



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hello there, my friend. Episode 282. We are creeping closer to 300. So, so crazy and so fun. I'm so glad that you're here. I have a really good episode for you today. I'm excited to share this one with you. But, before we get going, I always hear that you like hearing about what's going on in my life. I have had plenty of people tell me that they've been going to more concerts lately because I've been talking about going, which I think is amazing. We need to support the arts and if you like music, you should get out there and get some tickets. Seriously, it is... Ah. One of the best ways to spend money, in my personal opinion.

Now, we did something this weekend that was new for us, definitely different, definitely silly, and just a lot of fun. So, it's kind of a long story how I found out about this, but I found out we were having something here in Milwaukee a couple days ago called the Bubble Run. And, you may have heard of it. They actually host these all over the country in the U.S. I'm not sure if they're in other countries, but they for sure have them in the U.S. If you're in another country, you might want to recruit them to come and set up a Bubble Run for you.

I could not believe how many people were there. I mean, I'm not really good at being able to judge crowds, but so many people, so many families, and I would say that the vast majority of people didn't run. It was mostly a walk for a lot of people, so if you're like, "Running? I don't run," not a problem at all. But, I am telling you how much fun... It was so much fun. So, I found out about this and I thought, "Well, let me see if I can find like a video of what this is actually like." And so, basically the deal is that it's a 5k, so it's three point one miles and they set it up so that periodically throughout this run, you basically walk through this huge pile of bubbles and they are differently colored, so there's like a blue one, a pink one, a green one and a yellow one, and then the first one you go through is just regular white, untinted.

And so, you... Everybody like lines up and they don't let everybody go at once, so they kind of let every people go in sort of sections so that it's not too many people at once. And, basically they've got these bubble makers hanging overhead in an arch and they're just like dropping down all of these bubbles and you can just run or walk through them. And then, as part of signing up, you get a white tee shirt and then the bubbles get all over the tee... The bubbles get all over everywhere. Like, literally everywhere. And then, the colored bubbles kind of over time sort of leave a little bit of a tint or a stain on the shirt, which is actually really pretty fun because everyone's shirt is a little different. It's kind of like a bubbled but like a bubble tie dye kind of a thing. It's actually... It was kind of neat to see that.

So, you may be thinking, "Oh my gosh. Like, could you breathe? Like, what is happening?." Well, I kind of figured out some hacks as we went along. The very last one, I was like, "I don't want to get any of this in my mouth." And, I guess actually the main issue was like if you could just jog through it, it really wouldn't be a big deal. But, we were not first in line. Let's just say. And so, there were a lot of kids who were just kind of playing in the bubbles and stuff, and so, as you were going through, you felt like you needed to walk because you didn't want to like trample on a kid and you might not be able to see them. And so, it was maybe just a little bit more difficult. But, what I figured out is if you go to the side where they have like a little bit of a fence, then you can kind of stick your head out to the side so you can still keep breathing but you still get to run through the bubbles.

It was... It's... It's literally ridiculous. Like, I'm kind of like, only in America could someone come up with this. But, it's literally this thing and it's everywhere. Anyway, I found this video on YouTube of someone doing it so I could get a better sense of what it was. Showed it to the kids. They were all like, "Yeah. We're in." And, we had a great time. So, it was actually at our state fairgrounds and within our state fairgrounds, they have a race car track. It's called the Milwaukee Mile and it was all on that race car track. So, some of the walking or running was on the track and the pit lane and stuff, which was pretty fun because we've become pretty big Formula One fans, so my kids were not... Not that you would ever have a Formula One race there, but my kids were like, "Oh, we're in the pit lane."

And then, all of the... The way they directed you for all of the bubbles that was like in the interior where the grassy area was, so... So, the bubbles were over the grass. And, they even have like a whole system of like salvaging the water and the bubbles afterward. Like, the whatever soapy whatever something or other afterward to make it more environmentally friendly and stuff. But, it was just like a good community activity outside. So many people. It was just like refreshing and kind of, you know, like heartwarming to just see all these people out there just doing something for the heck of it. Just have some fun.

And... And, I think they did raise money for a charity. Offhand, I cannot remember what the charity was, but part of your entry fee was that. So, anyway, check it out. Bubble Run. I think it might even be bubblerun.com. I'm not totally sure, but... But, check it out if you want something fun to do. And, if there's no Bubble Run near you, you know, maybe there's like a fun little race or walk or whatever that you can do. I know here for... Well, okay. So, the deal in Milwaukee is we have lots of different heritages and throughout the summer, we have various festivals pretty much every weekend and it's usually just like for different groups or different ethnicities. Like, there's German Fest and there's... There is a Fiesta Italiana and there is Pride Fest and there is like all the fests. There's like just a ton of different things. Plus, there's Summer Fest, which is basically the hugest music festival in the world is my understanding. Every year, which is super fun too and there's special grounds along Lake Michigan where they have it and it's super fun.

