



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hello there, my friend. How are you today? So glad that you're joining me today. I am really, really glad to bring you today's topic and episode. I'm very excited about it.

All right. So today I am talking about a subject that was actually inspired by one of our program members. Her name is Shauna, and she actually asked me to do a podcast on this topic. And I thought it was so good. So good. We do talk about this actually decently frequently in our Weight Loss for Doctors Only program, but I wanted to do a little bit of a deeper dive on it here. So what we're going to be talking about is basically the difference between when you want to find a new thought, a new way of thinking about something or maybe a new belief, and when do you just need to process emotion and how do you know which one to do? So Shauna, very astutely, I might add, pointed out that she had noticed that it was pretty frequent that people were asking for a new way of thinking, wanted to develop a new thought process or develop a new belief around something and in doing so, they were trying to avoid the feeling that they didn't want to feel that was created by their original thought.

Okay. So they were like, "You know what? If I'll just think a different thing, then I can feel differently, then I won't have to feel that negative emotion that my original thought was creating." And I mean, honestly, at surface level, this doesn't sound like a problem. Does it? It's like, if you can do that, why wouldn't you just do that? But then we talked so much about processing emotion. So when are you supposed to process emotion? When you supposed to change the thought? When are you supposed to just feel what it is you're feeling? And what do you do with that? And I thought that was just such a great, great question. So I put together three steps for you on how to work through this, and then also three things to be watching out for, as you're working through all this. So just as we get started, I just want to give you a quick reminder if you're new to the podcast, what we're basically talking about here, the major premise here is the thinking cycle, which is what is taught in cognitive behavioral therapy.

I'm not a therapist, I'm a life coach, but we still use the same concept, which is that we have facts, just the truth, the facts that are things everybody would agree on around us. And then we have thoughts about those things. Our thoughts create our feelings or our emotions, how we feel, and then our emotions drive our actions. What we do, what we don't do, how we react. And then of course, we get results from whatever actions we take and don't take. The other concept that I want to just remind you of is what I call monkey bar rung thoughts.

Now, this is something I taught way, way, way, way, way back a long, long, long, long time ago on this podcast. I haven't talked about it in a while. So I just want to do a quick reminder. Essentially, when you find out you realize that you have a belief about something or a thought that you think on a regular basis, you may decide, "You know what?

I want to think differently. I want to actually believe something different." But you don't believe the new thing yet. So if you think about the monkey bars, you're standing at one end of the monkey bars at a children's playground and you cannot physically reach the other side. Your arms are not long enough. Even if you jumped as far as you could, you would not be able to reach the furthest rung. So sometimes that's what it feels like when we're trying to believe something new or think a different thought.

We really desperately want to get to the other side, we want to believe the new thing, but we just don't yet. So how do we get there? And that's what I call monkey bar rung thoughts, where you're essentially breaking down the difference between what you currently believe and what you want to believe into little incremental stretches.

Because the way you get across the monkey bars is you go one bar at a time. And if you get really, really fancy, when you're older, maybe you swing two at a time. But you still never get to the point where you just can go from believing something that is painful or something that you don't like the result of, and then something completely different, usually just in one fell swoop.

It is possible, but it's just not super common. So what that means then is we identify what it is that we currently think or believe and then we find a new thought that moves us just a little bit closer to the way we want to be thinking the thing that we want to believe. It's a little bit of a stretch, but it still feels believable to us. And then we start practicing living from that new thought or belief. Practicing thinking that one on purpose, generating the emotion that comes from that, and then when that becomes just the way that we operate, then we move on to the next monkey bar rung thought, which is the next one that is a bit of a stretch, but still believable.

We're not just totally convincing ourselves to believe something that we just don't believe at all. It's like, "There's some truth in that, we really want to believe that, we're really close to believing that, but quite there." And we work on that becoming the new way that we're operating. And then we just keep moving along, moving along one rung at a time. Before long, you find yourself at that other side actually believing something new. So what essentially Shauna is asking is when do we do monkey bar rung thoughts and when do we just need to process our emotions? And my answer to that is it's kind of some of both.

