



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hi there, my friend. How are you doing? Glad you're here today. I'm so glad you're joining me. Thank you for joining me. If you are a long-time listener, welcome back. If you are newer, then I have a great episode for you today because I have another installment of the Back to Basics series. We're going to be talking about overdesire today—so important. Make sure you listen, whether you've heard me talk about this a million times or this is your first introduction to it.

This is good stuff and so critically crucially important when it comes to solving your overeating and your weight problem for good, permanently, forever, okay?

So now let's talk about over desire, so is over desire a word? I think it is, it's coined. What does over desire mean? It means having more desire than is appropriate for something.

So in the case of over desire for food that means that you have more desire for food than is appropriate for the amount of food that your body needs, okay? So that means obviously your body needs food and you're wanting more food than your body needs is what is happening here, this is really how your mind plays into weight gain and weight loss. And I mentioned this as part of the back to basics series, if you haven't listened to the other back to basics episodes you can of course just Google back to basics Weight Loss for Busy Physicians or even Katrina Ubell podcast and you can find those. But I will tell you that the thinking cycle we discussed in episode 244 and the hunger scale we discussed in episode 247, so those are not too far back in your podcast app to go listen to.

The thinking cycle is obviously very important and that is kind of the real foundation of what we're going to talk about today, although if you haven't listened to that one yet you can still get a lot out of this episode and then go listen to that one afterward. Really the over desire component is how your mind starts playing into weight gain and weight loss and when you think about what the whole weight loss industry focuses on is not your mind, right? They focus on how you're moving your body and what kinds of food you're eating and how often you're eating and how much water you're drinking and things like that.

And no doubt those things factor in and they're important but there's this whole other element that is often ignored or if it's touched upon it's just very lightly discussed and not in a real meaningful way and that is, in my opinion, a huge reason why so many of us still continue to struggle with our weight even when we go through these programs, these weight loss programs, we just are not figuring out what the real problem is and over desire is a huge component of that. So when you think about desire, what is desire? Desire is a feeling really, it's an emotion, it's wanting really, right? And so, so often we say, I don't know what was going on for me, I just wanted that food, I just like that, I just want it, and we think that that is just innate within us it's not something that we have any control over and that is not how it works actually.

I'm here to let you know that actually every feeling is created by a thought always, every single time, okay? So when you have the feeling of desire there is always a thought there. Even if you are like, no, I can't think of any specific thought, at least on a subconscious level there is a thought. Even the thought, that looks good, I want that, right? We think we're just describing what's going on for us but it is a thought, I want to eat that, that tastes good, I like that, that's all thoughts that we have. And we know that they're thoughts because facts are something everybody would agree upon, okay? So I remember back in medical school I actually ran a marathon for charity, okay? So I'm not a marathon runner, if you're into running I think what they would call me is a clydesdale. I did not have the runner's physique, that was not really my thing but I did actually run a marathon for charity.

And so I was asking my fellow classmates, none of whom were well off financially, if they'd be willing to part with a couple dollars to help support me and my fundraising efforts. And what I promised them was that if they gave me a donation then after I ran the marathon then I would make them one of my special chocolate chip cookies, so I had these amazing chocolate chip cookies. And I'd made them before for people and they all loved them and that was kind of a nice enticing reward for them. But here's what's interesting, the majority of people were like, oh yum, that chocolate chip cookie, yes, I'd love that but then there was one of my classmates who totally got migraines every time she ate chocolate and so she was happy to have the cookie but not the chocolate chips. So every time I made those she never would have any because she couldn't do chocolate, she didn't have any desire for these cookies because she knew if I eat that I will get a headache and I don't want that.

So what I ended up doing is making her a cookie without the chocolate chips and that was what I gave her for her donation. But it just goes to show that it's not a fact that chocolate chip cookies are good, some people don't like them, some people are not into chocolate, some people get sick if they eat chocolate. We all have different thoughts about all the foods that we think are so amazing, there's somebody out there who has different thoughts for sure. So it's not a fact that any food is good or looks good or tastes good or smells good, it is just the way you're thinking about it. So when we're talking about over desire we're thinking about the thinking that creates over desire, right? Because it's thoughts that create our feelings and our feelings drive our actions.

