Katrina Ubell: Hello there, my friend. Welcome back to the podcast. If you're new here, I'm so glad you're here. Welcome, and welcome to March. Who can believe it? Time's just a flying, it sure is. I am super excited to bring this topic to you today. It is something that I can't believe in 267 episodes before this one, we haven't talked to about it. I think it's such a great topic and it was actually suggested by one of you lovely listeners. Her name is Teresa, and she brought the idea to me of overeating healthy food. She actually wrote in a few months ago, but hopefully she's still listening and will get this. She is a rheumatologist who was asking about overeating healthy foods. What she was saying is that at work, breakfast and lunches, she says they're limited in how much she can eat, because time is limited. She has to get going. She has to see patients. She needs to get her work done, she eats what she has packed and then she's done and then she just moves in. Generally, she's pretty tuned in to her hunger scale when she's doing that. It's at dinner and on the weekends that everything flies out the door and she has some difficulty with that. She wanted to see if I had any suggestions.

I thought that was such a great, great thing to talk about. Listen, I was on the skill level of over eating healthy foods in my past life, I was like the top level, whatever that is. I seriously could overeat some healthy foods with the best of them for sure. That was for sure something that I did. I've talked before about the massive salads that I learned to eat with Weight Watchers, because I was afraid of not being full enough. I mean, just became this habit. Also, I just have to say that, kind of growing up in the, well, I was born in the seventies, but growing up in the eighties and nineties, I just remember hearing so much about what's healthy to eat and what's not. That was back when fat was such a horrible thing to eat and it wasn't healthy and all the stuff about what's healthy and what's not healthy. How many grams of fat does this have and how many grams of fat does that have? Oh look, candy doesn't have any grams of fat. Remember that?

They're taking fat out of all of these foods, thinking it's so much better if we do that. It was so easy to say, "Okay, well this low fat item is healthy, whatever that even really means," if you think about it. That kind of then meant that it was like a free pass to eat as much of it as you wanted. During college, the good old SnackWell's, remember SnackWell's? I mean, I would have probably been so much more satisfied eating one or two real cookies, but instead I ate piles and piles of these low fat or fat free cookies and all the different treats and stuff that they offered, that didn't really taste that good and really weren't that satisfying, all in all, right?

As I was thinking about overeating healthy foods and why we do it, I came up with three main reasons why we overeat healthy foods and then I'm going to give you the solutions to each of those reasons. If you're someone who's like, "Listen, I'm in the bag of Cheetos, I'm eating the sugar cereal right and left, okay," this is probably not going to be something that's super relevant for you. If you are like, "No, look," because I do, I hear this all the time. "I eat really, really well. I don't eat a ton of sugar. I don't snack. I don't eat at night and I still can't lose weight. What is going on?" We're going to talk about that exactly, okay? It's not as complicated as you think it is. Okay.

The first reason why we overeat healthy foods is because we will overeat anything, okay? Whether it's healthy food, whether it's junk food, whether it's whatever it is, if it's a digestible substance, we'll overeat it, right? That may be what's going on for you. It can be truly habit overeating, habitual overeating. When this is going on, what's happening is we're confused about the hunger scale and our body's messages. Now, if you have not heard about the hunger scale before, then literally just go into your web browser and Google Weight Loss for Busy Physicians hunger scale, or Katrina Ubell podcast hunger scale, that comes up too. You'll find where I've mentioned that before, where I can teach you all the details about the hunger scale, because there's definitely several times that I've discussed it in the past. The hunger scale is basically just giving you some sort of framework in describing how hungry you are versus your satisfaction or fullness.

When we are used to overeating, we start to think that overeating is normal. We start to think that the distended overly full feeling, is the normal feeling that indicates that it's time to stop eating. We get confused. We don't remember really what it feels like to be just satisfied, having had enough. We are regularly eating past that, and then that becomes normalized.

That's totally what happened for me when I was eating my massive salads. The massive salad story is that in Weight Watchers, I don't actually know how it is right now, but for a while there with Weight Watchers, because I'm lifetime member, did Weight Watchers so many times, they would not have you count points for vegetables. That meant that they were quote, unquote free. You could eat as many as you wanted. Well for an overeater, that's not actually not helpful, right? It's like, "Great. I can stuff myself as long it's vegetables." What I would do, is I would have all my points for the day and I would eat my dinner and I would be terrified of being hungry later because I'm such a rule follower, or at least I was at the time, right?

