



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Oh, hello there my friend, how are you today? I'm so glad that you're here joining me. I have a really fun and interesting success story for you today that I can't wait to share with you. I think this one is going to be really, really impactful and it addresses a certain angle that we haven't really touched on in previous success stories. So I'm really excited to bring you Emmie Strassberg today.

She is a maternal and fetal medicine specialist. What she's going to be talking about is what it's like to take a break from weight loss, to lose weight, gain it back and realize you know what? I got a lot of work to do before I'm really ready to lose weight and what that all involves. So she's going to talk today about that. And then we also talk a lot about time scarcity that she had at work and how she was able to really improve her experience of her job so much. So I know that you're going to get a ton out of this, especially if you feel like you've had a lot of weight loss in fits and spurts, you lose some, you gain some, you're just back and forth. You're not able to really dig in. Or if you've ever wondered when I talk about saying some people need to do some work on themselves first before they can really lose weight permanently, that's what we're talking about today. So please enjoy my guest, Emmie Strassberg.

Katrina Ubell: Emmy, thank you so much for coming onto the podcast.

Emmie Strassberg: You're welcome. I'm really excited to be here.

Katrina Ubell: Yay. Okay. So I always love to have everybody start with telling us a little bit about themselves. So tell us a little bit about you, what you do and where you live and that kind of thing.

Emmie Strassberg: Well, my name's Emmie Strassberg and I live in Northern Virginia right now, west of DC over in the horse and wine country area. And I'm a maternal fetal medicine physician. I've practiced and lived here for now about four years. We have office in Winchester, Virginia and then also in West Virginia.

Katrina Ubell: West Virginia, the state or West Virginia. Does that get confusing when you live in Virginia?

Emmie Strassberg: It does. Yes. Because I live in the Western part of Virginia.

Katrina Ubell: Okay. I always wondering about that. Awesome. So I would love it if you would tell us a little bit more about your experience with food and weight loss through the years. When did you start struggling with all that and how did that lead you to joining Weight Loss For Doctors Only?

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. Since I was a kid, I probably can remember back to when I was eight years old, noticing that I was bigger than my friend. Now, my best friend was always a very petite, small framed person and I don't think you could probably ever describe me that way. I don't know. Maybe that's just my thought, but I didn't really start any diet or exercise or anything like that until I was in high school. And then the high school I thought, well, maybe there's something to fix here. I should work on this. My mother also struggled with her weight and my grandmother, and so they were always doing something with that as well. It seemed like—

Katrina Ubell: In hindsight, how much weight are we talking here? A little five to seven pounds, more than that when you're turning lose weight?

Emmie Strassberg: I weighed anything from 130 to 170 at different times of my adolescent to adult years.

Katrina Ubell: Okay. Got it. So there's a lot of fluctuations and that kind of thing.

Emmie Strassberg: Yes, a lot. And what the WLDO program helped me realize is that just a lot of it was how much food was in my family like a celebration, definitely huge comfort. I don't know if this is just a Midwest thing, but I don't think so, I think it's... I don't know. But you were expected to eat at meals. And if you weren't hungry, you were expected to eat anyway. And my parents didn't always make me eat everything, but it was definitely expected that you would try some of everything and not waste a lot of food.

Katrina Ubell: And what's interesting about what you're saying, your mom struggle with her weight and your grandmother struggle with her weight, unintentionally of course, when you grow up around other people who struggle with their weight you see that they struggle with it, but also any habits that aren't serving them are then passed down to you as this is just what we do like finding comfort in food and entertainment in food and you should eat all the food and don't waste it and things like that.

And again, they of course have the best intentions, but it's, I think then even easier because as a kid you're just like, "I don't know, what do we do with food? How do we use food besides to fill our belly so we're not hungry anymore," and easy to pick up on some of that.

Emmie Strassberg: For a lot of years actually, we had a wonderful Ecuadorian babysitter that would pick us up at school and take us to her house because my parents worked till late, couldn't come pick us up from school and she would feed us this amazing Ecuadorian food. And then we'd go home and eat dinner with my parents too.

Katrina Ubell: You were still going in too.

Emmie Strassberg: Eating a lot of dinner.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. So when you tried to lose weight in high school, what did you try?