When we're feeling out over desire we're so much more likely to take the actions of overeating, of eating things against our own will, right? Going and cruising the pantry and seeing what there is and just, what can I eat? Just having desire for food in your mouth, right? And sometimes we have desire for specific things, foods as well or alcohol or things like that.

I was thinking that there's kind of some different subsections of thinking that create over desire and I think it's important to understand how they're kind of different. The first is what I'm calling conditioned thinking, so this is what you're conditioned to think about food from an early age typically. You can be conditioned as an adult as well, for sure that can happen, but I think for most of us the majority of our condition thinking comes from our childhood so what that means is that we were just taught to think a certain way about certain foods.

So this can be from your family of origin whoever the adults were in your life that were important or influential in your life growing up the way they talked about certain things, maybe it was certain foods you ate during holidays or just the way the grownups or even the other children around you thought about certain foods. So this could be something you only get this once a year so eat up because this is your chance, that might be a way that people thought around you and so as a child, right? You just believe the people around you and you can take on that thinking. So it's kind of an indoctrination, this is how we think about food, just like this is how we think about religion or our country or certain things like that, we were conditioned to believe certain things.

Many of us were conditioned to believe that after something good happens you should treat yourself with food, right? Maybe you were on a soccer team and if you won you got to go get ice cream afterward, so that created this conditioned response that when something good happens you want to celebrate with some food, with something sweet and some sort of treat. On the flip side many of us were conditioned like, oh, you scraped your knee, here's a Popsicle, right? If you're in pain physically or emotionally a way that you can make yourself feel better is by eating something, by having something sweet. So many of us have this conditioned thinking that we think is just how it is, this is just the way I approach food or it feels very normal to you because it's conditioned and you've thought it so many times and it probably was normalized by the people who were around you.

So these are the kinds of thoughts that we really have to recognize as thoughts, they often seem very factual just like the truth for us and instead we have to question them and think, is this really? What happens when I think this way? And is there maybe another way that would also feel true and believable to me that would give me the results that I'm looking for, right? Because if your conditioned thought and belief is that if something good happens you need to reward yourself with food then of course you're going to have a hard time not rewarding yourself with food, right? That's just how it works. We have to change our beliefs and our thoughts that good things can happen and food doesn't have to follow them, right? It's not a requirement or something that's logical or what we always need to be expecting. The next sub section of thinking is what I'm calling habit thinking, so this is just thinking that we've repeated many, many times, but maybe it wasn't really drilled into us in a similar way.

So this could be that for instance, an example for me was in residency, the residence lounge every morning the cafeteria workers would bring up a tray of donuts and muffins and kind of breakfast pastry types of things and leave them on this table and so when you were post-call in particular you maybe didn't have time for breakfast or whatever, you could just grab something really quick there. Well, so initially I'm thinking, oh, I don't want to eat donuts, it's not healthy, whatever, and then all it takes is one difficult call night where you're like, you know what? I deserve to have a donut after I take call, right?

So one time have that thought, reward yourself with a donut that makes me feel incrementally a little bit better and then lo and behold three or four nights later you take call again and maybe that night wasn't so bad and maybe you actually got some decent sleep or just wasn't as intense but regardless, you know what? After you take call you get to eat a donut so you go and you eat your donut.

And then before you know it, it just becomes this habit like, oh, this is just what I do, what I eat for breakfast post call is a donut in the residence lounge, and then it just becomes this cycle. Often with habit thinking this is not something that we decided to think, right? It just kind of creeps up on us and before we know we've created a habit that we didn't even intend to create so it's just created from repetition. The next subset of thinking that creates over desire is what I'm calling adopted thinking, and this is the type of thinking that we adopt from other people. So other people think this way or talk about food in this way so apparently that's normal so I'm going to think about it that way as well. I think I might have talked about this once on the podcast before but I remember one time we were on vacation, I think I was maybe in college and my older brother was sitting next to me on some sort of bus, we were on some kind of tour, I think we were in Puerto Rico or something like that.

