



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there, my friend. How are you? So glad to have you back here today? And if you're brand new, this is going to be a really good one for you. I always say that, but I really mean it. And this time, this one you've got to listen to. And please, if this is helpful to you, make sure you share it with your friends because this episode I think is going to be the key for so many people who struggle with their overeating, who struggle with drinking more than they know is good for them, or then they want to and cannot figure out why and how to stop. We're going to totally talk about that.

First, I just want to ask how you're doing. We are ending summer here pretty soon. When this episode airs, my oldest son who is starting high school will actually be... Well, the day it airs is his freshman orientation day. At this point, right now they are hopefully going back to school. I swear every week it changes. There's always... There's just lots of changes. We shall see. I will let you know.

Other than that, we don't have a whole lot going on. I've got one of those weeks that as I book things into it, it seems like a really good idea. And then once I got to this week, I was like, "Holy moly! I totally over-scheduled myself." But I still got everything done. And it's all going to be great. I am just doing it and managing my mind. And I'm telling you without that skill, I don't know how I could do any of this stuff. I'm just letting it be easy. And I'm just moving ahead and getting it done. And I'm not just overwhelming, spending a lot of time thinking about what I need to do. I'm just doing it. And that's how you get stuff done. It's amazing. So, so good.

What we're going to talk about on today's episode is about restlessness. And restlessness is an emotion that many of us do not discuss or talk about enough at all. I often think of restlessness besides being a word that's a little bit hard to say, I realize as I'm going to be saying it a lot today is that it's kind of what I consider a sub emotion. It is an actual emotion and this idea of a sub emotion is just something that I'm sort of making up. But what I mean by that is, it's not a word or a description that we readily have top of mind for us. And so I think we are often feeling restless and we don't know that we're feeling restless. We aren't really in touch or in tune with that emotion. And so we call it something else.

And sometimes we also think we're just not feeling anything. Like I've had many, many clients tell me, "Listen, I just ate food. I don't know. I wasn't feeling anything. I just wanted to eat." And of course there's a feeling of desire when that's happening. But I think there's often a restlessness there and that they are just completely not in touch with.

Something that I've spent a lot of time thinking about and I want to share it with you because I think that once you identify where it's showing up for you in your life, it really makes a big difference for you, and it allows you to get to know this actual feeling, the true feeling that you're feeling.

I have a book by Patrick Micheal Ryan, I've talked about it before on the podcast, it's called The Dictionary of Emotions, and I don't reference it a lot, but every now and then I do. And I thought, "Oh, you know what? I wonder what his definition is of restless." And the way he describes it is unable to ease one's mind and/or body. Unable to ease one's mind and/or a body.

And I think that that is what's going on for us so often when we overeat, when we over-drink and when we are just experiencing a general dissatisfaction with our lives. Let me give you some examples. One that I can think of for sure is when you're trolling the kitchen for food, in the pantry kind of pacing around scanning, looking, going in, leaving, going back in five minutes later, is there anything different in there? Is there anything I overlooked? Maybe there's something that's hiding that I forgot about. Maybe something will look more appetizing to me than it did five minutes ago. Kind of looking and thinking, "Should I go out, should I maybe get something, should I just try to be with myself in this?" That is restlessness. Just that sense of unease, not being able to settle yourself down, not being able to settle down your mind or settle down your body. And what I know, in my own past experience what I've eventually ended up doing is wanting to put an end to the pacing, to the considering, to the looking.

And so I would just eat something. I would just eat anything. Even if I didn't really want it. Have you ever had that experience where you go in, you look at everything and you don't even want any of it, but you still eat something anyway because you're still like, something's not right, and maybe food will make it better? And then you eat that food and you're like, "That wasn't even that good. That didn't make it better. Oh, maybe I'll try this next thing." That's probably what it's going to be. And what's even worse is when you're trying to do it the healthy way. Because there's something that you're like, "Well, I might want that. And that might actually do the trick, but I'm trying not to eat that. I'll just eat these other things that are "healthier"."

And then usually what ends up happening of course, because none of the food makes any of this better, is that we end up circling back around to that thing we wanted in the first place and eat that too. We could have just gone there in the first place. But we don't.

I think at night this is a common reason why many of us end up drinking or drinking more alcohol than we would like, because we feel that restlessness. You might be feeling some anxiety or a little sense of worry. Just that uneasiness, maybe about how your day went, maybe about how a patient is doing, maybe about how someone that you love, your children or a family member or good friend, how they might be struggling. You might be even feeling just unease over maybe some disconnection that you have with your partner or unease that you feel over not having a partner. It's often at night when that emotion arises and when we're confronted with the other parts of our lives. Like the busy-ness to a certain extent has ceased. We're not distracted anymore. And now we can see what is actually happening for us in our lives.