So let me talk you through, walk you through these three steps. The first step, if you're even just thinking like, "What do I need to do? Do I need to think something different? Do I need to process emotion? What do I need to do?" The first thing always that you need to do is you need to identify what it is that you are thinking and what emotion you are feeling, now may be aware of what you're thinking, that might be the first thing that you identify. And once you know what that thought is, you can ask yourself, "Okay, well, when I think this thought, how do I feel? What emotion am I experiencing?" And then you find the word to describe that emotion. Or it might be the other way around. You might be much more in tune to how you feel, you know how you're feeling, and then you need to figure out what is the thought that's creating that.

So either way is completely fine. I think for me, it goes both ways for different occasions. Sometimes I'm much more aware of what I'm feeling. Sometimes it's harder to figure that out and I'm much more aware of what I'm thinking. Either way is fine. But what we want to do is identify both what the thought is, the main thought, and what the feeling is. Now, the next step is to process that emotion. Okay. What is that emotion that you're experiencing it and you want to be processing it. So what that means is you want to be feeling it all the way through, not trying to avoid it. One of the ways that so many of us avoid feeling our emotions is by eating something. We just like grab the snacks, we're surfing the pantry, we're cracking open a bottle of wine trying to avoid it.

We usually are doing that before we have any idea what we're thinking or feeling. All we know is that we just need something to take the edge off, or to give us some relief, or to numb us out. So what we want to be doing is not doing that so that we have some hope of figuring out what the thought and feeling are that we're experiencing. And then we want to learn to process that emotion. Now there's lots of ways to process emotion, and that's not really what we're digging into here on this episode. But one of the best ways to do that in this kind of a situation is to settle in to a place where you can comfortably be seated or laying down and move from your head into your body and identify what it is in your body that makes you know that you're feeling that emotion?

So like literally, where is it in your body? Is it in your throat? Is it in your neck? Is it behind your eyes? Is it in the pit of your stomach? Is it in your arms and legs, in your extremities some place? Where is it and what does it actually feel like? So you're continuing to breathe through this and you're just getting to know what it actually feels like in your body. And you stay with yourself while you are observing that. So you're not continuing to think the thought that's creating that emotion you're going, "So I feel this right in the pit of my stomach and it feels about the size of a golf ball. And it's kind of as hard as a golf ball, but it's maybe like a little bit more like a rubber kind of feeling, it's like a density more like rubber. And the color of it is like a dark beige."

Whatever it is, it's expanding, it's shrinking down, it is staying exactly the same. Whatever it is, you're just watching it and noticing it and you're staying with it, continuing to breathe and just seeing if it's going to change. Is it going to move? Does it go somewhere else? So often what we find is that really over the course of just a few short minutes, it completely changes and it ends up even dissipating. And then the emotion is processed. It's moved through us. So just to give you some examples, just common things that I hear. So one thought that you may have is, "I'm a terrible doctor." Something happened, your thought is, "I'm a terrible doctor." And the feeling you experience, there could be many feelings, but the first one that came to my mind was shame. "Something is wrong with me."

That's what shame is. I'm a terrible doctor and you feel shame. So then what we want to do is go into the body and feel that shame. Where is the shame? How do I know it's shame? What happens when I keep breathing and I stay with myself in shame? How does that actually affect my experience of being in my body? Another thought could be, "He shouldn't say things like that." And then maybe your feeling is anger. So where's that anger? For me, anger feels like a very energetic, bubbly kind of sensation. It's usually right in the center of my chest. Sometimes there's some heat that goes along with it. It's often more of a red, or an orange, or a yellow color. And truly, there's no right or wrong to this. It's just getting to know it and being with it. So I'm not continuing to think, "Yeah, he's such a jerk."

He shouldn't keep saying things like that." I'm just saying, "Okay. When I think that thought, I feel this feeling. I feel anger. Where is anger in my body? I'm going to explore feeling anger in my body and see what ends up happening, see if it dissipates." Another option would be a thought like, "I don't know enough." This comes up so often. "There's some sort of deficit in my fun of knowledge. Whatever it is, I don't know enough." And often the feeling that accompanies that is fear. We're afraid that something bad's going to happen because we think we don't know enough. So how do you know that you're feeling fear? Where is that fear? Often for me, that's higher up in my chest. It has a real tight sensation. Sometimes I feel it in my throat. Sometimes I feel it in my throat.