So, they're... At a different place, though, we also have basically... It's sort of like French Fest essentially, but they call it Storming The Bastille. So, their race is... They call it Bastille Days, but it's in July and the race is just a little five K and it's at night. They hold it at night and... And, it's just... Yeah. It's like in memory of storming the Bastille, which is just kind of fun and you don't even have to run it. You can just be outside having a good time.

So, maybe look for some things in your community, especially depending on, you know, COVID cautiousness and what you have going on. Being outside can be a great way to kind of get yourself back into some sort of arguably social things without feeling like you're cooped up inside with a bunch of people. I mean, you do you. Whatever you feel comfortable with. But, it's been... It was really fun.

Okay. Today, I want to talk to you about more about sleep. I've done an episode on sleep in the past, but I want to talk today about sleep more as a mindset issue and I feel like there's just so much talk about sleep and improving sleep and I've talked about it before too. But, in a lot of ways, I don't know that we really need like a lot more information. Like, we don't need more data to convince us to sleep more. It's really much more of a mindset issue. And, when I say we, I'm also largely talking about myself. So, this is kind of like a real time episode in the sense that this is something that I continue to work on. It's really truly been an issue for me for a very, very long time, getting enough sleep, and I'm actively working on it and I can't wait to share with you some new takeaways that I have that are making a difference for me and hopefully they'll make a difference for you too.

Now, I do feel... I kind of thought, should I even talk about some of the data on sleep and weight loss and weight gain? And, I thought, you know what? Let me just do a quick review. Nothing crazy. And, I do have a reason why I want to tell it to you, so... So, just a quick overview here. Sleeping less than seven hours a night on average increases your risk of weight gain, obesity, heart disease, depression and stroke. Okay? A lack of sleep increases your desire for energy dense foods and decreases your ability to resist them. Now, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about, you know, what I teach you to do is not have to resist them but obviously if you're well rested, it's helpful.

When you're sleep deprived, your body makes about 15% more ghrelin and about 15% less leptin, which leads to overeating. So, remember, ghrelin is the hormone that makes you hungry, so when you have more ghrelin, 15% more ghrelin, you are more hungry and when you have less leptin... Leptin is the hormone that helps you to feel satiated. Having less leptin makes you feel less satiated. So, you're hungrier and less easily satisfied. So, that leads to overeating.

And then, inadequate sleep is associated with an increased risk of obesity and then of course obesity can reduce your sleep quality, so it's kind of a little bit of this... This cycle that we can get into. So, just in case, you know, you didn't know, that is, you know, some pretty compelling reasons to be sleeping more. But, I think it's easy to understand that and then it can be really hard to apply it in your real life. I do just want to point out that when you hear stuff like this, like this kind of data, it's really easy from a mindset place, right? Because, I just told you some data. Now, we have to have thoughts about it. Right? We have to interpret it. What does it mean?

It's very easy for us to look at this and either start judging ourselves, blaming ourselves, or to start feeling kind of self-pity or disempowered. Like, well, yeah. Sleeping more than seven hours a night, but you don't know my job. You don't know what it's like when I take call. You don't know how I have to do things in house. You know, it's just never going to be possible for me to get that much sleep. Or, whatever your thoughts are about it. And, if that is the case, then we need to look at those thoughts. Right?

So often, we just decide things are impossible and as you know, and if you're new to the podcast, it'll just remind you or maybe explain for the first time that what happens is that your thoughts, the way you think about something, the way you interpret something, creates the way you feel. It creates your emotions. The way you feel determines how you act, what you do and what you don't do. And then, your actions create your results. Right?

So, there is this direct through line between the way you think, the way you interpret things, and the results you create. So, if you're listening to me saying that, going, "You know, there's just no possible way, Katrina. Like, I hear what you're saying and in an ideal world or if I had a different specialty or a different career, maybe that would be possible, but it's just not right now," then, you know, some... It's like yes and. That may be true and if you continue to think that way about it, you will continue to create that same result. You won't even be able to see any opportunities for that to change. Your mind will essentially be locked in on this isn't possible, which makes it impossible.