Emmie Strassberg: Oh gosh. I don't remember trying anything specific, but trying to eat things that were healthier. And I remember I would wake up early and workout. I would do aerobics or yoga or whatever. I found all my mom's old books from the eighties and was working on that sort of thing. I ended up losing weight. I went on exchange to Germany and when I was there, it was interesting because my exchange student had come to me first and she had gained 20 pounds when she was in the US. It was a really rough experience for her. She went home and shut herself out from the world, lost the weight and then reemerged into... or whatever she was doing.

I don't know, it was weird. The German girls in high school, they did not eat in front of each other. They are always talking about other people's eating and so I just never ate in front of anybody and I ended up losing 20 pounds while I was in Germany.

Katrina Ubell: Oh interesting.

Emmie Strassberg: Which was effective for a short period of time until I came home. I mean, it was such a good experience in so many ways, but I thought that was interesting too?

Katrina Ubell: And then what happened after or that?

Emmie Strassberg: So then in college I would go to the gym, but I never really worked on diet very much. Actually my doctor put me on a diet at one point when I was in college, which was... I think it was metagenics or something like that. Involved a protein shake and eating vegetable. It was horrible. And I love my doctor very much and I still am in contact with her, but that was not my favorite. It worked for a couple months and nobody can eat this way forever.

Katrina Ubell: Right.

Emmie Strassberg: And then what else did I do? I think the next time it became a really big deal for me was when I was in med school. And I was actually at the highest I'd been in a long time. And I had to have a echocardiogram done for heart murmur, which of course on my medical school physical they're like, oh, you have a heart murmur. So I had to get those echos done and it was nothing exciting. But for a while they thought it was my bicuspid aortic valve, so I was like, "Oh, not to freak you out or anything but..." So I was getting this echo in med school to try to follow up on that. And I was like, "Gosh, I really don't want to have any medical problems."

My husband who I had just started dating at the time, he was actually much heavier then too. And we just together... I just decided I was going to try to work on it seriously and he saw my progress and like, I'm going to do it too. And of course he ended up losing more weight than me. But we ended up just using MyFitnessPal and working out and just calories and calories out. And it worked pretty well, especially when I was a fourth med student, I could spend half the day at the gym. Suddenly when you're not doing that anymore—

Katrina Ubell: Right. And then you got into residency.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. Then you're an intern and you're like, "I don't know how I'm going to find myself healthy food."

Katrina Ubell: Right. And if you're relying on a lot of exercise, which for a lot of people does work when they're younger, you just have to find that time and if you don't or you're just too exhausted or whatever, it becomes a self limited type of thing.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. I've always felt that exercise was really important because I found out pretty early, I think back in high school when I started exercising how much it helped my mental health.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Talk a little bit more about that because that's something that I personally have also discovered for myself more recently. People were like, "If I don't exercise, I'm just a grouch or mean." I always think, "Oh, I wish I were like that." And now I'm like, "I think I might have become that person." So what do you notice when you exercise or what did you notice back then in terms of mental health?

Emmie Strassberg: It's like a way that I allow myself to feel my feelings. It's like a permissible area.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. I think so too. Just any negative emotion, anger, whatever, it's just like, channel it, right?

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. It just works really well and it just lifts my mood too. So I especially working out to good music.

Katrina Ubell: So you're in internship and...

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And then I gain weight back. Oh my gosh. And then I did this... have you heard of the Dukan Diet.

Katrina Ubell: I have. I remember I took care of a family and the mom did it. She lost so much weight. And I remember looking into it and just being like, "This is not something I want to do my whole life."

Emmie Strassberg: Nobody should live like that.

Katrina Ubell: I know.

Emmie Strassberg: And it's also not based in any scientific fact. It's just some random guy's opinion about what might work. I'm not sure how really healthy it is. It involves eating a whole lot of protein and then occasionally vegetables and almost never anything else.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah.

Emmie Strassberg: Again, not sustainable. And then when I was in fellowship, I did a lot CrossFit. I lived away from Gordon, so he stayed in New York and I moved to Pennsylvania by myself for three years. I had a lot of time for working out again, so I did CrossFit and I started running, which I never thought I would be a runner. But I started running and I really loved it.

And then one of my friends from college got me into Beachbody so I did that. So all the container counting and all of that. Again, doable for a short time period. The Beachbody thing is not a bad thing when it comes to workouts. I think they actually coordinate quite well.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. I know a lot of people do workouts a lot.

Emmie Strassberg: But I actually only just stopped my subscription because I started being completely addicted to the Peloton.

