



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hello there, my friend. Welcome back to the podcast and happy new year. I'm so glad you're here to join me today. I love the energy and momentum that a new year brings, and I hope that you can feel some of that energy. It's so exciting. We have our new group of Weight Loss for Doctors Only clients starting here very soon, next week. It's just such a great time to lose weight. I think it's not the only time, I think there's other great times to lose weight throughout the year as well, but there's something about January, it's just like, okay, we're turning over a new page, turning over a new leaf. It's just fresh and we're going to start with good intentions and not even just intentions, we're going to create some good results as well. I have some great things planned for you this year.

I'm so, so excited to share them with you as we go along throughout the year, but I'm actually super excited to share with you today's episode because it's something I've been thinking about for a very, very long time. And just for whatever reason, never kind of was the right time for me to discuss this with you on the podcast. But it really is something that so many women struggle with. And I mean, really no matter where you are in your adult life, hormonal changes and just struggles with our cycle and what that means for us in terms of our eating and how we're feeling, how we ask food and alcohol to make us feel better. It's just something that we struggle with again and again. And a lot of people don't feel supported in that, or just kind of feel like, well, there're other ways to support myself, but the way most people do it is by eating a drinking.

So how do I not make great progress throughout the month and then just unravel it in those few days, leading up to the start of the period, or maybe even just first few days of the bleeding actually beginning.

Okay, let's talk about cycle struggles. I am not an OBGYN, but I have coached lots and lots and lots and lots of OBGYNs. And also, when you are a pediatrician, there's a little overlap there as babies are born and moms recovering, and there's often kind of a bit of an intimacy, even amongst women just sharing what they're going through and how they struggle. And this is something that is really actually something that even just like a couple decades ago, it was largely considered pretty inappropriate to be discussing these kinds of things. You know, really the messaging, so often, particularly like marketing messages and advertisement messages are, if you're struggling with your period, there are things that you should be doing so that you can just act like everything's normal.

Like I particularly remember, I think it was when I was in high school or so, there were these tampon ad units. So they probably were on TV too, but I definitely remember seeing them in the kind of teen magazines about very slender, very attractive young women who weren't feeling great, but then did whatever was being recommended. And then there they were wearing white and playing tennis and feeling awesome.

And really, that's awesome, we love solutions, right? There's no problem with that. But the messaging is, if you're struggling, if you don't feel like playing tennis in something white, then you're doing it wrong, right. Or there's something wrong with you. And so, very often we've been taught to just keep things under wraps, to not discuss things. So often when, even as adult women, if we share something relating to our female reproductive organs, it's like, sorry, this is TMI, it's too much information and if anything, what we need to be doing is sharing more about that. Being more open about it. It's not anything we need to be ashamed about, embarrassed about or feeling like we need to hide it. In fact, the more that we do that, the more we just pass on that belief system to other women and of course the girls who are growing up as well, like this is something that you should be embarrassed about.

This is something that's dirty. This is something that is unnatural when it's anything but, it's completely natural. And, your body knows exactly what to do and how to take care of itself. And really what we need to be doing is, rather than thinking about our bodies or approaching our bodies as though they're the enemy and we have to somehow overcome these problems that our bodies create that slows us down and is something that's so difficult for us to have to deal with month after month. I prefer to think about it, like how can we work with our bodies? How can we listen to the messages that they're actually sending us and work with them to get through these times that sometimes can be particularly challenging.

And you know, this isn't even just when you're in your regular reproductive years. As you go into peri menopause and into menopause, there can be a variety of different struggles and challenges that come. And just to mention too, so many women are not super consistent. Like you may find that your symptoms are very consistent and you also may find that a couple months out of the year is when you really struggle, or you'll have a streak of three months in a row where it's really tough. And then for whatever reason, things are a little better again. And so, I want to just let you know that first of all, that's normal, but also that it's okay to really meet yourself where you're at. Like, what do you need today? What does your body need with this cycle rather than like, why haven't I cracked the code and why can't I just figure out exactly what's going to work every single time?

