



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hello, hello, my friend. Welcome back to the podcast. And if you're new, I'm so glad you're here. I've got a great episode for you today. This is a really good one. I don't care where you are in your weight loss process. I don't care whether you are considering the idea that maybe you should start trying to lose weight, if you're actively losing weight, if you're maintaining the weight that you've lost, this is going to be very important for you. So everybody, including active clients of mine, make sure you listen to this one. Sometimes when we see back to basics, we're like, "I don't need basics. I'm much further past basics." No, everybody can always review the basics. Those fundamentals are so, so, so, so important.

Okay, well, we are going to see what's going to happen. I brought my little doggy up here. My Oggie doggy—my dog's name is Oggie. I thought he was settled. And now I hear him moving around. If for the people, the old timers, those who are seasoned, who've been around with me for a while. Before I had my attic office, I had a tiny little closet office and I could just easily open the door and let my dog in or out whenever he wanted.

And now where I'm up in my attic in order for me to let him in or out, I have to cross the whole room and go all the way down the stairs, which is not that big of a deal. It's just not as convenient. So I just heard him go down. I think he's waiting at the door and he's just going to have to wait because I'm talking to you. We're recording a podcast, so I'm not going to get to him right now. He's going to have to wait. And that is fine.

Let's talk about making decisions ahead of time. This is an incredibly important tool, which is why it is included in the back to basics series. This is something that is incredibly important for you to understand, and for you to practice. Not even so much because of the food that you will then eat, although that will also result in the weight loss that you want, but because of what it does in terms of your relationship with your mind and understanding how to help your mind to help you, how to utilize your brain, to get the results that you want. Rather than letting it just kind of run wild, which is what most of us are doing most of the time.

So really the issue that so many of us struggle with when we're trying to lose weight. And I know I for sure did all of the time, is what to do about the impulse choices that we make. The decisions in the moment and just having the best of intentions. And then all of a sudden before we know it, the food's just in our mouths. And then we're making excuses about why that was worth it, or beating ourselves up about why we're so weak and undisciplined and something clearly must be wrong with us because why can we not just stop doing this?

This came up for me I could tell you a million stories, but the one that mostly comes up for me when I think about this is when I was in practice as a pediatrician. And we would have pharmaceutical reps come visit us from time to time. And I think it was actually on a schedule somewhere. So theoretically, you could check to see when somebody was planning to come or not, but I never looked at that. And I think sometimes they would plan to come, then they wouldn't come. And I just was like... I always thought, "Well, I should just bring my lunch every day because you never know what they're going to bring, or they might not show up." And this way I just didn't have to worry about it. So I would plan and create and bring with me something that I felt like was healthy and on plan at the time. And then I would find out, oh, we have lunch today. Somebody is bringing lunch. And there are many times where it was just kind of like regular old catering nothing special, didn't really want it.

There were other times when it was food that I really liked. And so if you've listened to this podcast at all early on, I actually... It's a very long story about why I was vegan for five years, but I was vegan for five years. And really part of the reason why I did it was this idea that a lot of the vegan people kind of tout, which is like, if you eat vegan, you won't struggle with your weight anymore. So that was part of the reason, probably a big reason why I did it. And so food from Qdoba, if you know Qdoba, it's kind of like a fast casual restaurant where they will... It's similar to Chipotle. It's like you can get like a custom made burrito or tacos or taco salad, or like things like that.

It's like an easy thing to cater with this food. So oftentimes drug reps would bring this and that food was vegan. I mean, if I didn't eat the meat or the cheese or the sour cream. But guess what was vegan? Their tortilla chips and their tortilla chips are made every day by them. And they have this special kind of like lime salt that is really good. And I mean, trust me, I've definitely had plenty of sweets in my life. But there's certain salty foods that I just really, really enjoy. And these chips are amazing. Especially sometimes like a big chunk of salt would like land on one of the chips and it would be like extra salty. Those are my absolute favorite. My mouth is literally watering as I'm telling you about this right now.