If you really think about it, "Okay. If I'm still hungry later, then I can eat more. If I don't have points left, who cares, because points are a made up thing. This isn't even a thing." In my mind, I'm like, "No, I have to get the A. I have to lose weight when I get on this scale again next week." I was like, "Well, I can't have anything more later." Terrible way to think, "I can't have anything more later." No, I'm an adult. I get to eat whatever I want to.

Anyway, that it would create fear in me that I wouldn't get my needs met. I would make sure that I really got full enough at dinner. The way I would do that, is by having my regular meal but then I'd also make this huge salad. Healthy stuff, good veggies in there, right? Nutritious food, lots of vitamins and minerals in there, but I would totally eat it to the point of distention, too full, definitely too, too full every single night. You do that enough times and it just feels normal. You normalize the whole thing. You don't think that you're overeating. You actually do not realize you're overeating.

People say to me, "I'm not overeating." I'm like, "Is that really true though?" Maybe. I don't know, but we should probably look at it. We should probably question whether it's true, because if you are really eating in a way that's very supportive for your body and you're not losing weight, there's a good chance it's still too much food for your body, right? It's still too much food.

When we are confused about the hunger scale and those body messages, we think it is totally normal to be super full. We think super full is normal full, okay? What we have to do, is recalibrate that, right? We have to understand what our body's actual messages are.

Another reason that we overeat is because overeating dulls are negative emotions. I think one of the best ways to think about this is if you think about a wine glass, like a crystal wine glass, you put a little bit of water in it and then you moisten your finger and you rub that moist and finger around the rim, it will vibrate. It'll make a sound, right? If you add some more water, the sound will change. Actual, whatever note, changes. Adds more water, it is still there vibrating, making a sound, but a different sound. If you keep adding water to the point where it's completely full, it will no longer vibrate and it will not make a sound anymore.

What we're doing when we are filling our bellies to the brim with food, is we are dulling the vibration, so to speak, of the emotions that we're feeling. We do not like how we're feeling, so we eat and eat and eat and eat. That dampens that vibration or that physical sensation of those emotions in our bodies. If you think of your body as the wine glass, the food is the water and we are eating, eating, eating, eating, whether it's healthy or not, right, it's still nutritious food, but we're still eating too much in order to stop feeling the way we're feeling. This can become a habit too, where we don't even know what we're feeling. We're not aware at all. Like I have people say, "Well, I don't think I'm doing that." Well, how do you know? You probably haven't even really thought about it yet. Maybe you are, maybe you aren't, but first we need to develop some awareness around what's actually going on in your body. How are you actually feeling? Why are you eating all of that food?

Another reason that we overeat healthy food is we think that eating more will make a good thing even better. When we think that good, nutritious food is so good for us, then a little more, it's got to be better, right? If some is good, then more is better. We'll just think, "Well, it's not a big deal to have more because this is healthy, right?" Think, "Well, I'm feeling really good. I'm enjoying the weekend. I'm enjoying the dinner with loved ones or friends. Some more will make it better." Then we realize, "Wait a minute, why am I overeating this food? Why am I eating past the point of a normal amount of fullness?"

Overeating anything, right? We are just overeaters and we just overeat anything. The solution has to be to recalibrate that hunger scale to actually figure out what a normal amount of fullness feels like in our bodies. I overate for so long. I remember being so surprised at how comfortable my body felt after eating a meal when I stopped after eating less food, right? In my mind I'd been thinking if I eat less food, I won't be as satisfied. It won't last as long. There were downsides to eating less, but there were not downsides to eating less. I felt so much better. My digestion was so much better. I was not hungry too quickly, turns out. I felt so much better. You do that enough times, and then that becomes the new normal. Then eating the right amount of food for your body, becomes that normal feeling of fullness. Eating as much as you used to eat, is totally uncomfortable. You would never do that to yourself.

We have to be willing to be open to understanding our body signals and the messages that it's sending us about whether we need more food or not, slowing down, getting in tune with the body, actually repopulating the body, getting out of your head and into your body to find out what is it actually telling me about this food. That is how we find out, "You know what? This is enough. I'm not hungry. I feel nice and satisfied, but I'm still energetic. It's not too much, but I'm not left feeling like I need more. Okay, that's the point that I want to reach with my meals." It can take some practice. You want to be patient with yourself while you're figuring this out for sure.