Katrina Ubell: I know. I don't know what crack they've got going on with the Peloton, but I'm on it too. I'm addicted too.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. So anyway, I did that for a while and then wasn't sure what to do once I got here and became an attending and then I got pregnant and I started listening to you actually when I was pregnant. Because one of my co fellows actually recommended the podcast to me and I don't think she's ever been a member. She just like the podcast. And I listened to it all of the.... while I was pregnant. And then I looked at joining the program and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I can't do that. That's a lot of money." And it's so funny now because I think about it and, no, it's not.

Katrina Ubell: Like pennies for what you get, right?

Emmie Strassberg: But I think it was when I was recently postpartum that I was like, "I need something," because being a new mom is hard. It's funny because for me it almost felt like I went through something really hard and then almost lost myself in a way. I wasn't really sure how to be this new person in this new role. I don't think I had clinical postpartum depression, but it was not easy. And I had some breastfeeding struggles that in retrospect I would just let it go. I joined in March of 2019, which is gosh, two and a half years ago now, almost three years ago.

Katrina Ubell: Feels like a million ago and it's like, wow.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. My kid's three.

Katrina Ubell: So what made you know though? You tried all these other things, what was it that you heard in the podcast? I'm just curious, what was it where you were like, "Yeah, this is the thing that I need"?

Emmie Strassberg: I knew it was my brain that had to change.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. And that's what hooked me too in learning this. I'm like, "I've tried all this other stuff. I can white knuckle my way through lots of things for a certain period of time, but it's like I keep winding up back in the same place. There's got to be something else, something different."

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And it made a lot of sense in a lot of ways. Giving up flour and sugar, whatever, just seemed so hard and impossible, but it's really not.

Katrina Ubell: It's not as bad as you think it's going to be. I know.

Emmie Strassberg: But the thing is when I started, I have a lot of time to think about this, I was such a rule follower.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. That's so common though, because it's like with every other diet it's like with Beachbody, fill the boxes and just eat what's in that and these are the rules. So we're like, "Great, what are the rules? Let me get onto the rules." And just like with anything else, at a certain point we're like, "Screw the rules. I hate the rules." And then the work really starts, right?

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And then COVID came around, and I think my weight regain happened even before, then I went home. Well, I took my boards in the fall, my MFM boards and I passed but I think I felt that I would get a higher score than I did. And I don't know why that bothered me so much. I mean, retrospect, I passed. That's what needed to happen, and it's one stupid test. And then I went home around Christmas and I hadn't really been home with my parents for an extended period of time. And I was home at my parents' house with my 14 month old who just started to walk. It was a lot. I had that feeling of, I don't know who I am a little bit. I lost my identity. I don't know how to be this person. And then COVID happened after that. And I think at that point I was like, well...

Katrina Ubell: Screw it all. I think a lot of people were in that mode.

Emmie Strassberg: I mean, I know how to eat to feel better so at least I can do that.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah.

Emmie Strassberg: And then I just got progressively more angry at myself for gaining the weight back, and somehow being angry at myself wasn't making it any better. And I think I got to a point in, I don't know it was July or August where I was just like, I need to just stop. I need to stop. I need to just work on my relationship with myself, because I never really thought of myself as somebody that doesn't have high self-esteem, but I get a lot done... not anymore, but I got a lot done in my life by really talking to myself negatively.

Katrina Ubell: Totally. And I think that that's so important to understand how you did and I did and so many people listening did. And that is a habit. We think we cannot motivate ourselves any other way, especially when we have evidence like in the past I did this or I talked to myself in this habitual way and then I accomplished X, Y, Z. We're just afraid to speak nicely to ourselves because we're afraid that we'll just become average or mediocre or never accomplished anything ever again. Even though I think rationally we understand that that's not true, I think deep down it's a legitimate fear that I think is important to acknowledge and work through.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And you know what I realized, and I loved that internal family systems book that you recommended. I had that mean girl voice and then also the rebellious voice. So one would be like, "No, you're going to do this." And then, "You can't tell me what to do. I don't want to do this anymore."

Katrina Ubell: It's a lot of conflict going on inside.

Emmie Strassberg: I think just realizing that neither of those voices are actually me. Neither of those personas are really who I am, and so just really spending some time finding out really who I am.