I haven't had these chips... I can't even remember last time. It's been years. Literally here I am. Pavlov's dog, apparently. Just remembering these chips. And so the drug reps would bring these massive bags of these chips. I mean, just if you think about a normal bag of chips from the grocery store, I mean, it probably held maybe two, three times that many. Just tons and tons and tons, huge big bag of them. And so I would walk in and I wasn't necessarily so interested in the beans and the rice, but I saw those chips. And even if I was planning on eating whatever I had planned and brought for lunch, I knew always right in the moment of course I was going to have some of those chips. So such an impulse choice. Were those chips anything I had planned for? Were they going to support me in my efforts, either lose weight or stop gaining so much or whatever?

No, of course they weren't, but it was just habit. If there were Qdoba chips, I was eating them. And then what also happened was there was no way everyone in the office was going to eat all of these chips in one day. And so for several days after, until the chips were gone, we would eat those chips. So I'd plan my meal. And it was almost like my dessert was having these chips. I literally have to swallow because I have so much saliva in my mouth because of this.

So that's just an example of that impulse choice. The decision made before, was I going to eat whatever this healthy food is that I brought or supportive food and I'm have anything else. But as soon as that food's in front of me, the impulse just hits and I'm like, "Oh, of course I'm eating that."

Like, there wasn't even a consideration not to. So this comes up for people in so many different scenarios, parties are one or different events. You show up thinking like, "Oh, this won't be a big deal." Or maybe you don't have a plan or maybe you do have a bit of a plan, but then you see, "Oh, but they're serving this." Or, "I didn't know they were going to have that." Or, "That's my favorite." And then we just throw the whole plan away and we're totally doing those things that don't support us. Travel is a big one as well. Often we really tell ourselves we don't have any other possibilities. This is all we can have. And that may be the case, but we don't have to overeat things even when we're traveling. So a lot of impulse decisions can be made there, vacation as well.

Lunch at work like I was saying, or really like, anytime at work. There is one family. I won't mention her name, although I probably should shout her out because she's just incredibly talented as a baker. But there was somebody who brought her family to us as pediatricians, we saw all of her kids. She's literally a neighbor of mine. She is just down the street and she makes the most incredible chocolate chip cookies. And she would, for a long time actually bake them and bring them to us straight out of the oven, warm still. So you could tell that this family was in the office because you could smell the cookies. You'd be like, is, "Mrs. ... Here? Mrs. So-and-so here?" There are all those cookies and I'm telling you some of the best cookies ever. So it did not matter to me whatsoever what my plans were, because if she showed up and there were those cookies I was going to... And you know I didn't just eat one. So there you go.

So there's so many scenarios in our lives where this just shows up and sometimes it can even just be you get home and your partner is like, "Hey, do you want to open a bottle of wine?" And you totally hadn't planned that. But you're like, "Okay, sure. That sounds good." And then before it you're like, "Wait, how, how did I end up over drinking tonight? That wasn't the plan." So when we don't have supportive tools at our disposal and we don't really know how to handle situations like this, we can either feel really like restricted or deprived if we are not engaging. Let's say there's lunch, the bag of keto tortilla chips. And I'm like, no, I'm not allowed to have them. Then I feel so sorry for myself. I feel like I don't get my needs met.

I don't get to have what I want. I might feel a lot of self pity for myself, sorry for myself, white knuckling through the whole thing. Or we end up just eating it and then regretting it later. And that can look like a lot of self flagellation, berating yourself, saying very nasty things to yourself, thinking very nasty thoughts about your body and what you look like. Thinking like if you just beat yourself up, then maybe it'll do better next time. Saying really mean things is going to help you to do better. Never helped me to do better. That's for sure.

So what do we actually need? Because these scenarios cannot be avoided, this just happens in life for everybody, no matter who you are or... I mean, unless you are like a hermit and you never interact with any other humans these things are going to come up. So what do we do?

What we need to do is we need to take out the drama that our brains create and what I mean by that is the over desire. We see the thing, whatever it is. And it becomes so important that we're willing to just throw away everything that we had planned, everything that we know is good for us and just go with it.