The next reason we overeat healthy food is because we think that healthy food is virtuous. This is a very common thing. I got sucked into it as well. I feel like I've been sucked into all the things, all the ways it could go wrong, just about. I've been there, totally thinking like, "Well, this is this good, healthy, whatever oat cluster thing that I made," or whatever. "It doesn't even really taste that good, but it's quote unquote healthy so it's good for me. It's okay that I overeat it, right? It's got whatever, matcha in it, or whatever the latest thing is. It's got turmeric. It's got whatever antioxidants. Oh my gosh, it's healthy so it's good for me to do this," as though eating more food than your body needs, is actually helpful or good for your body. It is not. It doesn't matter how many antioxidants it has or fiber or whatever good thing it has, it's still too much for your body. Okay? It's still too much.

When we're thinking extra food doesn't count because it's healthy, it's nutritious, it actually does still count. It's still too much food. Too much food is too much food. It doesn't at what the nutritional makeup is of that food, okay? There was a girl, gosh, the very first time I did Weight Watchers, I was still in medical school, my last year medical school. There was this young woman who would go to all the meetings and I remember her saying... I think they've changed the program or over the course of time. I think even for a while, fruit was free, I don't know. At that time, some vegetables were free, some weren't and with fruit, you did have to count the points for fruit. Again, rule follower here, I always counted the points for fruit. There's this young woman she's there every week for a while and always raising her hand saying stuff. At one point she raises her hand and says, "I'm just really getting frustrated because I'm not losing weight and I'm totally not eating more than my points. I just don't understand why this isn't working."

The leader was at asking her a few more questions about things and she's like, "Well, I mean, I don't count fruit because I mean, come on it's fruit," and then went on to the next thing. I thought to myself at the time, "Yeah, but you're supposed to count fruit. You can't just be oh, but it's fruit so it doesn't count. It does count, right? That's why you're not getting results." We have to remember, our thoughts and aren't necessarily going to contradict how our bodies respond to things, right? You might be like, "Well this is just this healthy food, so it's not really. Sure I overate it, but who cares? It's healthy." No, but it's still too much food for your body. The end. It's more food than your body needs, okay? We have to get real clear on that.

I do want to just mention something that we haven't actually addressed on this podcast before, there is something called orthorexia, and it is not officially a recognized diagnosis. The term was coined in the nineties and it's characterized by an obsession about nutritious food to the degree that it can damage your wellbeing. People who suffer from orthorexia, believe that eating healthy food is righteous.

Ultimately, orthorexia is an unhealthy focus on eating in a healthy way. I just want to point that out because someone listening might be going, "Oh, hey. Yeah, actually that does sound like me." If it does, I want to encourage you to do a little bit of an internet search on some of the key factors for that. I don't know that I would've really qualified for the diagnosis, even though it's not technically a DSM recognized diagnosis, but I definitely in my life have had tendencies. I've had some real tendencies toward this. I just want to point that out as well.

It's like judging food, is it good or bad? Back in those fat free days and stuff, right? Any food that have fat, it was judged so gross and so bad. Part of orthorexia is judging what other people eat. I definitely did that and cutting out certain food groups and not eating this, not eating that. I mean, it really can get to the extremes. If you are feeling like that's going on for you, definitely want to get some professional help for that.

I think that like so many things, there's a bit of a spectrum. I think at certain times in my life, have had a toe on that spectrum for sure. Really believing healthy food is virtuous. Eating these things with these nutrients, it has this and this and this and this is supposed to be so good for you and this ingredient's supposed to be so good for you. That obsession, and even one thing I read was talking about being obsessed with healthy living blogs and following people on social media. I totally had a phase where I did that big time, eating things that did not taste good to me because they were healthy and then not feeling satisfied and then overeating other things.

In hindsight, it was not healthy what was going on there. Not healthy for my mind. It was not good for my wellbeing for sure. I just want to point out that if any of that kind of resonates, you may want to look into that a little bit further. I will say that, anything that really feels out of control, of course want to get some professional help. I never did and I was able to move past that by changing the way that I think about food. Regardless of whether it goes to that extreme or not, when you're overeating because you think that healthy food is so good for you, what we want to do as a solution, we want to address the thoughts and beliefs that we have about healthier, nutritious foods that drive the action of overeating them, right? If you think about the thinking cycle, remember it's our thoughts and our beliefs that create our feelings and our feelings drive our actions. There are thoughts and beliefs about these nutritious foods that ultimately drive us to overeat. We want to become more aware of what that is.

