permanent weight loss. Permanent weight loss means that you don't gain a bunch of it back and then work on losing it. Now, if that happens, it's fine. You totally can lose the weight again. No big deal. But the way that you keep it permanent is you manage your mind. You cannot skip that part. So think about it in terms of those trimesters. Where are you in the trimesters with your eating? Or are you the person who we can imagine who's diagnosed with gestational diabetes who is like, "No, No, I'm good. I've got it totally dialed and I am keeping myself in a good place because of that."

I think it's just really a good way of approaching it. "Where am I at with things so that I can keep myself in check and not be so disappointed in myself in four months, eight months, 12 months or longer when things really do settle down and we're back to whatever our new normal is going to be?" And we're moving into that, and you're not going, "Oh great. Now I've just created this huge, massive weight problem for myself again."

And here's what I think is harder. I mean, losing the weight is one thing, but when you have all those patterns in place that have been set in place during a time when you were experiencing intensely negative emotion, your brain will so desperately not want to give that up, those patterns of eating to feel better. Whenever you have an experience that has happened with intense emotion, positive or negative, but particularly negative, the brain really, really, really remembers that. And so, if it's like, "I went through this very stressful time and I ate my way through it," then what will happen is anytime there's additional stress, which is, hello, life as a doctor, there's always going to be something, it's going to be that much more inclined to offer you food as a solution. And there's going to be more work for you to do there. So I just say, hey, how about we just do the work now? Let's just do it now.

And we just had our live event for my Masters. Masters is the continuation for my weight loss, producers only weight loss coaching program for physicians. And this time we couldn't get together live in person. We usually meet together for a full day in person and it's amazing, and so we totally transitioned, pivoted and changed it into a virtual event. And we had a hundred people there and it was amazing. It was way better than I could have even ever imagined or anticipated. So, so, so, so pleased how well it went, but it was so interesting seeing all the different people's responses. Like some people are like business as usual, doing their thing, no big deal, but what I really loved was the clients who shared that they noticed that their weight crept up a little bit, they'd gained three, four or five pounds, and they're like, "Hold on a second. No, that's not how this is going to go," and they got themselves back in check.

That's exactly what I'm suggesting that you do. You noticed, "You know what? I'm feeling a little fuller in these last couple of months," or you know what you're eating has been like, if it's serving you or not, and just going, "You know what? I'm just going to take care of this now. I'm not going to let this turn into a whole massive thing. We can just do this now."

So I want to suggest that you do not give yourself the pandemic pass. Okay? Don't take it. So many people are thinking that this is an acceptable time to gain weight, just like in pregnancy. In fact, I had a client who was saying recently that she was talking to some other physicians who don't know any of this work and didn't know that she had been working on weight loss or things like that, and they said, "Oh, weight loss, what? Oh my gosh, who could be expected to lose weight during this time? That would be impossible. That would be so hard. How could you possibly think about getting through this time without alcohol or without a snack, without ice cream?" And it just goes to show how deeply we believe that the pandemic pass is warranted, that this is totally acceptable and expected and normal, but then, at the same time, to complain about how our pants don't fit or we have to go up a size in scrubs.

So be really aware of that. Just notice how the people around you are talking in that way and intentionally decide that you're not going to follow in that line of thinking. If you're not intentional about that, you will just fall right in line with them and just say, "Yeah, you know what? You're right. Who cares? What difference does it make?" And here's ultimately the thing. I just want to share this with you quickly. It doesn't matter. So you gain weight, who cares? You're still an amazing, amazing whole perfect, valuable, wonderful human being, completely lovable, perfect exactly as you are, the exact amount of enough, you're not too much and not not enough, right? You are just the perfect amount of enough. You are just perfect. So if you gain weight, who cares? It doesn't matter. But until you've done that work to really, truly accept yourself as who you are and separating the size of your body from your way of assessing yourself and your opinion of yourself, this whole experience of gaining and losing weight will be uncomfortable for you.

Okay? So those are two very important pieces. Sure, we can lose weight, but if we don't understand that what we think about ourselves is actually the most important thing, then we miss the most important part. And that's exactly what I help my clients with, is understanding, sure, there's lots of things that we can do to lose weight, but how do we make it permanent? We make it permanent by understanding we just lost weight because we wanted to, because we want to be someone who doesn't have a weight problem. We like feeling what it feels like to be in a body that's the right size, but I don't have to lose weight so that I can prove to myself that there's nothing wrong with me or that I'm good enough.

That has always been the case, that I'm good enough and whole and exactly the way I should be from the minute I was born, just for being here and breathing oxygen. That there's nothing else that I need to do to make myself worthy of being alive on this planet. And then I just lose weight because I want to, because I like to achieve things because I like to have goals and I like to work toward them, very different than I have to lose weight or else I'm not acceptable.

So little side note there. Make sure you're not taking part in the pandemic pass. Everybody is talking about the COVID 15. Everybody is gaining that weight, and I want you to be the exception.

All right, have a wonderful week and I'll talk to you very soon. Take care. Bye bye.