And I remember just kind of being hot and thirsty and just kind of feeling sick to my stomach, maybe it was kind of the exhaust fumes or something, and my brother pulled out a small piece of chocolate and offered it to me. And I was like, oh, I don't know, I'm just like, my belly is not feeling so good, and he's like, no, chocolate makes everything better. And I was like, really? He's like, yeah, it will totally help, and I was like, oh, okay, I just completely adopted his thinking, chocolate makes everything better. I wasn't sitting there going, do I really want to think that? What's the impact of that going to be if I decide to take that on, right? So someone else is like, yeah, this is how we think about it, it's totally normal and we can just like that so quickly adopt that thinking and that just becomes that new way of thinking that creates over desire, right?

You see chocolate and you believe that anything that contains chocolate, chocolate makes everything better then you're going to be much more likely to have over desire, more desire for that chocolate containing food than you would otherwise if you were thinking differently about it. And then the fourth subgroup of thinking is what I'm calling escapism thinking and what that means is that we want to avoid what's really going on in our lives, maybe what's actually physically happening around us or maybe just what we're thinking about what's happening for us so we will just decide to be consumed by food related thinking rather than thinking about what appears to be the problem for us. We want to escape the perceived problem that we're experiencing and we do so by thinking about food more than is appropriate. So this can be just, I had a really hard day at work or my relationship is really not good or I'm really struggling with my children or with my aging parents or a sibling or whatever is going on and I want to escape what's going on from myself with that.

So rather than dealing with that situation, dealing with my thoughts and feelings about that situation directly I'm just going to try to avoid them by thinking a lot of thoughts about food and entertaining myself with food and maybe soothing myself with food and just in general, spending more time eating food, thinking about food than would be appropriate. And often it's going to be some sort of food that isn't necessarily the highest in the neutral realm, right?

It's going to be much more of something that's going to be a treat and so sometimes even in doing so we'll end up really overeating as well. So you can tell, right? There's just different subsections of thinking and different ways that we can develop thoughts and beliefs that will create that feeling of over desire.

And once we have over desire for the food that is just a collection of molecules and atoms that have a particular flavor when they're consumable by humans we put so much meaning into that and then we really, really, really want to eat it, it's not enough to just see it or know about it, we need to chew it up and swallow it. And so when we wonder, why am I eating these things? Why do I say in the morning I'm not going to have dessert and then by the time nighttime rolls around I can't get myself to stop doing it? We have to look at, well, okay, you're wanting this food more than is appropriate for what the food actually is and for what your body needs, what thoughts are you having that is creating that over desire? We need to get in touch with what that is.

Now, I think it's easy when you first learn this to be like, oh yeah, bring it, I'm going to figure out what these thoughts are and I'm going to change them all and I'm never going to have a problem again, it will take 30 minutes and that'll be it, right? And I want to offer that, I mean, I'm not going to say that couldn't happen but I'm just going to say, that's typically not the experience that we have, it might be actually challenging for you to figure out what the thoughts are that really create the desire. It may not be but you may also just kind of be resistant to giving up those thoughts, it's very fascinating to watch our brains, and mine has done this too, be resistant to giving up the thoughts that we have that create that over desire. We understand that over desire is a problem but we're kind of attached to it in some way, right?

So I often hear with the people I work with, the clients I work with, they're like, I don't really want to reduce my desire to normal levels, because they think that they're somehow going to be losing something, right? I think there's this misconception that if you reduce your over desire so that you have a normal amount of desire for food then that is going to mean that you don't like food anymore, that you don't enjoy food anymore, that food doesn't taste good anymore, that you're not going to get any pleasure out of food or that you're going to ultimately feel very sad and restricted and deprived, that this is really going to be a problem for you. And I actually have a couple of examples of times where I've reduced my over desire and it's actually made a big difference for me, it's just an explanation of what it is actually like to reduce your over desire to an appropriate amount, it's essentially taking away this power that you give to food with the way that you're thinking.

So first example is alcohol, so when I was leaving my practice eating wasn't really cutting it for me anymore in the sense that I wanted to feel even better, I wanted to check out even more so I started drinking more. And alcohol has never been a huge thing for me, it's really just not my jam, I could take it or leave it, I'm not totally against it but it just doesn't do a ton for me and it was actually really fascinating. I specifically remember when I went into our drink fridge and was looking for another bottle of Perseco and it turned out we were all out and I was legitimately annoyed, that had never happened to me before. I was like, oh, that's interesting, wow, I'm really having an experience that's different for me because this usually has not been an issue.