That's the kind of thing you want to be getting more accustomed to is not narrating what the story is about why you feel fear. But instead, recognizing, "I feel fear, and what does that actually feel like in my body?" If you notice like tension in your shoulders, you keep breathing and intentionally see if you can relax those shoulders, just really staying with yourself. You don't have yourself on any kind of timetable, it needs to be done in a certain amount of time. You can stop any time you want to. If it becomes too much or you're just over it and don't want to do it anymore, you can stop. But you're building up the skill of actually feeling your feelings. Okay. So that's number one. You identify what you're thinking and feeling, and then you process that emotion.

So do not look for a new thought in order to avoid processing whatever that emotion is. That is what Shauna was talking about, where we're like, "Ew, shame. I don't want to feel that. I just want to think differently about this. Can you give me a way to stop thinking that I'm a terrible doctor so I don't have to feel shame?"

Well, yes, but also the first step is learning how to feel shame. We want to not be skipping over that or looking for relief from this emotion that is an emotion that we can learn how to experience by trying to convince ourselves that we're not actually a terrible doctor, that actually we're an incredible doctor. Which is, I'm sure the truth, but it's still not really believable to us right then. So you do not want to be looking for a new thought in order to avoid processing the emotion.

Okay. Next step then is to continue identifying thoughts and the feelings that they create. You don't need to go through the whole monkey bar rung process on some thought that was essentially like a one off, one that you're not thinking regularly. But if you are regularly thinking the thought, "I am a terrible doctor," your brain interprets the facts of the world around you, what people will say, how they act. And you interpret that as through the lens of, "I'm a terrible doctor. That's what all this means is that I'm a terrible doctor." And then you feel shame and you're seeing this pattern repeating itself. And of course, you're processing the shame, but you might start to go, "Oh, interesting. This one keeps coming up for me. So if this one keeps coming up for me, maybe this will be one that's worthwhile for me to work through."

But before we're even ready for that part, what we then need to do is work on deeply owning the fact that the way you feel is created by the way you are thinking, not by what's going on around you. Really deeply understanding and owning, "I am feeling shame because I am thinking a thought. I am creating this with the way that I am thinking. I am feeling anger because of the way I'm thinking, not because of what he said. I am feeling fear because the way that I'm thinking, not because of how much I know or how much I don't know."

And this is a really, really important step because we're all like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know. It's just a thought." But you don't really. Cognitively, yes, you understand that, but deep down within you, you do not recognize that. You still just think, "If the facts were different, if I knew more, if he didn't say things like that, if I were a better doctor, then I wouldn't have this problem. I wouldn't have to feel these feelings." So you have to deeply own this. I can feel this and I know I'm creating with a way that I think.

Sometimes I'll even offer to myself, "At some point, if, and when I'm ready, if I would like to think differently about this, that is available to me. But for today, I'm just owning the shame I feel is because of the way that I'm thinking. The fear I feel is because of the way that I'm thinking." And just owning that and being with that, this is very important. This is a part where we want to race through it. You cannot race through this if you want this to actually make a difference for you. Okay.

Then the third step is inviting yourself to consider thinking about it in a new way. And that is when we move to the monkey bar rung process. Okay. So we recognize, "You know what? I'm thinking this on a regular basis. I have a lot of awareness around this now. So much of my thinking in this area is around showing myself that I'm a terrible doctor, showing myself that I don't know enough, being upset with what other people do. I recognize that I'm feeling this way because of my interpretation of the world around me. And that interpretation is through the way that I think. And I'm at a point now out where, yes, I can process these emotions as they come up. But you know what I think I'd also like to do is, I'd like to train my mind to think about it in a different way, because yes, I can process these emotions as they come up.

I don't have to eat to avoid them. I don't have to drink to avoid them. But I think I would be served by thinking about this in a different way. And I would like to explore different thoughts that could create that."