Like that frustration is just resistance to what our bodies do and the magnificence that our bodies hold, because without all of this, we wouldn't be able to perpetuate the species. And that's the whole point of this anyway. So whether you decide to perpetuate the species with your own body or not is not necessarily something that we have to take into account, but that is the purpose of this. So, there's three main struggles that I see my clients and people that I coach dealing with. And so I want to address each of those. The first is, being extra hungry. So just noticing additional hunger leading up to the start of the period, sometimes those first couple of days the period's starting as well. The second is just physically not feeling well. And that can be any number of symptoms, pain and bloating and just discomfort and constipation and diarrhea, and so many different physical that we can experience during that time.

And then the third is emotionally not feeling well. So that is possibly your kind of more typical PMs type symptoms, or just feeling just really irritable and not knowing why, people just being on your last nerve for a day or so. So let's dig into each one of those. Let's start with being extra hungry during this time. So I have had clients who are like, listen, I could literally eat whatever, an elephant, just this insatiable hunger it sometimes feels like during this time. But I do just want to mention that if you are not already fat adapted, then that might be one of the first things you want to consider if you find you're extra hungry during this time. It may or may not make a difference, but it's not going to hurt you for sure. And it may make a difference.

So the best way to become fat adapted is to take a break from eating sugar and flour on a regular basis for arguably four to six weeks or so at least. And what that does is it allows your body to more happily access your fat stores for energy when your cells need some energy, rather than making you feel like crap so you just go ahead and eat something. When that is how your bodies functioning, we call that being a sugar burner. And when you're a sugar burner, you tend to have more hunger, more intense hunger, more out of control hunger on a regular basis anyway. So if you're already operating from that place, and then you add the hormonal changes on top of it, it can make it even more severe. So coming from that place of being fat adapted is a great first place to start.

The next thing to address is what your thoughts and beliefs are around actually experiencing hunger, like being hungry. Are you someone who is able to tolerate being hungry without making it mean something negative? You might be like, well yeah, Katrina, I'm a doctor. There's a lot of times when I'm hungry and I'm not allowed to eat, or I can't eat for whatever reason. So obviously I can be hungry at times. But what are your thoughts about that? Are you feeling totally sorry for yourself? Are you thinking this is ridiculous? Why did you become a doctor? Nobody should have to live like this. Like, are you resisting that? Or are you recognizing, you know what, my body's just asking for some food and if I don't eat it, it's okay because it knows how to take good care of itself. It knows how to access the energy that it needs to fuel my cells if I'm not able to eat.

When we have thoughts and beliefs that make the experience of physical hunger mean something negative, then that is just resisting the relative discomfort of the hunger that we're already experiencing, which makes it worse. It's like the resistance is what creates the suffering, right? There's the discomfort of being hungry or hungrier than usual, or the amount of food that you normally eat isn't quite satisfying you in the way that you would like it to. And then there's a resistance to that and that's what makes it so difficult. So when we are feeling sorry for ourselves, when we have those negative thoughts and beliefs about it, that can make it so much worse. And when we're feeling extra worse, we're feeling a lot of suffering, we're feeling really not good about that. We often will eat even more or when we do have a chance to eat, we overeat basically to compensate.

We think that's like what we deserve or it's our reward for having to experience that. So that would be something that we would want to examine, look at, become curious about and decide if there might be a different way of thinking about it. You know, so there's a couple days a month where I'm hungrier than usual and the way I work through that is I drink extra water, keep myself hydrated.

And I just remind myself that this is not a problem that necessarily has to be solved with food every time, it's not like I'm starving myself, I am feeding myself. My body is just a little confused right now and thinks it needs more, or something to that effect. Now that's one way of approaching it. Now, there are other people who are like, listen, I really do need more food.