We literally are allowing the decision making... The part of our brain that allows us to make good, positive, helpful decisions to just go offline. We're like, it doesn't matter what you think. This is what I'm doing in the moment. So the part of your brain that is driving you to do that in the moment is what I call the primitive brain. It's the limbic part of your brain, limbic system. It's just more primitive, it's less developed.

And really its job is just to keep you alive. And it does a really good job of that. So it wants to keep you safe. And part of keeping you safe is making sure that you eat enough food, because if you don't eat enough food as a human, you could get sick and die or you could become really weak and a predator could get you. And so we need you to live long enough to perpetuate the species. I mean, that's what we're going back to like really the very, very beginning. This brain doing its job was really, really useful, but it's still doing that job regardless. Meaning it's like, "There's tortilla chips. Those are the best ones, you need to eat those, they're incredibly important. You need to eat them right now." That is the message. Sometimes the message comes across in the form of like a toddler tantrum.

"Like it's just not fair that I don't get to have those. And, but I just want them, and I'm going to have them. And you know what? I work really hard and I deserve this. And so I'm just going to have it." That kind of thing. Sometimes I think it's like a little two or three year old, but then also I'm like, that's also kind of how we are as teenagers as well. In any case it's not particularly the mature the way that we approach that. The other part of your brain is the prefrontal cortex, which is what I consider like to be the supervising mother. The part that really does have your best interest at heart, it can really think about the future. It can plan. It understands like if you have that, this will be the outcome in the future.

Whereas the primitive brain doesn't care about anything, except right now. It's like totally living in the moment, doesn't care about the future. It doesn't care about the past. It's just all about the moment. So what we want to do is utilize the prefrontal cortex, which tends to be a little bit of a quieter voice. And it's advice sounds much more rational. Where the primitive brain's voice is much more dramatic and emphatic and its urges and cravings. And just over desire, just wanting food more than is appropriate for what your body needs.

Obviously, my body never needs tortilla chips for me to live and be very healthy and to thrive. But my primitive brain didn't know that. It was like, "You need to have these right now. They're very, very important." So we want to take that drama out. We don't want to hear the suggestions of our primitive brain and think that we just have to follow whatever our brain says in the moment.

So we kind of want to push it offline. We're not going to be able to get it to stop making suggestions, but we can do things that will allow it to become much quieter. So that it doesn't feel like it's like collaborating you over the head with requests and demands. Really, they're not requests or demands. And where it's more like, "Ooh, that would be good." And you're like, "You can be quiet over there." Not in a mean way, but just recognizing it's just a suggestion.

It doesn't need to be acted upon. So we don't need to seriously consider what it's suggesting. And that's what we want to get to. Where it goes, "Hey, those tortilla chips. I mean, those are the best ones you should eat. Those." And it's not dramatic in your brain.

You're not immediately going, "Yeah, I'm going to throw out the plan that I had. I'm going to go ahead and eat whatever comes up." So what we want to utilize when we're using this tool, making decisions ahead of time is our prefrontal cortex, because it can think about the future. It is good in terms of making decisions that will help you in the future, that will give you that result that you want. So what this looks like, what this tool looks like is deciding at least the day before what you're going to eat. Now, before I really get into this, you might be thinking like literally for the rest of my life. And we'll get to that. Maybe, maybe not. But if you are struggling with impulse choices in the moment, then yes, for now, you're going to be doing this until we get to a point where you don't need it anymore.

So I don't know how long that's going to take, but it's not going to be like three days and then you're over it. Most likely it's going to be a little while. What you'll find though, over the course of time is that this tool creates so much peace for you. You actually fall in love with it, and it doesn't feel like super rule based or oppressive in any way. It's something that actually really helps and supports you.

So what this means is the day before you decide what you're going to eat. Now, when you do this, and this may take a little trial and error, when you do this, don't think about it, "This is me if I just never was a hungry person and never experienced hunger and didn't care if my meals weren't satisfying." Sometimes we create these plans that it's not enough food, or it's not really going to satisfy us in the way we want to be satisfied.