Katrina Ubell: And I think that that's so important. When I've talked about before and I've mentioned this on the podcast many times, some people really do need to take a break from trying to lose weight to do some work on themselves first so that they can get the results they want. Because you could white knuckle it again and you could lose a bunch of weight again, but if the same patterns, the same ways of approaching yourself are still present, we know how that story's going to end. So we could also just decide let's hit the pause on actively trying to lose weight. Doesn't mean it's free for all, eat everything, gain 50 pounds. But just taking a moment, however long it needs to be to actively work through improving just your opinion of yourself, your overall self worth and how you work with yourself to accomplish what you want to accomplish. And that's exactly what you're doing. So I would love it if you'd share a little bit more about what that process looks like for you.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. Well, it's funny that you said... because I heard you say that so many times and I was always like, "Yeah. But I don't need to do that."

Katrina Ubell: She's not talking about me.

Emmie Strassberg: I mean, that sounds nice and all, but let's get to work here. We don't have time for that. We have goals to achieve. I just spent lot of time... I guess it was more of just time being in my body and feeling my feelings and just not judging myself for anything really.

Katrina Ubell: Let's just get into the details of that though, because people are always like, "Well, how do you do that, not judge yourself?" Can you give an example of what that process actually... if we really go into the actual what are you doing kind of thing. I know everyone would love to hear what does that mean? What do you actually do?

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. So if I ate something that technically wasn't something I would've eaten when I was doing weight loss work, instead of just being like, "Oh, I can't believe you still are eating that crap." Or if I overate something, why would you do that to yourself? And it's so subtle.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Little digs. Just letting you know how to satisfied you are with yourself.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. You should be better than that. The first thing you have to do is recognize it, because you can't just go from unconsciously doing that to then stopping. So recognizing it. And then I really focused a lot on cultivating the feelings of curiosity and compassion and love. And a lot of that just was spending time in my body trying to generate what that felt like.

Katrina Ubell: Which of course it's your thoughts that create that. So what you're doing then is you're figuring out what thoughts actually create that feeling where I know that I'm feeling it in my body is what you're-

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah, exactly. And the more I could be curious, the less judgemental I would be. It's like, oh, that's so interesting that I think it's so important to be upset about this.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Gives you a little perspective. And I think what it does too is, with anything, even if it's a habit like biting your nails, you just have to develop awareness. So many people who struggle with chewing their nails will say everything was going fine and then this thing happened at work and all of a sudden I looked down and everything was chewed off again. There's that lack of awareness, it's like a checkout. You know what I mean? I'm just going to go into this fog for a little while and then come out.

And so the same thing is, what you have to do is you have to become aware of I actually have my fingers in my mouth. Oh, interesting. And now I have the urge to put my fingers in my mouth before I've actually even done it. Getting into the nitty gritty of it so that you can create some space in there and consciously make a different decision. And that's essentially what you're doing here because it's the habit way of thinking is some something negative like, certainly something's wrong with you. We just have to figure out what it is so I can let you know. That's basically

Emmie Strassberg: Exactly. Because when I was taking this break, my husband and I often liked to watch Netflix and eat chocolate chips from a bag. And I would think to myself, okay, you can do that. I mean, you're checking out. Why are we checking out? Let's think about that for a second. Okay. Because I'm tired and I just want to be entertained when probably I can just go to bed.

Katrina Ubell: The fact that you're even aware of it is so important. Versus just like, take the chocolate chips from my cold dead hands. You know what I mean? I need to have them. This has to be the way that it is. Or poor me, I can't eat the chocolate chips. And you're just like, oh, interesting. This is what's going on for me. I like to think of it as like, okay, now I know what's going on, so it's not a mystery anymore. And at any point when I'm ready to address this, I will. I think what's good to think about is what's the difference between being gentle with yourself and being permissive. Because we don't want to be permissive.

I think of it as humans like rules and boundaries. We thrive in them. Think about small children. And even employees and everybody, we just want to know what are the rules so that we can play by the rules. We know what the boundaries are. When you're being gentle with yourself, you're creating some boundaries and you're treating yourself kindly within them. Being permissive is there being no boundaries. It's like, do whatever.

And the if you think about it from a toddler or a young child standpoint, a permissive parent is usually the one who's like, "I don't know. This child runs the household. It's like crazy town in here. They won't listen to anything we say." But you can still be a gentle parent and have boundaries and guidelines that keeps the child safe and helps them to thrive. And so that's the way I like to think about the difference. You can be gentle with yourself, but understand that, well I'm eating chocolate chip now, but I'm going to draw the line there. I'm not going to go and grab the box of Oreos too. Or I have this much and then that's enough. And at some point I might be ready to maybe work on having that. But for today, that's what we are going to do versus it's a free for all and just eat until you're ill.