I am fat adapted. I looked at my thoughts and it is just, I am hungrier. And if that is the case, it's completely fine. It's another completely valid option to just decide to eat more during those times. What I suggest that you do though. And what I have my clients do is to create a special plan for those days. So you have like your regular way that you're eating and then when you can anticipate your period coming, then you know, okay, there's going to be one day, two days, three days where I'm going to be extra hungry, and when I have those days, this is how I approach that. If I eat a typical amount of food and I still am not at a plus four on the hunger scale, I'm not satisfied, then these are the things that I eat to get myself there.

What I would suggest though, is that you get really clear with yourself on how you're going to tell the difference between extra physical hunger and emotional hunger, because you might be telling yourself a story of like, oh, I'm so hungry, this is the time when I need more food. And so you will experience emotional hunger, which can feel like hunger until you get really more acquainted with your experience of it and then you'll notice that it actually often is experienced in a slightly different way than physical hunger, meaning it's not necessarily located in the same place. It often comes on much more strongly and quickly than a physical hunger does and it often will go away extremely quickly as well, even if you don't do anything, which is a little bit different than physical hunger. So this is something though that you want to experience for yourself.

You want to get really curious about, and this is of course what we guide our clients through. So if it's something you're interested in getting help with, and next time we open up our program, you might want to consider coming and joining us so that you can figure out those nuances, understanding the difference. And so the thing is, if you're actually physically hungrier than normal and you need more food, then what you could plan on doing is eating like another serving of vegetables, or maybe having a little extra salad dressing that's fatty and more filling rather than, oh, I need ice cream. You know what I mean? Or like the only way I can make this hunger go away is by eating something that's off plan. And so that's not what we're doing. If you're actually physically hungry, then nutritious food solves that problem.

If you are emotionally hungry, it typically won't and it's going to want you, what's going to solve or what makes that emotional hunger dissipate, if you don't do the emotional work around it is usually something that is much more sugar based or flour based, or very salty or crunchy, like highly palatable foods, basically. So in your plan, you would not be like planning for eating Doritos, even though that might be what you like to do, you would be planning on something maybe even like an extra piece of fruit or something like that, and really being aware of your hunger scale. And what you're doing here is you're letting your body know like, Hey, if you're hungry, I will support you, but I'm going to support you with actually nutritious food that fuels my body, not something that is emotional, trying to make myself feel better with food.

Now let's talk about physically not feeling well. Again, so many symptoms that can come into play, I'm not going to list them all off, but there are just a lot of physical discomforts that we can often experience leading up to the start of the period and those first couple days of the period.

So if you notice that you struggle with that and you find yourself eating more, drinking more, I mean, literally remember it was my first year in college when somebody suggested that a good way to deal with the menstrual cramps I was experiencing was to have some alcohol. And I tried it and it worked. I have to tell you it did help. So we just have to be really aware of those patterns. I mean, I was like 19 or something and that was my education into the world of being a woman like, Ooh, you could do that.

Alcohol, luckily is not too big of a thing for me so that wasn't something that I continued on. But for a lot of people, it really is the way that they deal with things. It's really part of that solution. So what you'll want to be paying a lot of attention to is when you're overeating during that time, are you trying to feel better with food? You know, are you just trying to comfort yourself? For many of us, particularly, depending on how you were raised, that was the main way that we learned to comfort ourselves, was through food. And if you eat something and you still don't feel better, you're like, well, maybe eating something else. I mean, how often have you been told, well, if you have a headache, you probably need to eat, when it's so much more likely that you probably need to drink some water.

And so again, for not feeling well, oh, maybe you need some alcohol. So, you want to become really aware of how often you're eating, thinking that food is going to be the solution to your physical discomfort. And so once you recognize, this is a discomfort that I could deal with in lots of other ways than food or alcohol is one possible way, but then you can start building up your list of other supportive activities that you can do. So ideas for this can be just sleeping more. Sometimes we really just need to just really nurture ourselves and take good care of ourselves and sleep is what we need. Sometimes, particularly with bloating and aching and things like that, a warm bath can feel really good or a warm shower. For a lot of people, exercise can feel good and that can even just simply be walking or stretching, yoga, things like that.