So it's very important that the plan you create is realistic. And one of the best ways that you can determine whether it's realistic or not is to ask yourself on a scale of one to 10, how confident am I that I'm going to follow this plan the next day? You should be in eight, nine or 10. So if you're like, "I'm a five." That probably means you're like, "Nah, I might follow it, I might not." If that's the case, just being totally honest and upfront, then we need to change the plan. So we can get you to an eight, nine or 10. Seen this with many clients where they're like "I made this plan and then I threw it all out the window that weekend or whatever." And I say, "When you made the plan, how confident were you that you were going to actually follow the plan?"

And it's never an eight, nine or 10. Sometimes it's like a two. Sometimes it's like, we're just going through the motions. Well, I made the plan, even though I basically knew there was not a chance that I was going to follow it. That's fine. It's just good to know. We need to make sure the plan is something that we think we're going to follow that we're willing to commit to in that way. So create a plan the day before and make sure you're an eight, nine or 10 on the scale of likelihood. Are you going to follow it or not? Then here comes the magic. Ready? The next day, all you have to do is follow your plan. There are no decisions needed. All you have to do is just eat what you said you're going to eat. So new things will pop up. The Qdoba chips are going to show up.

They're going to be sitting right there on the table. And all you have to do is ask yourself, "Did I plan to eat that?" If the answer is no, then there's nothing to contemplate, there's no decision to make. There's just nothing to consider.

You're just going to eat what you said you were going to eat. And so, especially in the beginning, your brain might be like, "Oh, but, but, but, but, but, but." And you just notice that that's there and you just remind yourself, "All I have to do is follow my plan." Now, when things come up. If it really is strong "Oh my gosh, it's the chips. And they're extra salty today or whatever." Super important. You're not going to eat them that day. But telling yourself I can't have that is not true because you're an adult and you get to eat whatever you want whenever you want.

So be sure to not add to scarcity and over desire by telling yourself that you can't have it. That just creates more of that feeling of deprivation. It's a thought that creates deprivation, the feeling and restriction. It's just not true. So you can have them, but you need a plan for them in advance. So, I mean, here's what's funny. I can go to Qdoba store, restaurant, anytime I want to, I could even order a huge bag of chips like that if I wanted to. But I didn't, which is very interesting. So we have to get just real clear with ourselves. You know what if I really want those tips, if they are that amazing and that whatever over the top, so good. Then one day coming up, I'm going to plan for them the night before, the day before. And then the next day I can have them and I won't overeat them. I'll stop when I get to four.

So you're not telling yourself you can't have it. You can have it. You just need to plan for it. Let's say it's the mom who brought in those cookies that were so good. Well, I wouldn't eat them that day, but I can package a couple up, bring them home and plan for them for the next day. That is how you handle this. If it's something very special. You're never going to be able to have this again. And it still feels very important that you have it. Then what you do is you wrap it up, bring it home, plan for it for the next day. So you're not telling yourself you can't have it very, very important. So what we have to do here is just create this scenario where you know that you are in control, where you build up evidence for yourself that you can plan your food and follow that plan.

I've talked before about your relationship with yourself. This is very important. Your relationship with yourself is how you treat yourself. Do you do what you say you're going to do? Every time you make a plan and you don't follow it, you are eroding that relationship. You told yourself you would do something. And then in the end you didn't actually do it. And to your own detriment. So what we want to do is build that relationship by doing what we say we're going to do, and then managing the thoughts that come up.

If your brain's really having a hissy fit, it's losing its mind. You're just like, "This is the worst." See if you can become the observer or watcher of your thoughts and notice, "Wow, there's a tantrum going on in there right now. And I wonder why that is? What is it about this food that makes my brain think it's so important and that I must eat it? What are my thoughts that create so much over desire for this food? What are my thoughts about wanting to eat something and not eating it in the moment?"