And, we think what's making it impossible is our schedule, the... You know, the pager, if you still carry a pager. I think we still just call it a pager. Right? Because, old habits die hard. You know, whatever it is. Maybe even, you know, you have children, small children who are not sleeping through the night or you have a sick relative that you have to take care of or something like that. It's just important to understand when we're telling what we believe to be the truth but by thinking about it in that way, we're unintentionally limiting ourselves in being able to create something new or even to try to make it just like one percent better. You know, we're not able to really see that.

So, I just do want to point out that that may be true and there could be a more useful way for you to think about it so that when opportunities for more sleep arise, you're able to take advantage of them. Or, it could be that you realize, "Well, yeah. You know what? I do end up taking in house call quite frequently. But, you know, while I'm sitting in the unit, rather than going to the call room and trying to lay down and sleep, I'm sitting there on my phone or I'm chatting away with the support staff. Like, maybe actually one of those opportunities is making the agreement with myself that even if I can't sleep, I'm going to rest or I'm going to try doing...."

You know, there's lots of different things. Meditation, yoga nidra. There's like tons of different things that you can do to still bring down that stress level, still be supporting your body, and maybe that will lead to sleep and maybe it won't and maybe five minutes later you'll be leaving to go back out to take care of somebody or answer a question and that's fine. But, the only way you'll even be open to figuring out a different option is by opening up your mind to the possibility that, you know, even within the constructs of the life that you're living, maybe there's still an opportunity for improvement.

So, that's the first mindset piece. Okay? We don't want to be using this information against ourselves. Like I said, I think everybody is kind of on the bandwagon of yes, sleep is important. Yes, we probably should be prioritizing it more. And, there may be plenty of you who are like, "Listen, Katrina. Like, I got problems but this is not one of them. I'm a really good sleeper." And, if that's the case, amazing. What you can do here is you can substitute in whatever it is that you are struggling with. Okay? If it's not sleep for you, then whatever it is that's a problem, just pretend that that's what I'm talking about today because you can still get some help with us.

So, just a quick little backstory for myself. I think probably, you know, when I was home and I had a bedtime and stuff and my parents were in charge of me and I listened to them, I think I had more regular... You know, regular sleep. But, you know, in high school and everything, I was staying up a lot, had all the activities and all the different things and there were many nights where I wasn't getting enough sleep, like going to bed late, getting up early, all of that. And then, I went to college and my roommate that I was just randomly paired with was this young woman who had a really interesting sleep schedule. She would stay up super super late every night and she would I guess... I don't know. I guess she just napped a lot during the day. I'm not really sure what the story was with her, how she ended up sleeping.

But, we were in this tiny little dorm room together. We had the same major and I just... I mean, you know, in defense of my little 18-year-old self, I just kind of thought, well, whoa. If she's staying up and studying, then I probably should be too. And so... And, I didn't have like, you know, a mask to make it dark for myself. Like, she had the lights on and it was hard to fall asleep. So, I would often end up staying up way too late and then be, you know, either missing class in the morning or dragging myself out of bed, finishing class in the morning, having to take a nap. Like, it was a disaster. Really, truly a disaster.

And, yeah. I mean, I just... I just guess I thought it was just okay. I don't know if I really even knew that it was really the problem that I think it is now. But, that was kind of the beginning of crazy sleep hours. Then, I... You know, that... Yeah. That kind of, you know... I mean, I didn't live with that young woman anymore but still, staying up late and sleeping in on the weekends and the whole thing. And then, of course, we know what happens with our medical training. Right? You know, it's staying up late studying for a test and then, you know, sleeping in when you can and then you start out on the wards and then it's just totally depends on which rotation you're on and all of that stuff.

So, I would say that for my whole entire life, adult life, I don't think that I've had any kind of super regular routine. And, even the way that sleep was modeled to me from my parents... Like, they would just doze in front of the TV at night and go to sleep too late and then be tired during the day, and so, it wasn't even modeled to me really about like proper good sleep hygiene.

So, I recognize this. I've actually been working on this for truly like decades in different angles, kind of thinking that because I like to sleep that I was lazy and like working through that and I don't believe that so much anymore. Then, of course, perimenopause hit and then I was like waking up drenched in sweat, so if you've been a longtime listener, you know that the chilly pad has literally saved my life and I know many of you listening, you're huge fans as well. You don't know what it is. There's also a version called the ooler, like a cooler only without the C. O-O-L-E-R. The one I use is called a chilly pad and it basically helps to pull the heat off of you while you're sleeping, the excess heat, which is like the best thing that's ever happened to me. Every time I travel and I don't have my chilly pad, I'm so sad.

So, there's definitely things that can be done. But, I still will find myself staying up too late. You know, might be watching a show. It might be, you know, just doing stupid crap. Basically nothing that's needed.