It's often, what I found, not something that we really feel like doing in the moment, but once we've done it, that was exactly what we needed. So having this at the ready, it's so easy to just be like, well, I'm just going to grab this snack. But if you know, Hey, when I'm struggling this way, I have this list of things to try. Then you can remind yourself to see. And then there's also various supplements that sometimes people take, and even possibly medications, of course, that would be something that you would want to be talking to your healthcare provider about. But there are so many ways that don't involve eating and drinking that we can engage with in order to help our bodies feel better when they're physically not doing well during that time. The other thing to note is that eating more food than your body needs, doesn't actually make you physically feel better.

So if you really start paying attention, and what I mean by that is approaching this in the way that you always have been, but really being aware of what the after effects of doing that is. How do you feel physically, you were feeling uncomfortable, physically, then you ate some food to try to feel better. Does your body actually feel better? Did you overeat and now you just are experiencing different discomfort in your body? So maybe it's just like distracting yourself from one discomfort with another discomfort, because ultimately your body does not want you to eat more food than it needs. It really doesn't like that. It taxes the system, it doesn't make you sleep as well, or it impacts your ability to sleep effectively and in a way that really is rejuvenating for you. It's just not something that your body wants.

And so you may be with good intentions, inadvertently making yourself feel worse. Once you start to see that connection, it can be even easier to remind yourself in the moment, hey, you know what, I know food seems like a good idea right now, of course it's habit based, it's what I always do, but I actually will feel worse if I do this. So let me try something else that doesn't have that downside later. And then finally let's talk about emotionally not feeling well. And this is what so many women really struggle with. Whether it's regular PMS symptoms or, maybe wouldn't even call it that, but just emotionally struggling. I do just want to say that I am not really talking here about PMDD, which is premenstrual dysphoric disorder. That's something that, of course, you would want to be working with a doctor on.

There are tons and tons of symptoms of PMDD that it would be too many to list here, but just so you know, those symptoms, to qualify for the diagnosis, they're so severe that you really have trouble functioning at home, at work, in your relationships, it's really like an extreme form of PMS. I did actually find that Johns Hopkins Medicine had a nice resource that really explained a lot about it. So, if you'd like to learn more, hopkinsmedicine.org would be a great place to go to. And of course you'd want to talk to your doctor about whether medication would be the right thing for you. But even when you look at the treatment options, medications are one of them, but there are other options as well. Other things they recommend. And those are things that I already have been discussing here. And so everything I'm talking about here is still potentially going to be helpful.

But if it's really on the extreme end, you'd of course want to check in with your doctor about that. So one thing I just want to tell you, some of us maybe dabble in the things that are a little woo, woo or like maybe our little woo curious or a little woo adjacent, meaning we're not a 100% fully immersed in all the woo, woo stuff, but we're interested and we think there might be a little something to it sometimes. Just to let you know what people in that world kind of believe about this time in a woman's cycle where she is more emotionally charged, maybe feeling more intense emotions or more negative emotions than usual. They think about this as though, the term they'll often use is, the veil is thin, and what they mean by that is, you're more in touch then with what's actually emotionally true for you.

So let's just say you find yourself to be just so angry during those couple of days leading up to your period, what might really be going on for you is that you actually have a lot of anger all of the time that you're just really skillful at repressing and maybe you've been using food and alcohol to not feel that, but during that time, when the hormones are changing, it kind of bubbles to the surface and you become more aware. So what I've noticed is that often we're like, why am I so out of control? What is wrong with me? Wouldn't it be so interesting to think about it more like, oh, this is more like the authentic truth of what my emotional experience is like. I wonder if I'm feeling a lot of anger now, maybe there's other anger that I'm not even in touch with throughout the rest of the month.

It might be worth looking into that further, or maybe it's sadness or maybe it's impatience or whatever it may be. So, take it or leave it. But I think that can be an interesting way of exploring that time and also moving toward it and allowing it to have something to teach you, being open to learning something from that time and what you're emotionally experiencing, rather than just wholeheartedly, blankly rejecting it, like it's wrong and bad and you shouldn't be feeling that way. Which leads me into the first thing that I want to talk about.

