



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, I'm so glad you are here. This is a really good one for you today, especially if you are new. We're going to be talking about boredom eating. I can't believe I've done 186 episodes and we've never talked about boredom. In fact, this has been an ongoing request for many, many months, that I do a podcast on this topic. And I'll explain a little later why I haven't done one yet, but I'm really excited to bring it to you this time. I'm finally feeling it. I spend quite a bit of time pondering my topics. I don't just pick something out of thin air and get going with it. I really do think about it a lot and really prepare myself, and it finally all came together, and I'm excited to share that with you.

I hope that as this is starting to reach you, that you feel like maybe your life is starting to come together a little bit. I know for my family, we have had a lot of ups and downs as to whether my children will be going back to school in person or be doing distance learning, as they like to call it. There's been a lot of hubbub. I won't get into all the details, but basically our city health department, like the big city, city of Milwaukee changed their rules and did not let many of the schools know besides the public school district. So there were over a hundred plus schools and universities that were like, "Wait, what? We can't go back to school. We thought we could." And it's been just a lot of requests for email writing. And some people have been doing peaceful protests, and there've been many surveys for us to fill out and just a lot of uncertainty and unknown.

And then today, we got an email from one of the schools that they are hoping to be able to go back, at least this kind of hybrid partial plan that they have and that the health department has softened their viewpoint on their rules and will have a look at each school's individual plan and approve them one by one. I think the school actually has an amazing plan so I really hope that they pass it and approve it. But who really knows? So by the time this airs, I hopefully will know if my children will be going to school. Because as this airs next week, my high schooler is supposed to start high school. So we're going to find out. We are just going to see. It has really been an interesting, interesting year. Hasn't it? It really has.

Okay, so let's talk about boredom eating. I want to tell you why I have not done an episode on this yet, and that is because I can't remember the last time I felt bored. So I really, really, really had to spend a lot of time thinking about this and coaching my clients on it in order for me to understand boredom well enough to be able to teach you adequately about it.

I certainly don't want to come on here and pretend to understand that I know what's going on for you when maybe possibly I don't. So bored is a feeling, and our feelings drive our actions. And so boredom eating is when you take actions like eating food, drinking alcohol, or just drinking a beverage, lemonade, whatever. And you're drinking that because of the emotion that's driving you, which is feeling bored. Okay? So that's boredom eating or boredom drinking.

So feeling bored is a feeling, and of course your thoughts create your feelings. That's what I've taught you, right? So it's not your circumstances, it's not what's going on around you, it's not the vibe of the room that you're in or being with people or not with people or any of that stuff. It's your thoughts always that are going to create your feelings. So if you're feeling bored, that's because you have thoughts that create the feeling of boredom for you. So what I notice is that a lot of thoughts that create the feeling of boredom are thoughts about how boring something is. So once again, something being boring is not a circumstance. It is a thought.

Now, I do remember being bored when my children were very young. So I remember, particularly with my first child, because I think I really wanted to be that kind of mother that would just be absolutely overly delighted to be in the aura of my child at every single moment and completely delighted by him at all times. And that was not really my experience. In addition, my husband was still a resident. So I was out in practice, we had this baby and he was still in residency, so he was gone a lot. So I was alone with my son as a baby, as a toddler a lot. And what I found was that I was so bored, often, reading books. I mean the hundred million times I read some of those board books, right? And not bored like bored books, the books are bored. B-O-A-R-D books. I mean, I just felt like sitting there and trying to help him with tummy time or things like that like, "I should think this is fun." No. I wanted him to be settled and happy so I could go do what I wanted to do.

So I did find that to be very boring because of my thoughts, not because what he was doing was inherently boring. And we know this because there are mothers who literally cannot get enough of all of that. And it's not even saying one as good or bad or better or worse than, it's just saying that we have different experiences because of what we make it mean. What I made it mean was that this is boring, it's not stimulating enough for me, it's not something that I want to be doing. And of course, those thoughts are what made me feel bored. Now, I did not have coaching then. I did not know that my thoughts create my feelings so I cannot tell you that I actively changed any of that in that time. But it's always, always, always our thoughts that create our feeling of boredom. And you have to remember that, okay? That is important. Very, very important.

So even when you have the thought, "I'm bored," you think you're just telling the truth. You think you are just factually stating what's going on for you, but that is a thought as well. So you have the thought, "I am bored," it's worth putting that through a model and seeing what actions you take when you think thought, "I'm bored. Now, I do think that for people who find themselves being bored pretty frequently, or even just on a regular occasion, I think there might be some deeper issues there that are worth exploring. And I want to get into those here.

