



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, welcome my friend to the podcast today, I'm so glad you're here. How is the longest day of the year for you? It's June 21st, the day that this episode is going live and it's also a special day in our household because it is the birthday of my second son.

And so, he's turning 11 today, which is really kind of weirding me out. I'm like "What's happening? No!" But anyway, it's still very fun. A fun time to have a birthday, for sure. I was always excited for him that he got that special summer solstice birthday.

So, anyway, I hope you are doing something fun to enjoy the long days. And if you're in the Southern hemisphere, which we do have listeners who are, well, I hope you're having a great shortest day of the year, longest night of the year. That's how it works. But anyway, I hope that you are doing well as well.

Alright, let's talk about food and eating FOMO. Do you know what FOMO is? I think everybody does now. I think that's like in the lexicon of the general public. But in case you don't, FOMO stands for fear of missing out.

And so, this came when a client asked about how to handle FOMO at parties when everyone is eating, but me. And I thought what a great podcast episode, because I am confident that is not just my clients who want to know how to handle this. Everybody listening to the podcast is going to want to know about this too.

So, let's break this down a little bit more. We can all imagine that, we've all been to an event or a party and it seems like everybody is enjoying, consuming something that we feel like we should be able to have. Maybe, we've told ourselves we can't have it, maybe for whatever reason, it's just not on plan for us. And then we feel bad about it.

Because the fear of missing out is that by missing out, you feel bad. That something bad is happening. So, I think that fear of missing out is really this inherent scarcity, it's based in scarcity, which then leads to over-desire, which then drives a heightened craving or emotional response. So, let me break that down for you a little bit.

So, scarcity means there's not enough to go around. So, inherent scarcity means they're having it. Like for whatever reason, we don't think we can have it or there's not enough or whatever. So, the people at the party are having the thing and I'm not having it, which means that I'm somehow less well off. Somehow, my needs are not being met, somehow, I'm not okay.

By thinking about it in that way, about something that our brains think is really important, it just fuels our over-desire. Over-desire is when our brains overemphasize the importance of food. Because whatever it is at this party, you're not going to starve to death if you don't eat it. I think we can agree in this scenario that we're talking about, this is not life or death.

Your needs can be met in other ways that are arguably probably more supportive for your body than this would be. But still, the brain is confused, totally focusing on over-desire. It's like, "I want it and I want it bad." That then drives that heightened craving or emotional response. What that can look like is deeply wanting to consume the thing.

Having strong urges, finding yourself really — often, the chatter in your brain is negotiations, trying to convince yourself this doesn't really matter, you'll do better tomorrow. It can't be that big of a deal, everybody else is having it, like kind of talking you out of not having it. Or that emotional response, which often, is related to self-pity.

Like "Poor me, it's not fair. No one should have to live like this. It's so hard, I'm probably never going to be able to do this anyway, so I might as well just eat it," which turns into us usually eating it.

So, it's kind of cute and funny to be like, "Oh, FOMO" but this is a real issue. I can remember many times where this came up for me. And so, I want to kinda give you an example that's based in my personal experience, not something like this one time kind of a thing, but definitely experiences that I've had that I am quite sure you've had as well.

I'm going to talk about a brownie at a party. So, you're at a party and there's this tray of brownies there. Now, you can literally sub out whatever you want. If brownies aren't your thing, maybe it's chips and dip or chips and guac, or some other savory thing. Maybe, it's an alcoholic beverage of some sort, that for sure, can be something that can be difficult for people.

Or maybe, it's some other form of sweets. Maybe you're not a chocolate person, but if there's something else, then that's your thing. So, just for the sake of this example, I'm going to use the brownie, but you sub in whatever it is.

So, I went to a party and they had lots of different food there and some of it was kind of interesting. Like sometimes, they'll have like grocery store dip and like the tray of veggies where like the baby carrots just look kind of slimy and gross. Like none of that is the problem. That's not the thing we have FOMO over.

But, then we notice, we spy the corner of the table, there is a gorgeous plate of brownies and we're like, "Shoot, crap. That's going to be the thing." And everybody is walking around with a brownie and they're going, "Mmm..." like looking like they're enjoying it so much. And then your friend walks by and goes, "Ooh, have you had one of these? Oh my God, totally worth it." And you're like, "Really? Why do you have to say that to me right now? Why do you have to share that with me?"

So, how do we break this down?

So, the first thing that I want to make sure that you address here is asking yourself whether this is something that you actually really like, because just because other people really like it, does not mean that you necessarily do.

So, in my personal opinion, this may be sacrilege for some of you. But in my personal opinion, there is no better way to ruin a brownie than to put nuts in it. Like I am not interested, I do not want to eat that brownie. I don't care how good it looks if it has nuts in it.