Another area where restlessness comes up a lot is at parties or other events. And a lot of us are not attending things like that right now. But just think back, if you've ever been to a barbecue or you've ever been to any kind of party or event where you ended up eating when you had planned not to, or you just end up going off the rails, like maybe you had a plan and that just went out the window when you got there, or once you had a couple drinks in you or something like that, often we are feeling restless. I know as somebody who... Sometimes I think when I tell people this, they don't believe me. I'm really good in small groups or one-to-one, but in larger groups I can be very socially awkward in the sense that I feel very socially awkward.

I don't really know how I come across. Maybe sometimes I am more socially awkward, maybe not other times. But I think also I sometimes come across as aloof or uncaring. Because of my restlessness and my discomfort in this kind of social anxiety, I just don't really know what to do. I feel a great sense of unease and I don't know what to do. And so I definitely feel restless. This has happened to me... Oh my gosh, last year I went to an event where it was something where it was like a place to meet people. While I get there, everybody all knows each other. Everybody's all sectioned off into little groups and they're all with each other.

And I had gone in there with this idea like, I'm going to go in there and I'm just going to walk up to someone and introduce myself and say my name and, "Hi. I don't think we've met before." And once I got in there, I couldn't. I just could not do it. It was so, so hard for me. There was nobody just milling about. They were all engaged in these... Look at me trying to explain to you and convince you. They were all engaged in their tightly wound and developed conversations. And I didn't know how to break in without being rude. I felt so restless. I literally got a drink of water then I left and went to the bathroom. I thought how long can I wait in the bathroom before they start the meeting then came back through, circled around again.

I was literally about to walk to the car and just leave. That's how restless and uncomfortable I felt until someone that I knew I happened to bump into her and she wasn't even going to that event. But she was like, "Oh, hey, let me introduce you to so and so." And then guess what? I had a great time, because I actually got to meet a couple of people. I was so restless. So restless. And I just didn't even know that's what it was.

Now, what I will tend to do when I'm feeling restless like that at parties or events, especially when I don't know what to do with myself is like, why not check out the food? I had already decided at this example that I'm just giving you that I wasn't going to eat, but an easy thing for me to do would be to go to the little buffet thing they had with their hot orders and fill a plate and then stand there eating, because at least it would give me something to do because I was feeling so uneasy in my mind and my body. My brain was all over the place and I didn't feel like I could just stand there. I had to move. I think that we end up eating so often, and of course drinking alcohol to take the edge off when we're feeling restless.

Another issue... I just recently talked to you about weekends on the podcast. Again, restlessness on weekends. It happens so often. We're so used to being busy and running around and all the things we're doing throughout the week and weekend comes, we don't know what to do with ourselves. We feel so uneasy. It's like we want a purpose. We want a mission. We want something to do. And when we don't have that, then it's so easy to feel restless. That restlessness to me is that feeling of what is happening right now isn't right and I'm not sure what to do about it.

Because if I knew it wasn't right and I knew how to change it, I would just change it. I would just do something else. But usually what I find when I'm feeling restless is I don't really realize that it's a feeling that's creating that problem. Even though of course I know that rationally it doesn't feel like that restlessness is an emotion that I'm creating with my thinking, it feels like it's the circumstance that's the problem. It feels like I don't have enough to do, or I have too much to do, or the right people aren't here, or this isn't what I wanted to do, or whatever it is. And thinking that that is the problem. Like I need to get together with someone. Or I need to get away from everybody. Or whatever it is that's creating the restlessness. Well, of course it's not, since restlessness is an emotion and all of our emotions are created by our thinking.

So when you're feeling restless on the weekend, what do you do? Turn on the TV, watch some Netflix, get a drink, have another drink, get a snack, have another snack. It's so easy to end up overeating and overdrinking because of that restlessness. And we don't even realize that that is what it is.

I think another time that we feel restless often is when we are spending time with people that we don't particularly care for that much. And we can manage our minds about everybody and we can always offer everybody love. But we all have preferences too. And so this could be anybody. This could be your family of origin. This could be a family that you married into. This could be family friends. This could be chosen friends. This could be anybody. This could be people at work that you are spending time with that you just particularly don't like.

And so when you're spending time with those people, because of some event you feel obligated to go to, or for whatever reason, you're on vacation or spending time with them, it is really, really easy to find yourself overeating and overdrinking. And often that is because of that sense of... it's like this baseline uneasiness. Just this feeling of this isn't right. I don't want to be here.

Now, here's the thing. You can listen to that uneasiness and you can decide, you know what? I'm just not going to get together with these people that I don't really particularly care to spend time with, but that's not always possible. One example I can think of from the working world is every now and then there's these dinners, probably not right now in COVID, but we would have these... hospital systems would put on these dinners and have their annual meeting. And of course we'd all go. And so there you are with all these people and it's supposed to be a social event, already explained to you, sometimes it was going to be uncomfortable for me. But even though I knew people there, maybe that wasn't exactly how I wanted to spend my time right then.