Emmie Strassberg: Well, yeah. I mean, part of it is just bringing the consciousness into it because I would be sitting there like, "Do I really even like this? Am I even tasting it? What exactly about this is appealing to me?" And a lot of it I noticed was just the checking out. I'm like, "Or I could just go to bed."

Katrina Ubell: Right. Exactly. You're like, read a novel or something or some other kind of

Emmie Strassberg: Or doing some tea. I mean, it doesn't have...

Katrina Ubell: Absolutely. Yes.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And I think now when I... and because I did the work, I'm like, "Okay, why am I eating this?" I just ask myself the question. That's it. And I've actually just recently gone back to making a plan and protocol, stopping flour and sugar just because I feel like I'm ready to do that. But my ground rules are, if there's any sort of deviance from the plan that I will not beat myself up. That voice is not going to be the one in charge of my head, and nothing is off limits. That's the other thing as far as the... If I tell myself like, no, you can't eat that, then that just is not going to work.

Katrina Ubell: Right. And you want it so bad. I know.

Emmie Strassberg: Right. But the answer is, you can always eat if you're hungry and if you really want eat, you can just eat it. It's really not a big deal.

Katrina Ubell: Right. What that is though is taking away the emphasis on how important food is. Because I approach it similarly. I'm like, "I can eat that if I want to, but do I really want to?" And when there's not so much emphasis on it, I'm like, "I could or I couldn't." Well, then maybe we'll just let this one go. I probably don't need to have that.

Emmie Strassberg: Oh, I'm never going to eat that again. I mean, I could if I wanted to.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Exactly. Totally. I think that creates so much freedom when you're like, "It's just food and I'm sure it does taste delicious and I could have it or I could not have it." So what do I actually want, rather than this pressure of like, this is my chance or this is what I always do. Or I need to hit the easy button and escape from whatever negative emotion I'm feeling. It's separating the food from using it to try to make our lives tolerable or more tolerable and more exciting.

Emmie Strassberg: And also not eating things that I don't like.

Katrina Ubell: I know. Isn't that huge?

Emmie Strassberg: If something just doesn't taste good like my dinners, I don't have to eat it.

Katrina Ubell: I know. So good. So you mentioned that your self confidence has improved so much. And for so many people who want to lose weight, they think, well, I'll just have a lot more confidence. I'll feel more confident with myself once I've lost weight.

So they tie their emotions and the thoughts about themselves and create those emotions to the size of their bodies or what their body looks like. And so what I love is that you have spent this time really divorcing those two. You can feel confident in yourself, and that has nothing to do with your body. And then you can just decide to lose weight because you want to, not so that you can feel a different emotion. So I would love it if you could speak to that.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. I think part of what I did when I was pausing the weight loss work is I just focused on other things like what kind of clothes do I want to wear? Really just getting rid of the stuff that I don't like. And it's funny, when I initially lost weight, I bought a bunch of stuff that honestly really isn't me. And it was just a novelty to be able to fit into it and try on that persona. But I was like, "That doesn't really feel like me. That's not comfortable and no wonder I didn't want to stay there." So really what do I like? What feels comfortable. It's why the purple hair happened.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Nobody can see if you have super fun purple hair. I love that.

Emmie Strassberg: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Expressing yourself. Letting yourself be seen for who you are.

Emmie Strassberg: Exactly. Decorating my little office in here, which you can't see, but has all my stuff in it. Just curating my life just how I want it. The other thing was really prioritizing fun and rest and not having to be protective and achieving really just more like, this is the time you want to spend with your family. You're going to do that. And I went through the LifeBridge School and I got coach certification and I had all these ideas like all, I think baby coaches do about, oh, and I need to do this and this and this. Or I have a job that I love already and I have created a few things to set up a coaching business if that ever happens, but it doesn't have to happen right now. I can just let it happen when it needs to happen. And I have a doctor job that I love.