Just wanting to stay up. I will say that back when I was in practice before I had, you know, any meaningful coaching knowledge or had been really coached, I think a huge part of why I stayed up late was because my experience of my day to day life was, you know, really not that pleasant. So, I mean, of course there were those ups and downs, but like, I'm not the kind of mom who does well just like being home with the kids, little kids and like playing games on the floor and stuff like that. Like, as desperately as I wanted to be that mom who loved that, if I'm being honest, that's just not me. That's just not my thing.

And so, I'd be bored out of my gourd during the day if I was home with them and if I was at work, I was running around and all the things and giving, giving, giving and people-pleasing like crazy. It was so exhausting. And then, I would get home, get the kids to bed, and then it felt like it was me time and I didn't want that me time to end because I didn't feel like I had any other way of getting that time during the day. Like, I didn't have any other... I don't know. I think I just didn't even know that was something you could do or slash I thought it was kind of selfish, probably, at least on some level to do that.

So, I would end up staying up late, sometimes way too late, mostly because I didn't want to have to go to bed and then get up the next morning and go back to work. You know? It's just like but if I go to sleep now, the next time I'm conscious, it's going to be time to get up and go round again and I don't want to do that yet, so I'm going to stay up late.

So, that is not my life anymore to this point. Right? Like, I... I'm not practicing in that way, yet I still struggle. Still struggle with this. So, what really came up for me recently and the reason why I decided to do this episode is because I have a dear, dear friend who is amazing at her sleep. Like, I have witnessed it. She is just so good about getting to bed on time and it's not like she doesn't have a family or a busy life. Like, she's got all the things going on just like everybody else and she always, always, always gets to bed on time.

So, I texted her. I actually wrote down several of the things that she texted me back. I basically texted her and said, "I need you to teach me how to go to sleep on time." And, this is how she responded. I think this is so helpful because this just shows her mindset. Okay? How her thinking... Like, what kind of thinking creates the result of going to bed at a regular... You know, the way you're supposed to do it, supposed to in quotes, the way you're supposed to do it, which is around the same time every night, getting up around the same time every morning. Of course, when you're a doctor and you take call, there's going to be fluctuations in that, so we just have to work with that.

But, in general, when we're able to get our sleep, you know, how do we approach that? So, I said, "I need you to teach me how to go to sleep on time." She said, "You aren't excited enough about a good night's sleep." And, that kind of hit me. I was like, you're right. You're 100% right. Right? She is so excited to go do it. Anything you're excited to go do, the resistance to doing it is a lot lower. Right? Or, non-existent. Non-existent, possibly.

So, I really let that sink in. I was like, I think you're right. I think I'm not excited enough about a good night's sleep because in my mind, going to bed is sort of like punishment. Right? Like, you don't get to have fun anymore. You know, like the party is over. Back to work tomorrow.

That's, you know, like less fun than you know doing the spelling bee on The New York Times app or whatever the thing that I'm doing or I convince myself that this is actually really good for my brain and is warding off dementia. These are the thoughts I have justifying what I do.

She... Then, she wrote to me, "You have to make sleep more compelling than your phone, a show or working." And, I was like, "You're 100% right." The way I think about going to sleep and actual sleep does not make it more compelling than the other things that I end up spending my time doing. I mean, isn't it so clear and obvious? Like, so think about how this is the case for you. I'm not making sleep more compelling than a show, my phone or work. I was like... I mean, light bulbs going off like, like crazy. Right? I'm like, oh my gosh.

So, then I told her, "I need to know like how you think about this. I understand the concept of like you get yourself ready. You get in bed. You go to sleep. You know, I understand that. But like, how do you think about it? I want to know what your thoughts are." So, are you ready? Here are some really good thoughts that you can borrow if you'd like to or just, you know, take. You don't need to return them if you struggle with this or you can also... Like I said, you can extrapolate this to something else that you struggle with. These are all things that she just texted me. I just said, "Tell me what you think," and this is what she said.

She said, "Without sleep, I can't do anything fun or valuable." This is what she believes. Like, if I believe that I can't do anything fun or valuable unless I get enough sleep, like, I will go to sleep. I see why she's so compelled to go to sleep. She said, "I can't function without sleep and I love feeling well-rested and refreshed, so it's non negotiable." Non-negotiable. Could it be non-negotiable? Could going to sleep on time just be non-negotiable where it's like a loving thing to go and do that? I think that's so great. Right? Because, I was saying, like then the next day is work and then whatever. But, guess what makes work a lot better? Guess what makes managing your mind around work a lot better? Not being exhausted. I have a lot of evidence to support this being true. Okay?