Sometimes we just rebel, because we're like, "Don't tell me what to do." What is that? Is it like anytime we feel like there's some sort of limit placed that we have to push back on it immediately. This is such a great opportunity for you to understand why you struggle with food more deeply. And you need to understand that so that you can work through it and get to that place where you truly experience peace and freedom around food. And I'm telling you, it is the most worth it exercise to do.

Now, when we talk about, do I have to do this for the rest of my life? What I will tell you is do I plan my food, five years in laying it all out every night? I don't, but it's because I know I don't need to anymore. Because I did for a long time and now I don't need to. And it was a gradual process to undo it. And I will also say that if I ever felt like my eating was out of control or something was off for me, planning my food the night before, making decisions ahead of time would absolutely be what I would do. That would be one of the first things.

Whenever we feel like we're out of control, we've fallen off the wagon. Even there isn't though there is no wagon. That's not actually a thing. But when we start feeling like we've derailed and we just are out of control. What we want is to actually create some stability and control for ourselves, our brains are out of control, but we can create some control around our food.

These are the things I'm going to eat. When I eat them, they make my body feel good. They support me and my body is satisfied. I get what I need. Then I'm going to work through all the objections that my brain comes up with. Figuring out what's going on in my brain, because it's not the food that's the problem. It's what we're thinking and our reluctance, our unwillingness to feel what we're feeling. So can you decide to back away from this, you totally can. Over the course of time, as you've built up that relationship and you have lots and lots of evidence that you in the moment will make decisions that are in your best interest and create a long term result that you want. Now I've had clients who have been totally successful in being able to do this. I've had others who have tried it and they've realized you know what, I'm not ready.

And some of them also find that what? I think life is just better when I do it like this. It's just the way I have you plan food is so simple and easy. It takes so little time that it's really not a hardship to do it. So you can also just continue to do it moving forward. And if you don't know what they're going to have at some party or whatever, you can choose larger food groups or decide I'm not going to eat, or whatever they serve I won't overeat it. That's another thing you can just be like, this is just a hunger scale meal where I'm only going to eat when I'm hungry and I'm going to stop when I've had enough. When my body is satisfied. There's so many different ways to move through this.

And the reason why it's so important to recognize that there's lots of options is because when someone just tells you, there's just this one way and you have to do it this way and as though that works for everybody, it's unlike to always work for you. We have to have options. There needs to be an individual approach where we have to look at ourselves as people, how do we thrive? Then we create our own individual plan, taking that information into consideration.

Because the plan that helps you to thrive may not be the same plan that helps me thrive and vice versa. So me telling you exactly what I do and how I eat, it's irrelevant. It doesn't really matter for you. What we need to figure out is what works for you. I will tell you though, that all of us have a primitive brain and all those primitive brains just want us to stay safe and our brains have gotten confused and think that food is excessively important. And so this can really dial it back. When you have those urges to eat and you just follow your plan and you do this consistently, the brain starts to actually quiet down.

You start having messages of like, "Oh, you should eat that. Or that looks good." And they're quiet. And they're just little nudges and suggestions, very easy to just skip over or ignore rather than the total, full bore toddler, tantrum, face down, kicking the feet, slamming the fist against the ground. You know what I'm talking about. The full blown, "But I want to eat it right now." That gets better the more that you practice this.

So I want to suggest and encourage you... Suggest that you go ahead and give this tool a try. It really makes a big difference. It's one of the very first things that I have all of my clients do. And it really starts to help you to see what is the real issue underlying you're overeating. So it gets your eating under control and then you see what's really going on for you.

And we need to see that so that we can work through that and actually solve the problem for good. Rather than just like, but should I be eating more of this macronutrient or should I be calculating that, or keto is the thing like that. None of that really matters when it comes down to it. All right. I can't wait for you to try decisions ahead of time, such a great tool. I hope that this makes a huge difference for you. I really think it will, as you go ahead and implement this. And I hope you have a great rest of your week and I'll catch you next time.

Have a great one, take care, bye-bye.