So often we believe that we should be feeling differently during this time, we think something is going wrong and then we are upset about that. And what I want to offer to you is one of the best things you can do is to stop believing that you should be feeling any different than you are any day for no matter what reason, whether it's hormones that are making it maybe a little bit more intense or any other reason why you're experiencing what you're experiencing, your feelings are valid and they're important and it's worth caring about them.

And so when you think that you be feeling that way, when you think you should be feeling differently, when you reject yourself for the way that you're feeling, you're sending yourself the message, the way you are is not okay, your emotions are not important and they're not to be shared with yourself or the world. They should just be locked up and put away forever. And when we believe that, that is when we are so much more likely to be using food and possibly alcohol to get us through because we have this belief that we shouldn't feel the way we feel. And if we don't eat the food and drink the alcohol, then those emotions are there. So, that's like the sure fire way of keeping them under lock and key. And so what it takes here is a mindset shift in recognizing, actually feelings are super important.

They're like the spice of life. Emotions are what make our lives meaningful and they're what gives us a full experience of everything that is available to us. When we are thinking that things shouldn't be the way they are, we are denying ourselves that experience. So that would be something for you to explore. The next thing is asking yourself or becoming more interested in finding out what are the emotions that you're asking food and alcohol to solve for you, something's going on for you and food and alcohol or just food is the solution that you've been seeking. And so what is the actual problem? So we know what the solution has been, but what is the problem so we can find a different solution? What is it that you're feeling that you don't know how to process, that you don't know what to do with, that you're unwilling to feel?

We need to understand that so that we can then learn how to process it and move that energy through us instead of trapping it inside us with food. And finally, there is never a more important time to be cultivating love and compassion for yourself than when you are struggling hormonally. And, at 45 years old, I am firmly in perimenopause right now. And it has been a really interesting experience so far, really cultivating this, even for myself, just being willing to be with myself even on a day where I'm struggling, even on a day where I had other plans and I really wish that my body were responding differently and it's not. Just being willing to be there with myself. This is again letting my brain and body know that they're both important, that I'm with them, I won't reject them and I find that their experience is important and I care about it.

That alone, can help us to weather that time without needing food or alcohol to make us feel better. We just want to be seen and validated and understood. And when we're not rejecting ourselves, when we're instead loving ourselves and offering ourselves compassion, we're able to have that experience that we want. So those are the things to approach for yourself and just to explore, just to see, what are these things? It's probably going to take several months of just understanding, genuine curiosity. What is my deal when this is going on? What's going on for me? Trying different things to support yourself.

But knowing that if you're really struggling, there are ways to support yourself that don't involve eating a bunch, gaining back the weight that you've lost the weeks prior, or even if you're in maintenance, knowing, well, now I'm going to gain weight and then I've got to lose weight, every, I'm back to losing weight again. It's just recognizing that there can be still some emotional ups and downs and physical ups and downs, but we know how to deal with that.

And what I want to say is that when you can learn this skill, since this comes up relatively monthly, what you're then also doing is building the ability to weather other storms that come up in our lives, right? There are other times where we physically don't feel well, maybe we're going through a special treatment, or we need to have surgery. You know, if we already know how to approach ourselves when we're physically not feeling well, that's amazing. When we're emotionally not feeling well there're often times where emotionally things are very hard. If we already know how to handle those things with ourselves, like all the better. So, so good. Right?

So it just makes approaching the rest of our lives a little smoother. We just are able to move through that, I guess yeah, just more, I wanted to say effortlessly, but I don't know if it's effortless, but it's not quite such a rocky experience. So I hope that these are helpful for you. I'm sure they will be. And of course, if you'd like some additional free resources to help you get going with losing weight, head on over to katrinaubellmd.com/resources, there's some great ones there for you to choose from and we'll get you started losing some weight.

All right, happy new year once again and I'll talk to you next week.