But, even the thought, I can't function without sleep. I thought, what if I started thinking that about myself? This was the next one. It's so good. She said, "Without sleep, I'm useless." I was like, oh man. If I thought I was useless without sleep, I would go to bed. I could actually decide to start believing that and start practicing that thought. And, she said, "When I don't get sleep, I get sick and I hate being sick." Now, I personally have a lot of evidence that that isn't the case for me but I know it is for a lot of other people. And so, as a prevention, right? It's like, I need to get that sleep. I need to take good care of myself so that I don't have to deal with the consequences later.

So, these are all those thoughts that she offered to me, which I think are so, so, so amazing. So, the way that you can apply these of course is by practicing them daily, potentially writing them out, saying them out loud to yourself. You can find apps for affirmations that you can type in your own ones and have them just like popping up on your phone to remind you, especially in the evening time. I mean, I use an Oura ring which I really do enjoy. It's spelled O-U-R-A if you haven't heard of it. I resisted getting one for like years. I was like, I just don't think I'm going to be that into this, and I actually love it. I've had it for about six months now and I'm super into it and it even reminds me, like, hey, it's time to start winding down. I'm like, oh yeah. I should start winding down. And then, like, before I know it, I'm up too late again.

So, it's like we can put together all the kind of hacks and stuff to get us into bed but you know what makes it a lot easier is just believing that you can't do anything fun or valuable if you don't get that sleep. Right? Or, you can't function or you're useless if you don't have that sleep. Right? You could decide for that person who's on call in the unit is just kind of staying up chatting with everybody... What if you just decided, like, I'm just going to be useless tomorrow if I don't even at least lay down and rest? Or, I remember my body just being upright, you know, more. My ankles, my body, my legs felt heavy. Like, I just... My body did not feel good if I did not lay down horizontally at least somewhat, you know, when I was taking call overnight.

Like, there's things like that when you get really clear about it and then you repeat them to yourself. You remind yourself again and again about it. That starts making the sleep or the laying down or the resting that much more compelling and then it's much more compelling than being on your phone or watching a show or working. I'm telling you. If I had had a cell phone back in the days when I was a resident, I probably would have never slept. If I had any time to lay down, I probably would have been watching a show, thinking I deserved it, knowing me.

And so, you know, and I've tried all the things. Like, I'm not going to watch a show. I'm only going to read. I can stay up too late reading, too. I mean, I could stay up too late doing anything because it's not even so much about that. It's just that the sleep isn't, you know, more compelling than all of that. And so, that's the personal work that I'm working on. I know I so often hear from everybody like thinking that I've got it all figured out and I don't ever work on anything. That is not the case. This is something I'm still working on and often I'll get into like a really good jag and things are going really well and then what often kind of messes it up for me is travel. So, that's what I'm working on, is like the re-entry. You know, coming back from somewhere and then picking up those habits and behaviors just as I had been doing before.

So, there's always room for improvement, my friends. Always room for improvement. So, I want to suggest as I wrap this up you really think about sleep as a mindset issue. Yes, there's all these other things you can do and there's a million people who are much more skilled and expert at that than I am, but what I can help you with is the way that you think about it and understanding that that way you think about it is creating your results. I understand that when I think that watching a show is more compelling than sleeping, then I stay up too late. You know? And, the next day I regret it and then my Oura ring tells me like, "Hmm. Sorry. You didn't recover very well." I'm like, "I know."

So, anyway, give this a try. Have a chance to really just think about what do you think about sleep. When you're thinking about it, you know, winding down or getting ready for bed, like, what are the objections? What is the resistance about? What is it that prevents you...? Like, what's standing in the way between you and the bed? That's... Those are going to be the questions I'm going to be asking myself and working on and if you struggle with sleep the way I do, I think that that will be super helpful for you as well if you... Again, like I said, if you struggle with something else, then of course make sure to sub in whatever it is. What's standing between you right now and the behavior or action that you want to be taking?

Remember, thoughts and feelings are what create actions. Okay? So, you have to find out what you need to feel. Like my friend said, she's excited to go to bed. So, you can think, like, what thoughts could I think? What beliefs could I have that would make me truly, genuinely be excited to go to bed? You know, maybe it's amazing sheets. Maybe it's, you know, really good jammies. Like, whatever it is, it's worth trying out because sleep is so important.

Okay. Have a wonderful rest of your week. Take care. Maybe check out the Bubble Run in your area and I'll talk to you next time.

Bye bye.