So what I find interesting too is, I work with a lot of clients who are like, listen, I can give up food but alcohol, out of my dead cold hands will you take my bottle of wine, they just have a lot of connection to the alcohol, the alcohol is really the thing for them. So what's different? The way that we think about it. Now, granted in this case, right? It doesn't give me the dopamine hit. But what I think is so funny is that I recently went on a trip to France and I was thinking leading up to it, you know what? I need to start drinking more, I need to maybe work on my tolerance because I just really have not been drinking and I don't want to get there and drink some French wine and then I'm hangover the next day or anything like that. And what was so funny is, I had the desire to build up that tolerance but day after day I would forget to drink, right? The day would end and I'd be like, oh shoot, I forgot to have a glass of wine today.

And that is what happens when you have an appropriate amount of desire, you are not over-emphasizing the importance of it even when you want to be drinking it, right? It was just kind of a funny thing that happened but it's like, that's what having a normal amount of desire looks like. And I could have set myself some reminders or put out a bottle of something or whatever just to try to remind myself more but it just goes to show that desire is created by the way you think about the alcohol, I'm just like, I could take it or leave it. Now here's an example with food though, so peanut butter, right? Back in our low fat days totally off limits, right? There were so many that I ate, I think it was called, it's powder peanut butter, PB2 or other things like that, which at the time felt like a good secondary diety kind of version of peanut butter because I was happier to eat that than not ever have peanut butter.

Which is actually kind of strange because I don't even really like peanuts that much and I don't really like other nuts that much either but there's something about peanut butter, must be the creaminess or maybe it's just the nostalgia from eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch as a kid for years, I don't know, but the point is that when I started doing this, I'm like, yeah, no sugar, no flour, and peanut butter, I'm all in, I can have as much as I want. And yeah, guess what? I wanted a lot, I wanted more than my body needed and what I would find is that I would start off with maybe a couple of tablespoons or something with an apple and then I felt like that wasn't enough, and then I'd scoop out more. And over the course of time what I found myself doing, and I'd already lost weight, this was in maintenance, okay?

What I found over the course of time is that I would be doing something and I'd think, oh, you know what? I'm just going to go get a spoonful of peanut butter, I'm just a little bit hungry, get a spoonful of peanut butter and I'd eat it, and then I'd think, I'm just going to get one more because one more is not too bad, right? And you can see where this is going. Before I knew it I one time had eaten some peanut butter and then I looked in the container and I was like, whoa, I think I've eaten literally a cup of peanut butter, that's a lot of peanut butter for any human being. And just realizing this isn't even a weight thing, this is the peanut butter is calling to me from the pantry and I'm having a hard time resisting it, I'm coming back, I'm coming back, I'm coming back.

So over desire, right? I had totally created over desire with my thoughts thinking this is on protocol for me, this is on plan, this isn't going to harm me, fat is good for me once I learned that low fat is not what actually helps us to lose weight and keep it off. Just thoughts like, that taste good, it's satisfying, it makes me feel a certain way in my belly and I like that, it's so cream and smooth and I just liked it because of the way I thought about it and then it created over desire which caused me to go and eat a cup of peanut butter.

The cup of peanut butter was when I was like, okay, I think this is my moment of realizing I think that I have some over desire for this food. So that's an example of how I created a lot of over desire for peanut butter with my thinking but then I was able to reduce the over desire. So I recognized it after I ate so much of it and I realized, you know what? I got to change this.

And so I think there's the habit of when I do this then I go and get a spoonful of peanut butter so I had to break that, that kind of conditioned response, meaning that I stopped going and getting a spoonful of peanut butter during the times that I had typically been doing that and then I worked to change my thinking. And I stopped thinking about peanut butter as just this glorious amazing food that I was so lucky that I could eat as much as I wanted to now of and all of that, I just changed my thinking to this is a digestible substance that is adequately palatable to me, this is something that I can eat or I cannot eat. For years I didn't eat it and I was totally fine and so I can it or I cannot eat it, that's where I went to. So I didn't go to, I hate peanut butter, peanut butter is gross or anything like that, I just went to, I want to just not care that much.