And because as you know, my personal rule for myself and what I encourage you to have as a personal rule, is that I don't eat food that doesn't taste good to me. I don't like nuts and brownies, so I can remind myself, I don't even like that food. So, I am happy that all these other people are loving it, but that's not even a thing for me. I don't enjoy that.

Or say you had some sort of food allergy, you could think about it that way. Or say, you had some sort of a gluten allergy or something. You're like if it's not gluten-free, like it's just not for me. Or just something that you know you just don't like. Your preferences are that you do not need that thing, it's just not your thing.

So, you can just know like, you know what, if I'm going to eat a brownie, it's not going to be one with nuts in it. Like that's for darn sure. Also, interestingly, brownies sometimes have frosting on them. Those are also not my favorite. And I'm not like as morally opposed to frosting as I am to nuts in brownies. But my preference is for brownies to just be themselves. I think for me, myself, my personal taste, that's what tastes the best.

So, if there's brownies that have frosting on them, also remind myself, "Oh, you know what though? Like it would taste good, but not as good as my brain thinks it's going to taste because I actually don't prefer brownies that have frosting on them.

So, sometimes, we just got to get clear with ourselves. Like that food isn't even something I would consider until like a second ago when I walked in this door. Just being really real with ourselves. Like that's not even something you like, this is not an issue. There's no reason to feel like you're missing out on something because you don't enjoy it. And by not having it, everybody else gets to enjoy it more, lucky them, so amazing.

Now, then sometimes, we look at it and we're like, "No, this is prepared exactly how I like it." Like one of the ways I enjoy a brownie is when it has kind of that like shimmery top and it's got some chocolate chips mixed in, that's a good brownie. I do enjoy that. And I'm not trying to tempt you here, but just trying to explain to you how there are times where we're like, "Ooh, that is like the exact consistency that I like. Like this is a really good brownie."

Now, we have to start looking at what have we been telling ourselves about food like this. So, if you have been trying to lose weight and approaching yourself — and let me just say, this could be with weight maintenance as well.

If you've been maintaining weight and approaching yourself with a narrative of something along the lines of you can't have that, you shouldn't have that, you're not allowed to have that, then scarcity automatically comes up. Because first of all, it's just not even true. You are allowed to eat whatever you want. As an adult in this world, you can purchase, make, acquire any food that you want to, you will not go to jail, it is okay. You can do that.

But when we tell ourselves the untruth that we can't have it, we shouldn't have it, that that's not for people like us, we're not allowed to have it — it fuels that over-desire. It makes our brains get really confused and go, "Well, wait, if they're all having it (everybody at the party) and I can't, shouldn't, I'm not allowed to, that really sucks because there's these rules. And by following these rules, I'm not going to get my needs met, I'm not going to get this amazing thing. Everybody else is going to get this amazing pleasure," whatever we think is going to happen and we're not going to be able to have it.

And so, then, we build up resistance: "I'm not supposed to have that, resist, resist." Like literally think of your hands like pushing out against it. And when it's around, when we finally are around it, the urge that we feel to eat it bumps up against that resistance.

So, if you are telling yourself you can't or shouldn't eat brownies and brownies are not around, you don't have to put a lot of resistance up. I mean, maybe when you're walking through the grocery store aisles or whatever or through the bakery or something, but it's probably not something that's coming to mind all of the time.

If it is, it's probably just because you have been eating them a lot or something like that, where your brain's like, "Ooh, this is this habit." But generally, you don't have to resist that much.

But when they are around and you have been telling yourself this narrative, your desire to have it, that over-desire, meets that resistance of you saying "I'm not allowed to have it," and the more you resist, the more the intensity of that urge increases.

So, the more you push against it, tell yourself you can't have it, that you shouldn't be wanting that, who was the jerk who brought that stuff — the more your desire increases, the more the urges and cravings increase.

That's when we start to feel like I'm out of control at a party. Everyone's eating it, I want it so bad. I just found myself eating it. And we don't even realize how we're creating it. Then we give credit to the food for sort of "making us eat it." And of course, the food didn't do anything, it just sat there as an inert object.

What happened was our brains kind of got hijacked and before we knew it, we were like, "I just need a relief from this, I'm just going to eat." So, what we need to do in this kind of scenario is we need to decrease the resistance to the food. And by decreasing our resistance to the food, it decreases our desire and it decreases our urges.

So, you might be like, wait, but if I'm not resisting it, then I'll just eat it. But that is not how this has to go. You can decide that you're not going to have something and not resist the fact that it's there. This all comes from the internal narrative that you have in your mind.

So, when you tell yourself you can't have something, you shouldn't have it, you're not allowed to have it, we've established that that's not true. It's actually a lie that you tell yourself that makes you feel like your needs will not be met. That you're not being well-taken care of which increases the desire and the urges and increases that resistance when those things are around.