Once we know what's creating the problem, we can decide how we want to think about food in general, so that it serves us. Okay? We want to be thinking less about what's quote unquote, good food and quote unquote bad food and healthy food and nutritious food and junk food and bad for you food. That creates a lot of problems for a lot of people. If you like think that way and it's not creating problem for you, amazing. I think for a lot of people, it does create issues. What we want to focus more on, is how does your body feel when you eat this food? If you get connected, when you get connected to your body and how your body actually feels, then you can connect, "Well, I eat this food. How do I now feel? Should I eat more of that food or not based on how I physically feel?"

Your body will let you know, you just have to learn to listen and think about collaborating with your body instead of trying to override it all the time, right? Staying up in your head and thinking about things and forcing certain things onto your body. Instead, we really want to be collaborating, we're in this together, why not eat this? What is the response?

You may find that there are quote, unquote healthy and nutritious foods that you do not feel help your body. Everybody says X, Y, Z is so good for you and when you eat it, you don't like it or it just doesn't sit well with you, then do not eat that food. Please don't eat that food. I don't care how nutritious it is. That is not what we do. Okay? This is very much a thinking area that we need to focus on and also getting connected to the body to really truly understand how our bodies to certain foods.

All right. The third reason why we over eat healthy food, is because simply we have an over desire for healthy food. We just want healthy food, nutritious food, more than it's appropriate for how much our body needs. It's as simple as that right? We're thinking about it a lot. We want it. It tastes good to us, right? What's characterized typically as nutritious food, tastes delicious to me. I like that. I like all of it. Well, not all of it. A lot of it. Don't send me Brussels sprouts. I'm not into them, and don't tell me you have the best recipe. It's a hard, no.

When we are thinking thoughts that create too much desire for any food, whether it's nutritious or not, the solution is to reduce our desire for that to a normal desire, right? A normal amount of desire means that when you're getting physically hungry, you're thinking about food and what you're going to eat. Then you eat and you enjoy it and that tastes delicious and you stop and your body's had enough. Then you stop thinking about food. You're not mulling it over. You're not planning what the next meal is. You're not totally thinking all the time about food and qualifying it and how many calories is that? Did I get this macronutrient and whatever? You put it down, you go live your life, you go do other things. Then several hours later when you're hungry, again, it's time to think about food again.

What we have to remember is that desire is an emotion and it is created by the way that we think. Again, we want to be looking at what are our thought that create desire for food and what are thoughts that create over desire for food? 100%, you can change this. I am a living proof of it. If I hadn't actually done it myself, I'd be much more skeptical but I am telling you, if you had told me that I could ever get to a place where I did not care about eating peanut butter, I wouldn't have believed you, but it's true. Same with coffee. I didn't even try to reduce my desire with coffee. It just happened. I'm sometimes bummed by it because I'm like, "Coffee would be good, except I don't want it." Bummer.

If you're thinking that your issue with overeating nutritious food is simply just over desire, you want to be really aware of what you're thinking. You have to understand that they are thoughts because they're going to sound just like the truth. They're going to sound like, "That just tastes good. I like that. It's good for me. The simple stuff, I want that. I like that." Simple stuff like that, you want to just understand what do you think? What do you make that food mean? What are your thoughts about that food? Then, understand what those thoughts create for you. It's not like you go to, "I hate that food."

One way of thinking that has really helped me when I've wanted to reduce desire, is reminding myself that this is one of a whole array of foods that can be consumed and digested. This is just one of them. It's not any more important than any others. Just taking the wind out of the sails, taking away some of that importance so that it doesn't have such a power, right?

We think the food is controlling us. It has all this power. It doesn't. We're giving it power with the way that we think. We want to understand how we're doing that and then understand that we can actually take the power back anytime we want to. That is how we reduce our over desire for healthy foods.

If you are one who can relate to this, you've got some great things to explore for you to start figuring out what are the next steps so that you can eat food that supports your body, in an amount that supports your body, right? Anything like portion control, words like that, they all sounds so restrictive. It's not restrictive to give your body the amount of food it needs and no more. The way you know how much that is, is by listening to your body. Actually tuning in to your experience of being in your body after you've eaten.

A lot of people allow themselves to get real confused. They start thinking this is a difficult thing. I promise you it's not. Don't be indecisive about this. Just check in. "Do I feel comfortable? Was that too much food maybe?" We're not judging you. There's no court of law here. You're not in trouble if you overate. Just recognizing, "Okay, that was too much food. Next time I want to try to eat a little less and see what happens," and just continue to essentially make friends with your body. You and your body are in this together. You're on the same team. You want to figure out how to work together.

All right, my friend, Have a great rest of your week and I'll catch you soon.

Take care. Bye-bye