Katrina Ubell: I would love to talk about that though, because I don't want to make generalizations, but I've done this now for many years and I've worked with many, many, many, many OB-GYNs and fellowship, other MFM and sub specialties. It seems to me in my experience that so many women in that field really, really struggle, not just with their weight, but struggle with their experience of the job. It's very, very stressful. Actually, I don't know. I was going to say, it seems like it maybe takes people off guard how challenging it ends it being for them when they're out in practice. Maybe that's actually not true though, but it just seems like people really struggle with it. And you're like, "I love my job." And the MFMs are the ones who are like, "No, my job is so stressful. You don't understand. Everybody's high risk. It's so hard." And you're like, "I love it."

And so I just find that to be so inspiring. And I really hope for all of our OB friends who are listening might be in that other world, if they could... I just want them to even know that it's possible. So let's start talking about that though, because I know you had a lot of time scarcity and you really, really struggled with that. So let's talk about that a little bit more.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah, So first of all, just in case any OBS are wondering, I do not deliver babies. I do not deliver babies. I have a wonderful 8:00 to 5:00 job and my weekend call is by telephone mostly. So it's really not that bad, which is great. I mean, I'm still making difficult decisions a lot of the time, or I guess high stakes decisions, I should say. But I've wanted to be a doctor since I was eight years old. And I thought I wanted to do family medicine.

Turns out I didn't want to be that. And I really loved OB so I did OB and then it turned out I really love maternal fetal, because I could do more of the medicine, less of the surgery, which I enjoy surgery, but surgery stress me out. And the fetal ultrasound is just a bonus. That's the fun part. Because the maternal conditions are really what interests me. My mother was really sick when I was growing up with lupus, and had a very high risk pregnancy with my brother and with me. But I didn't remember that because I was not conscious of it. And I think a lot of my experience loving my job is just wanting to take care of women like my mom. And what I really love about my job is being able to advocate for my patients to get appropriate medical care. Because I don't know if you know this, but sometimes pregnant women are seen as unicorns and people get very confused about what medical care they can and can't have.

Katrina Ubell: Yes, nobody wants to touch the pregnant lady.

Emmie Strassberg: I had a preconception patient the other day that told me that her rheumatologist just discharged her from the practice because she said she was about to start a family. And I was like, "You do that? That doesn't seem right. And I can't prescribe your HUMIRA because that's not my job, but I agree that you should have it." So just being able to be the one to direct that and guide that a bit and it's awesome.

Katrina Ubell: That's always been your experience of it? I know you had significant time scarcity concerns, so that can put a little damper on the joy, right?

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. I think part of it was just figuring out my flow as a new attending physician. And in medicine, people complain all the time about time and schedule and that's just what I learned to do. And that was a fun thing to unlearn. I was like, "This doesn't have to be a problem. Isn't that fun?" But really if something was added to my schedule, it's like, "Oh gosh, it was already a busy day. I can't believe that was added to my schedule."

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. So much victim mentality.

Emmie Strassberg: It's like, man, I'm not in control.

Katrina Ubell: Exactly. Yes. I mean, listen, I was the queen of that so I hear you. I know exactly what you're talking about.

Emmie Strassberg: Sorry, I think that you coached me about where this came up sometimes is I would get a patient referred later in their pregnancy like a 36 weeks or something and be like, "What am I supposed to do now? Why did you wait until 36 weeks to refer this patient to me?" And maybe that's not a problem either.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Yeah. But I love what you were saying though, about how everybody complains about that and then you just start thinking it's a problem too. I think that that is massively overlooked when it comes to doctors and burnout and overall life satisfaction, all the other things that we struggle with. So much of our negative thinking or terrible thinking or painful thinking or thinking that holds us back is thoughts that other people gave to us. We observed.

What do we do? So much of our learning is shadowing and we're just like little sponges picking everything up including all these other people's terrible thinking. We're like, "Oh, I guess this is how we think about it." And then we just think that's just how it is. And really it's doesn't have to be that way.

Emmie Strassberg: I definitely had people that didn't complain. I don't want to be

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, no, of course not. And I'm not saying everybody is like that, but if we're going to make a generalization, there's plenty of that, let's just say, especially when you are that sponge. And I think it's like, you know how you need so many more positive reviews to counteract one negative review in your brain? You can have all these people that you shadow who are really happy and it won't leave really a mark, but the person who's complaining and whatever we're like, "Oh yeah, I remember that person." It just sticks with us more.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: So did you mostly just work on questioning those thoughts that you had? Is that how you worked through it?