And I would have this feeling of restlessness. How long do I have to be here? And then of course, when I decided beforehand, "Oh, I'm not going to have dessert," but then they come around with dessert and serve it to you, I'm like, "Oh, what the hell? Why not? Of course I'll have some." And that's because of that feeling of restlessness and not wanting to feel it.

The thing about restlessness is that it's actually not that uncomfortable when you get to know it and actually spend time with it. What I find is that it is just the sense of uneasiness. To me, it's a bit of... it's not really nervous energy, but it's kind of like unbridled energy. It's just energy in my body and brain that it doesn't know what to do with. It needs a purpose or something to do. Like I was saying at that event that I went to, I just walked over here and went over there.

I just didn't know what to do. You're probably listening, going like, "Oh my gosh, Katrina, seriously? Come on." But for real, this is like... I'm just being vulnerable and honest with you. This is the real deal. This is me. This is what it's like to be in my head. And I know some of you definitely understand. And those of you who are extroverts are like, "What? That's my favorite thing." And that's great. And I'm so glad for you.

But anyway, when you get to know what restlessness feels like in your body, then you can stay in it with yourself. And I've talked to you about this before, but what I mean by getting to know the feeling of restlessness is not thinking about it in the sense of using your brain to try to figure it out, but actually learning how to feel it. What that means is, instead of living up in your brain, putting your awareness, your attention on your body, I usually say that's like moving out of your brain and into your body, where do you actually feel the feeling of restlessness? Is it in your throat? Is it in your back? Is it in your chest? In your stomach? In your limbs? Is it in your head? Where is it?

And then find it and get to know it better. Just pay attention. Just notice what it actually feels like, how it changes, how it doesn't change maybe the shape of it. Is it a fast kind of a feeling? Is it a slow kind of a feeling? What does it actually feel like? And just with total non-judgment and curiosity, get to know it. What does it feel like? And what does it do over the course of time? If you just sit with it, what ends up happening? Does it just go away? Does it stay there? Does it get a little worse, a little better? The reason we don't know these things is because we've never paid attention. We've always reached for some food or some alcohol or in my case wanting to run away. Escapism, avoidance, so that we didn't have to feel it.

But when you get to feel it, it's really not that bad. It's really okay to feel it. I think I've felt restlessness so often and just didn't even know that's what I was experiencing. I can think of times where maybe my husband took the kids out of the house and I was home alone and maybe I had thought, "Oh, you know what? While they're gone, I'm going to do this thing." Sometimes even like, "I'm just going to read this book." And I sit down with the book and my brain is just energized. It just can't settle into the book. I can't really get focused. I find myself wandering with my attention. I'm all of a sudden thinking about whatever rereading the same paragraph on the same page, over and over again because I can't stay focused. And then I think, "Well, maybe I shouldn't do that. Maybe I should go do this thing." And then I try to do that. And I just have the sense of a lack of focus, a lack of direction, sort of a lack of purpose, not really being sure what I want to do.

And of course it's easy to think that that's a problem to be solved, or it could be a really magnificent opportunity to get to know what it's like to feel restless and to have restlessness as your emotion that you're feeling. And then recognizing that it's really not that bad. You can sit with uneasiness rather than try to eat it or drink it away. I think that we often are feeling restless and we use cover emotions, sub emotion. We call it boredom or loneliness, but really it's restlessness. Often.

You're going to have to check and see. You're going to have to tune in to yourself and find out if that's true or not. And when you recognize, "Oh, it's restlessness. The reason why I'm in the pantry is I'm just restless." Like, "Oh, okay. That's cool. I can feel restless," then you can stop thinking like, "Certainly there is some sort of package of something that's hidden in the back there I forgot about that nobody ate." No, that is not the solution. We don't need food.

We need to figure out what we're actually feeling and then feel it. And I think that very often you'll find that it's just a sense of restlessness. Maybe even when you are avoiding doing your charting, or dictating, or things like that, are you feeling the sense of restlessness? So often we're avoiding and procrastinating and like, "What should I do?" It's that same kind of scanning energy. Certainly, there's something else that I could be doing that's also productive.

Certainly there's some snack I could be going and getting to encourage myself to do this is that restlessness that you're feeling. And can you feel restless and just get to work, doing your charting anyway. It's something that I'm really excited for you to think about and to address and to just really explore for yourself because I think it's going to make a big difference for you understanding that restlessness is really not a big deal. It's okay to feel uneasy. When you're feeling that uneasiness, that is normal. It's the inability to feel the uneasiness that's the problem, the unwillingness to feel it that's the problem.

And you know right now with everything that's going on in the world, there might be a lot of uneasiness for you. And can that be okay? Can you stay with yourself in that from a loving perspective, rather than trying to eat it or drink it away?

All right. Can't wait to find out what you think about restlessness. Make sure you let me know by commenting on this episode at katrinaubellmd.com/188.

Have a wonderful week. And I'll talk to you very soon.