That's when you start looking at, "Okay, where do I want to be? What's the far end of the monkey bars? What is the thought or belief that I want to truly believe and operate from? Where am I right now? And what would be the next meaningful step forward?" A bit of a stretch, but still believable and working on practicing that on a regular basis, intentionally, deliberately reminding yourself, "No, this is the way I think about this now. I am thinking this way on purpose." And then whatever emotions come from that, you continue this process of processing those emotions, being with yourself in those emotions.

And when you notice yourself thinking that new way automatically, now you know you're ready for the next monkey bar rung and you keep moving yourself forward. But the idea that you can use the monkey bar rungs as a way to avoid learning to process emotion, it's just not going to work. It's just not going to have the long term effect that we want. And the long term effect that we want is that we don't need outside substances or distractions to help us avoid the normal human experience of feeling emotions that we are having. We want to learn like, "You know what? This is actually normal. Nothing's going wrong. I can feel this. And when I'm ready to make a change, if I decide I want to, I can and I know how." Okay, so now let's talk about three things to just watch out for while you are going through this process. The number one, biggest one is you got to watch out for yourself being in a rush to feel better.

And I understand this, we all want to feel better. That's the point. We all are searching for a way to feel better. And there's of course, a million ways that help us to feel better in the short term, but don't give us the long term results that we want. So what I want to offer to you is that when you are in a rush, you're creating more of the same experience, meaning, you maybe are kind of able to skip over feeling the emotion in the short term, but it won't give you any long term relief.

It won't actually make you feel better in the long run. So if you notice yourself in a hurry, if you notice yourself rushing, if you notice yourself thinking, "Why is this taking so long?" you've got to dial that back. It's going to take as long as it's going to take. The fastest way to get through it is to keep showing up for yourself, processing those emotions, practicing the new way you want to think when you're ready to do that and keep moving along. But trying to skip over it, pretending like part of these steps don't apply to you, it's just not going to really work out for you. Okay.

The number two thing to be watching out for is forcing yourself to think a positive thought about a "negative fact". We can get really good at this. In fact, when I was first learning these coaching tools, I became a really good expert at thinking a more positive thought about a negative fact, a negative situation. Now the key here is that facts aren't negative. Facts are just facts. If everyone agrees, they're not good or bad, they just are. Is it good or bad that the sky is blue? It just is blue. Right? That's just how it is. So when we're confused in thinking that it's the situation or the facts that are bad, and then we just need to think more positively about it, we're not actually owning the fact that it's our thoughts that are creating our emotions.

We think it's still the facts that are. So you can get a lot of relief from thinking a more positive thought about a negative circumstance, but you will reach a limit. And what you'll find is that you can create some initial relief and then you get to a point where you're just like, "You know what? This isn't working for me anymore." And it's because you still are not deeply understanding that it's your thoughts that create your feelings and really opening up to the idea that there are not actually negative facts, there's negative thoughts about facts.

So we want to be real careful about trying to convince ourselves to think or believe something that we don't really believe. Okay. And the third thing to watch out for is avoiding processing emotion. I just think that this is one of those things that... I have such a deep empathy and understanding for anybody who wants to avoid processing it because I totally understand. I was there for super long time too.

And I think that the more we can support ourselves and love ourselves through the processing of the emotion... I was going to say more comfortable, I would say less uncomfortable, I think is more accurate of a term, the less uncomfortable it tends to be. There are many days when I am feeling what I'm feeling and the narrative, like what I'm telling myself is, "It is just hard being a human adult. This is this hard. This is just hard. So let's just be in it. We don't have to try to escape it. We don't have to avoid it. We don't have to try to run away from it. Let's just be with this. This is just what we've got today. This is normal." I think normalizing that is really important because for so long, we've picked up this idea from just society at large, advertisements, everything, that if we're feeling bad, we're doing something wrong.

If we're experiencing a negative emotion, there's something wrong with us, we're doing it wrong, something's wrong with our life, we don't have something that we need. Whatever it is, we think that's going to be the solution to feeling better. And I promise you the solution to feeling better is being willing to feel those negative emotions when they're there. They're there, you're able to work yourself through them. And another big point for me is reminding myself this never lasts as long as I think it's going to. The more that I can stick with this, the sooner the good times come back again, the sooner the easier times come back again. But we cannot have it be always easy. It just doesn't work that way. When we're seeking ease all of the time, then we end up with more discomfort because we're looking for the short term ease in exchange for the long term discomfort.