Emmie Strassberg: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So the time scarcity one was actually really interesting. What I did was I kept a little track of every time I noticed the time scarcity thought coming in my head, and that just brought the awareness to it. And so I would be thinking, oh gosh, I don't have time to do whatever, or worried about time, stressed about time and I just check, check, check. And after a while, it just became amusing. Every day I get through all the things. Pretty much always get everything done. Occasionally maybe I don't, but somehow most of the time it works out.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Maybe I don't have to be miserable while I'm doing it.

Emmie Strassberg: So some of it was coaching and finding new thoughts and maybe finding different ways to think about whatever was happening. And other times it was just like, there it is again. All right. And then it was just almost like, poof, there it goes. I don't have to coach myself on it anymore. I just don't need that.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Well, and what I love about that too, is I think so often we're like, okay, I'm ready to get rid of the time scarcity. What's the new thought going to be? It's very effortful. And you've heard me say this a million times and I'll say it again, you got to slow yourself down. If you're in a rush, then it's unlikely to work as effectively as if you're willing to sit in the awareness of how the way you're currently thinking is creating the problem, which is exactly what you just described with marking it off, being aware of those thoughts, looking at the reality, which is almost all the time, you're getting your work done regardless. So it's actually maybe not true that you don't have time to do things because it turns out most of the time you do.

Then you start to see it's kind of ludicrous. You start to see like this literally doesn't even make sense. And then it's so easy to think something new. You don't have to convince yourself, force yourself. It just becomes clear, this old way makes no sense, so I think I'm just going to opt out of that and it's going to be this new way.

But it requires you to be willing to stay in the current situation, which is why we don't want to rush. So when you're at work now, what is your experience like now?

Emmie Strassberg: Well, I think part of it too, is that I have more trust in myself to get things done and I have more of a leadership role than I did when I started. I'm more aware of the ins and outs and how the schedule fits together and I have more control to say things like, "Hey, if you're going to add a patient in at the end of the day, it would be really great for me to know about that." And part of that too was just

Katrina Ubell: Which is advocating for yourself. That's really what that is, letting the people in charge of that know what your preferences is and communicating that.

Emmie Strassberg: Exactly. And so just doing that. Of course the schedule's not going to work here and there and schedules, almost always something is wrong at some point. It's never perfect. If I'm feeling really sorry for myself I'm like, "Listen, this is my job. Tomorrow will be different." It usually is. It's usually one hard day and then the next day is fine. Or maybe it's one hard week, but then the next week is fine. Just realizing that it's temporary too.

Katrina Ubell: Right. I love that, that transient nature of it and reminding yourself of that, because when it is so hard... I mean, at least what my brain always did was like, they always do this. This always happens. That was thinking in absolutes when the reality was that was not true at all. It just got me more riled up and more upset and then I was like, "Ah, I hate feeling this way." And then using something around to eat. I mean, I think that is really what it comes down to is being willing to...

Well, first of all, I feel like so many people have resistance to it even being a good experience. When you tell them it could be better, they're like, "No, you don't understand how bad." We think we want to feel better, but often there's.... And when I say this, I don't mean it in a negative way, but a bit of self importance that we get out of being, were very important that people want to get on our schedule and we're so overbooked and whatever. And it's important to just own that and open up to that. And you know what, I use this as a way to bolster my opinion of myself. And then I complain about it. Maybe I could just have a good opinion about myself in a different way that doesn't have to involve so many work days being so challenging or just an overall negative experience.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And some of that too is learning how to have difficult conversations with people where it wasn't like I'm the victim and you're the villain. And it's like, no, there's something we have to talk about but-

Katrina Ubell: Let's work together to find a solution.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. Exactly. That this doesn't have to be that kind of conversation.

Katrina Ubell: Adversarial. Right. Exactly. You know what it reminds me of, it's really moving into emotional adulthood. It's really like growing up emotionally and moving into, I'm actually creating the experience of my life enough. I want something different. That's up to me. I remind myself of this constantly.

f there's something I want in my life, no one's going to just stroll down the street and be like, "Here you go. Here's that schedule you want. Here's that time off you want. Here's the time to whatever you want to do." It's not going to happen. I have to take responsibility and make that happen for me if it's something that I want. And that goes for all of us, no matter what we do.