What we really need to remind ourselves is we can eat whatever we want when we choose to, but we can also have some guidelines for ourselves.

So, here's an example: I can eat brownies whenever I want to. All I have to do is plan for them in advance. I have to make sure they're my absolute favorite in terms of how they're prepared and what ingredients are in there. When I eat them, I only eat them if I'm in a positive emotional state. So, no negative emotions being dealt with or avoided by eating.

And then when I do eat them, I slowly savor every bite. I do not gobble it down, I don't try to empty the pan. I really taste every morsel and bit of that. And then my agreement with myself is that I stop eating it the minute I notice that the pleasure I'm getting from the taste of the brownie begins to decrease.

So, if you think about the pleasure you get from food, it's kind of like a bell curve. You have that first bite ... well, maybe it's not even a bell curve, maybe it starts up high and then dips down. But for those first few bites, the pleasure that you're receiving that you're experiencing is very, very high.

And then there comes this point, like this sort of tipping point where the bite you took, this latest bite, taste ever so slightly less good as the bite before it. This is something that you have to be paying attention for. This is a skill to develop: "Am I still even enjoying this? Or could I actually stop?"

I mean, raise your hand if you have continued eating something that's "special" or drinking something, even though if you're really being honest, you didn't want it anymore and it didn't even really taste that good anymore. My hand is raised right now. I've done it thousands of times, I promise you. So, so, so many times.

You're finishing a huge bowl of ice cream, your tongue is numb, you can't even taste it anymore, yet you're still eating it. So, we have to develop this agreement with ourselves where we let ourselves know, I absolutely can have brownies, but they're going to be homemade and warm out of the oven exactly the way I like them.

And I'm going to make sure that I have a little time to myself, nobody's pestering me or bugging me. I'm in a really good place emotionally. And then I'm just going to squeeze all the pleasure I can out of this until the pleasure has peaked, and then I'm done with that.

And the good news is, is you don't have to get again into fear of missing out, the scarcity; like "This is my chance, I need to finish the whole pan" because if you want some another day, you'll just make them again. This is something that I remind myself of on a regular, regular basis. There's no reason to overeat that because I can have it again anytime I want to — anytime I want to.

And if it's something that's extra, extra special where you're like, "But no, I can't have it anytime I want to. I can't make it or I'm in a special place" or like whatever the thing is, then what you can do is you can wrap it up, take it home with you and plan for it the next day, and then the rules still apply.

You make sure it's your absolute favorite, you slowly savor every bite. You make sure you're in that positive emotional state and you stop the minute the pleasure starts to decrease. And if something comes up for you then going, "No, but I want more and I don't want it to be over," that's when you focus on loving on yourself, basically recognizing and validating, "Of course, it's normal to want more. That was so good."

The thing that we have to remember and pay attention to is it's the amount of pleasure is going down. It's not going to taste any better than it already has. So, we can have this another time, or especially if it really is something that you're like, "I don't know that I could ever have this again" — what I like to remind myself of is that there are so many amazing things to eat in this world, this is only one of them.

There's literally millions of amazing things to eat in this world, this is just one of them. If I don't get to have a chance to have this, that is okay, because there's so many other great things to eat. Even if I don't get to have it at all, it's okay, because I eat food that tastes good to me, I take care of my needs, I take excellent care of myself.

There's no need then to be resisting and creating that increased desire and urge and spending any time fearing that you're missing out on something, because the way you miss out on something is the way you think about it. If you don't want it, you're not missing out. You're only having a problem with missing out if your brain is thinking about it in a certain way.

So, this is a little bit more advanced skill type of stuff here. If you're kind of like, "Hmm ..." I would suggest that you go to the *Back to Basic* series, you can search for those and maybe go through that series. This builds on some of that foundation, but this is how you create a way of living your life as a normal human being, going to all the places where food and possibly alcohol exist, and still taking excellent care of yourself, and it just not being a big deal.

Like what other people are eating doesn't even factor into what's going on for you. People tell you this food is amazing, this wine is amazing, and you check in "Is that what I want?" But that only really works when your desire is at an appropriate level. So, learning to reduce your over-desire is such an important part of this process of losing weight and keeping it off.

Alright. So, the next party, the next event, especially now that it's summer, at least in the Northern hemisphere and there's all these events, this is going to be something great for you to practice. Of course, it can be good to have guidelines and plan what you're going to do in advance, but sometimes, you don't know what's going to be at the party, what they're going to have. You also need tools and skills to utilize when that happens in the moment, and this is one of those.

Alright, enjoy this beautiful solstice day, whichever solstice you're on, and I will check back in with you next week. Bye-bye.