And then the long term discomfort just builds up and builds up and adds up and compounds. And that's what we don't want. So we have to learn how to actually be with ourselves in the discomfort of it. So many of our members have shared wins or written in to let us know the amazing strides they've had. And one of my favorite things to read about is when they say, "I just had like the most hellacious call week," or just this really difficult experience that they had, where normally they would have just eaten their way through it, drank their way through it, or at the end of the call week or whatever, just had a total overeating fest in celebration of getting through all of it. And instead what they actually commit to doing is, "I'm just going to be with myself. I'm going to process these emotions as they come up."

And it's so fun to see how empowered they feel when they realize, "You know what? I did that. I processed the emotion and I even told myself I could still eat or drink after if I felt like I wanted to, and I did not even want to." The desire literally left them because they had taken care of themselves in different way. So it wasn't like, "Oh, I had to overcome the urge." It was like the urge left because they actually took care of the real problem, which is they were experiencing an emotion. And we could argue, "Is that even a problem?" I mean, it is if it's uncomfortable for a lot of us.

But if we can just recognize, "I can just be with myself, work through this. And then I actually feel better in the long term because now I didn't just overeat and feel sick to my stomach and know that I went against the things that are actually supportive of me and my body and my goals." You know that by processing those emotions and being with yourself, that you really are on your side, you're building that relationship with yourself where you're like, "Listen, I am here for you even in the hard times. I'm going to work through this all with you."

So I want to just really encourage you to focus on the processing of the emotion. In our program Weight Loss for Doctors Only, I mean, this is what we are teaching our clients to do. We actually, on coaching calls, walk them through this. This is a skill you have to learn how to do. And there's not just one way of doing it. Actually I teach in the program several, more than several ways of processing emotion.

But this is really a nice way to be able to do it basically, essentially anywhere. You can literally go into a call room, sit in your car, go into the bathroom stall and do this even for just a few moments if you need to.

The more that you do it, the more you build up the experience, the more you build up the evidence for yourself of what this does for you, the more willing you are to do it moving forward, the less reluctant you are, the more you realize, "You know what? I feel total rejection right now. And it feels like crap. And you know what? Okay, that's what we're going to do. Boom, it's on. Let's feel some rejection because I know what's on the other side of this. And the other side of this is the rejection goes away and I can actually move on with something else."

And then of course we want to change our thoughts and beliefs for things that are bigger, that come up again and again. If you really believe you're a terrible doctor, I'm going to take a guess that the result of that is not positive for you, especially if you're working as a doctor. Right? So yes, of course we want to work through that. Of course, we want to create a new self-concept, a new way of thinking about yourself within the role of a doctor, a new identity for yourself as a doctor. But in the meantime, we have to be processing that emotion as well. So do not please skip over the processing emotion part and try to just convince yourself to think something new in order to skip that hard part. I'm telling you, it's like, I wish I could just give everyone that experience, and I can, as long as you buy into the idea, the experience of thinking, "This is going to be the hardest thing in the world. I don't want to feel this. It's going to be awful."

Seeing how quickly it can go away and coming out the other side feeling better and just going like, "Oh my gosh. I think that's it. That's what they've been talking about. That's what she's been talking about. This is so worth it." So I want to encourage you this week to really give this a try. When something comes up, just give it a try. And it doesn't have to be something super intense, like shame. Maybe you're just a little annoyed. That could be a good one too. But make sure it's something that you have a real emotion about. You can do it with positive emotions too.

It's just that what we want to really build up on is knowing that whatever the negative emotion is, we can feel it and we can work through it, and this is normal, it's part of being a human being, nobody is above this. Anybody who tries to skip it is just taking part in compensatory behaviors that eventually end up biting them in the butt in some sort of way, shape or form.

All right. Have a great week. And I will talk to you next time. Thank you.