So one thing that I see a lot of and people who say that they're bored and struggle with boredom is that when it comes to experiencing free time or time to relax or just downtime in some way, they won't really let themselves enjoy that time because they believe that they should constantly be productive or else that means something negative about them.

So they're not good enough, they're not valuable, they're not acceptable unless they are going, going, going, going all of the time. This is very, very common amongst women in particular, because we are socialized to give to others, to serve others. And especially depending on what was modeled to you as you grew up, you might have seen women who literally never put their needs first that they should always be running around doing something for others. So to take time to sit down and to relax meant something bad about you, because that meant that maybe you were lazy or you were selfish or something like that.

I think about, I don't know if many of you will remember this movie. I remember seeing it in theaters. I think it came out in the early '80s, dating myself, but it is a classic and it's called The Christmas Story. And it's basically the story about a young boy who's probably like 10, I'd say, who is growing up, I want to say it was probably in the 1950s or so. And it's just the story of him and his family and his experience of one Christmas season. And of course, I think my parents took us thinking that it was a kids' movie, and it definitely was not. And I remember being in the theater and being kind of confused, because I was like, "This isn't really funny or fun to me." But now as an adult, I'm like, "This is a great movie." Anyway, there's a lot of classic things that come from that movie.

But my point is that, it's this boy, I think his name's Ralphie. It's the narrator, the voice you hear is him as an adult telling the story of what happened. And so they're sitting at the dinner table and he describes his mother as never having gotten through a meal without having to get up and get somebody something. And so there's all these examples of that, where she finally sits down to eat and then like someone needs some more milk or someone spills something or something like that. And I just think about that as such a caricature of like, it doesn't matter that the father could get up and do that or that these kids could be trained to get themselves more milk or whatever it is. Right? Her purpose, her reason for existing was to serve. And so sitting down and letting other people handle things was just not acceptable.

So it's interesting to think about that and to explore that. What do you make free time mean? What do you make it mean for you to relax? I had one client who told me that she feels like she should just be doing her CME, because if she's just going to be sitting there reading, she might as well be getting some CME credits. You see that, that constant drive to achieve and succeed, literally not knowing how to slow down and just be in the present moment. And that lack of ability to do that is then interpreted by the brain as whatever it is as being boring. Sitting down, just being with yourself, having a conversation with someone, reading a book just for fun, that that's boring. So that might be going on for you if you find that you really have a hard time with boredom and want to be going, going, going, going, like you're driven by a motor all of the time.

What are you going to find out if you actually slow down? What will you think about yourself? What does that mean about you if you do that? This would be a really good thing to ask yourself if you struggle with boredom. Now, another deeper issue is, and I see this all the time with my clients, is an underlying belief. So this is a subconscious belief, okay? This is not something that is typically top of mind for them, but when we really dig, we find it. An underlying belief that something is wrong with you or wrong with your life. Because you're bored, and then what you make that mean is, "And that's bad. I shouldn't be bored. Something's wrong with me or something's wrong with my life."

Now, I will say that social media has been really, really excellent at making us think that our lives suck and are boring, because you of course see the highlight reel for everybody else. And then as you're sitting there trying to figure out what you want to do with yourself, you're thinking, "Well, compared to everyone else's highlight reel, my day to day looks really boring. Something's wrong with me, something's wrong with my life that I don't live in the highlight reel 24 hours a day." So that's another thing that we have to explore. What do you believe that being bored means about you and your life? Could it just be okay to be bored? We'll get to that in a minute.

Another deeper issue is avoiding being with yourself by having constant input, so much so that taking away that input equals being bored. So what I mean by that is, I mean, it's never been easier to consume information. And I find this all the time with my clients where they say that literally there's pretty much never a time where there's not some sort of input going into their brains, whether it's actively working or listening to podcasts, listening to audio books, constantly learning something. And those things in and of themselves are fine. But when I suggest, "What if you just drove to work in silence so that you could be with yourself and be with your thoughts," they literally have a negative reaction. They're very uncomfortable with that idea, because first of all, their brain is addicted to the dopamine hits of the constant input and learning, learning, learning, learning. But also, when you're constantly learning and constantly thinking about something else, then you don't have to think about yourself. You don't actually have to get in touch with what's going on for you.

So often we say like, "Well, no, I do this because otherwise it's so boring." Well, is it boring or is it that you just don't want to be with yourself? You don't want to find out what's going on in your brain. It's so intolerable for you to be with yourself that you need to distract yourself with something else. I may have told you guys this before on the podcast and can't remember, but I'm going to tell you anyway. I have this friend and she is just one of the most lovely human beings that I've ever met. She's just so great. And I remember talking to her once and she was saying, "You know what? I love being by myself. You know why? Because I'm a really good time." I remember just being like, "I love her so much." Props to Brittany.