And is it hard sometimes? I feel like it's a relearning. I come back like, oh, there I'm doing it again. It's like a regression and then maturing again. But overall it moves you forward and I feel like I can get out of it quicker when it does happen, because of that experience like, oh, it's this again. Okay, I know how to handle it.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah, definitely. Anytime I feel righteous indignations, I'm like, okay. I imagine myself

Katrina Ubell: Hold on a second. I know what this means. I got to pause. As we wrap up, I wanted to just read something that you wrote when you're thinking about coming on to this episode. You said, "I'm showing up as a person I want to be in my life consistently. And this has been the best gift of all." I mean, that is so cool, because we so think we're like, "Oh, I'm just here for the weight loss." But that is everything. And then the weight loss comes when you're ready to lose the weight, because then you are the person that you need to be so that you can lose the weight and keep up.

Emmie Strassberg: I mean, it'll be nice to lose weight, but I care less about it now too. That's not my goal at this point.

Katrina Ubell: Well, and you don't think that that's going to be... then you're going to be golden, then life's going to be amazing once you've lost the weight, then you realize you're like, okay, so my body will be different. And maybe like you're saying, health and whatever, maybe you get to a point where you're like, I think something that would be in my body's best interest would be a little different than what I have now. Very different than you're a good person when you're thin or something like that.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. And I've really been undoing that belief too and really especially I counsel a lot of obese patients and just centering my compassion and non-judgment of my patients and other people around me has really helped too, just questioning I will notice I'm having thoughts. I'm like that's interesting. No wonder I think the same thing about myself. And not judging and not being like, "Oh, you shouldn't have thoughts like that."

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Well, and I think that that's just when you grow up in a society that over emphasizes the... first of all, just objectifies women's bodies and all that. And then the message is like, you're never good enough unless you look this; someone that an extremely small percentage of the general population looks like that. It's going to come up from time to time. But when you have the awareness, you're able to just go like, okay, diverting away from that. We're consistently working to undo that. And what a gift to give to your patients as well to have a doctor who isn't just like, "Well, you know if you lost weight this would solve that problem or things would be better or whatever." Even though that may be true, it's possible that that could be true, but is that even a useful or helpful thing to say to a woman in that situation? Is that really going to help her to get the results that she wants?

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. Because by the time I see them, most of the time they're pregnant.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. So here we are.

Emmie Strassberg: You want them actively losing weight, so why make anybody feel bad? I mean, nobody should make somebody feel bad about that anyway, especially not in pregnancy. But I think the reason that I'm going back to having a food plan and following it is, it's not even so much the desire to lose weight, it's really more, I just feel like it's the next thing for me to get to the next level of work.

Katrina Ubell: Totally. Because it'll bring up all the things that you haven't... It'll just keep bringing it up.

Emmie Strassberg: Hence that effect might be weight loss.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Exactly. It is a fun little side effect and you figure out, where do I really have some growth waiting for me. And then you have the opportunity to embark on that. And final thing I was going to read that you said was, even if I have not "achieved weight loss," the freedom this program has given me to love being myself is the greatest value of all. I mean, that seriously, wow, touches my heart. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, yes, this is what I'm always talking about." Learning to, first of all, accept yourself as you are, and then loving yourself, unconditionally loving yourself. Not saying I'll love myself once I get to some ideal or some level of perfection, whatever that even means. It's like, all of me right now is completely lovable. I'm going to offer myself that love and I can still decide I want to do something different with my body if I want to.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. I was just telling Caitlin earlier, my coaching girl, I wish I had figured this out earlier. It's the best news. I can just love myself and I don't have to have any conditions for that. That's amazing.

Katrina Ubell: I know. Right. It's like, why did nobody tell me that so I didn't get the message? Oh my gosh. So good.

Emmie Strassberg: And I had a great childhood and very loving parents.

Katrina Ubell: Yes. Well, and it's not just our parents that influence us. You know what I mean? I think sometimes we think we... Those are obviously important key relationships, but there's so many other experiences that we have as we grow up and just the community and the society that we live in. That's all influential too. And so I think of it as, I don't know anybody gets into adulthood without something to work through. Even as parents, the goal isn't to create this environment where the child comes out totally evolved and never has a problem. Completely knows how to handle it all. The way that you evolve and figure out your problems is to actually have problems and work through them. That is how you do it.

Well, thank you so much for taking the time to come and share your story with everybody and to talk about what it looks like to decide to maybe not go completely hardcore on the weight loss and then maybe work on the thoughts later. To prioritize these important parts and then knowing the weight loss is waiting for you whenever you want it.

Emmie Strassberg: Yeah. Thank you. This has been great.

Katrina Ubell: Great. Well, thank you so much.