So peanut butter is one of the many, many, many foods that I can consider eating when I'm hungry and when my body needs new nutrition, and so I just with my thinking took away the over emphasis that I had on the importance of the peanut butter. Sure, that was one thing I could eat but there were also many, many other things that I could eat that were just as good, served my body just as well, and that I felt I had more control over. So I totally took out the thoughts that were driving me to create this over desire and eat an excess amount of food. So what I want to be clear about is it doesn't mean that I was like, oh, I can't have peanut butter in the house, I totally have always had peanut butter in the house, I have it there right now, it doesn't mean that I have to have all these limits on it or restrictions or, oh, I can't have that.

The minute we think we can't have it all we want is it, right? Then our desire goes through the roof, no, I can eat that or I don't have to because it's just food and it's just sitting there and it's really not that important. And so over the course of time I actually forgot about peanut butter because I just thought to myself, you know what? I think I'll just take a break from this because I think after you've eaten a cup of peanut butter in one sitting and you've probably had enough for a little while maybe and so I just took a break from it. So I was not saying, I can't ever eat this again or now I'm not allowed to have this or anything like that, I was just like, I could have it if I want to but I probably just had enough for a while so I'm going to take a break from it and then see where I'm at, and it was so interesting how much the desire dropped.

So here's the deal, I can't remember the last time I ate peanut butter, not because I can't have it, it's just not really a thing. When I think, oh, what should I eat? I don't think of peanut butter, not because I can't have it, not because it's off limits or bad food, it just literally doesn't occur to me because my desire has been reduced. Can I have it if I want it? Absolutely, I genuinely don't want it, and that is what reducing over desire looks like, right? We're like, no, I don't want to reduce my desire about brownies, that's going to be so sad, that presupposes that you will still think that brownies are very important when you reduce the desire. Think about something you don't like to eat, you don't place the importance of that food on it, it's just food that you could eat if you wanted to but you're choosing not to. I'm telling you, the freedom that you feel when you could take the brownie or leave it is way better than feeling like the brownie is in control of you.

The five minutes of joy that you experience or maybe even less when you're actually consuming the brownie is not worth all the mental drama leading up to it and then afterward, and then brownies are classic for calling to you from the kitchen, right? You can go back and you cut off a little more and a little more and a little more and a little more, right? And you don't feel like you're in control, that's what we're trading. That feeling like you can't control yourself, someone else is in charge, the food is in charge or a part of you is taking over your body or your brain, that is the part that's not there, that's really nice to not have that experience. So what we want to do is understand that every action we take has a thought and a feeling that's driving it, okay? So if you're taking actions with food or maybe alcohol that you wish you were not doing we need to figure out what the thoughts and feelings are that are creating those actions, okay?

Once we know what they are then we can play around with the idea that we might want to experiment with different ways of thinking to just see, right? I think we often think, if I reduce my desire it's almost like a punishment in some and it's not at all, it's total freedom, it's an absolute gift. So you enjoy food when you eat it, it tastes good to you, you get pleasure out of it, and then you just put it down and you move on and you do other things and you get more joy and pleasure out of other areas of your life. You're not putting so much pressure on food and maybe alcohol to do that heavy lifting for you of making your life fun and exciting and enjoyable. So that's what I have for you today on over desire, over desire is where it's at. If you eat more food than you think you should regardless of whether you're overweight or not, you have over desire factoring in at least in some way, shape or form.

So that's what I want to encourage you to do this week is to really pay attention to how you are unintentionally very likely creating over desire with the way you think about foods and just consider, offer yourself the opportunity to maybe think about the food in a different way and then just see what happens, see what your experience is like. That's very much been my experience of going through this process is, well, let me just see what happens if I do this, versus, well, now I have to, so and so says that I have to do it this way or this is the right way. I just go into it like, well, let me just try thinking about it this way and see what ends up happening and the things that work I keep and things that don't work I change until I figure out what it is that does work.

All righty, I will talk to you next week.