She is so great, because she has done... And I will tell you, she wasn't born this way. She has done a lot of work on herself for this to be the case. But she has truly, truly, truly fallen in love with herself so that she loves her own companionship. She's told me, she actually lives overseas in Europe and she's like, "I've just walked along the street and burst out laughing because of something that I was thinking that was really funny." I was just like, "I love you so much. You are amazing." I always think, this is what we're striving for, where we're like, "No, no, no, I don't want to listen to something else because being with me is so great." So if that sounds foreign to you or awful, this is something that we need to work on. It's not boring to be with yourself. That's just your thought about it so that you can find something else to do so you don't have to be with yourself.

And finally, so many of us do not know how to feel our emotions, and that's the deeper issue here too. Like, so you're bored, so what? Why is that a problem? Well, because we don't like to feel negative emotions. Now, sometimes we think of being bored or that feeling of boredom as not really that intensely negative, but for some people it really is. Or even if it is not that negative, they still aren't willing to feel it. Sometimes I think about it like an itch in your skin.

So sometimes you get an itch that's like really all like, "Oh my gosh, I need to get to that." And sometimes you just have a little low grade one. And the little low grade one is like boredom. It's like a kind of a low grade negative emotion. And so can you just be with yourself and allow the urge to scratch? Not resist it, but allow the urge to scratch the itch away.

Can you be with boredom, get to know it very well and allow the urge to go eat or drink something to make it go away or go on social or watch something on Netflix or just anything to try to avoid that feeling? Maybe boredom is a great emotion for you to practice feeling your emotions on. I always think of it as becoming best friends with the emotion. This is your buddy. You want to really get to know boredom all the way around, top and bottom, front, back, side to side. You want to know boredom super duper well, exactly how it feels in your body, exactly how it changes or stays the same. So that when you notice, "Oh, there's boredom," you have the confidence then to be able to feel it.

Now, here's what I also think is really, really important. I could not do a podcast episode on boredom without mentioning this because anytime my kids told me that they're bored, I always mentioned this to them. So many great ideas come from boredom. Literally you can look it up. Okay? So many great, great, great ideas have come from people who are willing to stay in the boredom. If you're willing to stay in it, your brain will get to work. If you keep thinking, "I don't want to feel bored. I need to make this boredom go away," then your brain will offer you things like food and alcohol to go eat and drink. But when you're willing to stay in it, all of a sudden your brain will give you amazing ideas, solve problems that you haven't closed the loop on. It'll just give you such great insight if you allow yourself to stay in the boredom. But that's the key thing, you have to be willing to stay in the boredom first. So you're bored. Why is that a problem? Really answer that. I'm curious what your answer is.

So when you are thinking that being bored is bad, what if it was actually amazing and you just tested it by allowing yourself to stay in boredom for a little while? If it's very challenging for you, maybe set a timer on your phone and just do it for a couple of minutes. Jus, you can baby step your way there. And it doesn't have to be like, "Oh my gosh, now I have to feel bored forevermore." Because here's the thing. Nobody can solve your boredom besides you. People will give you all kinds of different suggestions. They'll say, "Oh, you know what? You just need a hobby, or try this thing. Or you can take this online course, or you can sign up for this training." You can, but you can also stay with yourself in the boredom, and then from that place decide what is the next thing that you should be doing? What really is the right thing? Versus doing all of those things to try to run away from yourself and try to run away from that boredom that you're experiencing.

So with that, I hope that you can experience some boredom. Now, I should just say that I don't experience boredom because I always have way more things that I want to do than I ever have time for. But I also love doing nothing at times. So I don't want you to think that I'm just running around being productive all of the time. My kids know one of my favorite things to do, especially on a Sunday is see if golf is on TV. And if you ask my kids, "Why would Katrina want to watch golf?" Well, because having golf on TV equals instant nap. I take the best naps when there's golf on TV. And there's usually beautiful scenery and they talk in a really nice soothing way. And I don't even know what's really going on. I mean, I understand the basics of golf, but not anything more than that. Most of the time, I can't even see the ball.

I was like, this nice gentle clapping. Even now, there's not even any crowd so you can't even hear any of that. It is so relaxing. And so I'm not bored. I just want to rest and do whatever I need to do to rest and recharge myself. So I don't feel the feeling of bored very often because I don't think thoughts that make me feel bored. It's interesting, so I was talking to my mom recently and she's like, "I'm never bored." I'm like, "Maybe that's where I learned it." Maybe I learned to not think thoughts that make me feel bored from seeing her. I don't know, I remember being bored as a kid, so who knows? Maybe I just worked it out for myself. But you really do have control over this, and you never, ever, ever have to eat or drink out of boredom.

All right, have a lovely, lovely week. I will talk to you next week. Take care.