



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

[00:00:08] Welcome to the Weight Loss for Busy Physicians podcast. I'm your host, master Certified life and weight loss coach, Katrina Ubell, M.D. This is the podcast where busy doctors like you come to learn how to lose weight for the last time by harnessing the power of your mind. If you're looking to overcome your stress, eating and exhaustion and move into freedom around food, you're in the right place. Well, hello there, my friend. Welcome to today's podcast and thanks for joining me. I'm so glad that you're here with me today. I'm going to be answering a question that I get a lot from people as they are working on stopping overeating.

People are like, Yes, I'm on board. I understand it's emotional eating. I understand I shouldn't be doing it. And then stopping [00:01:00] overeating, stopping emotional eating kind of creates almost like a void in their lives, like a time void, an activity void like they literally don't know how to spend their time. And I think this is sadly more common than we realize. When we're young, we have lots of ways to fill our time, right? And even when we're bored, our parents or whoever we're around will tell us, like, you can do this, you can do that, or, you know, give us some chore to do. And then instead of doing that chore, we'll find something else. We'll get creative. But as adults, it can get really easy to fall into these patterns and these habits of just doing the regular stuff.

[00:01:38] So say you've got like your work stuff that you do. You've got your home obligations that you do. Maybe that involves caring for other people, maybe it doesn't. Maybe it involves caring for animals or, you know, having some other obligations like that. And then when those things are all handled and taken care of, you know, maybe you have some additional friend or family responsibilities. When those things are all done, then what's [00:02:00] left? And typically that's when we are eating right. We're

sitting around at night on the weekend and filling up on food. And so when we're not filling up on food anymore, then it can feel like there's, like I said, like a void, like a hole, like what are you supposed to do? And it can actually be pretty uncomfortable.

So I want to talk to you today about what to do when you're not eating. And it was interesting actually titled this and then I'm like, oh, I wonder what happens if you Google this? And actually what came up was the Google was thinking that I was talking about like not eating enough, you know, like, you know, somehow undernourished or restricting yourself. I was like, no, that's not exactly what I mean. So no help there. I'll just tell you what I mean. And you know what I think you should be concerning yourself with when you are no longer overeating or working to stop overeating, there's something you want to be aware of, something you want to be cautious about so that you don't end up substituting [00:03:00] one activity that creates problems for you with another activity that might create problems for you.

[00:03:06] So what I mean is, you know, so maybe you're not overeating anymore. So what are you doing? What a lot of people end up doing is things like shopping more and that might be in person. Or often it's more online. Maybe you're spending more time on social media of some sort. Maybe you are drinking more, you know, or consuming other substances, or maybe you're just watching more shows, you know, kind of spending more time in front of a screen, kind of zoning out. And, you know, none of these things in general, like are a bad thing, right?

It's just that when we start to really overly rely on them, like lean on them a bit too much, they can create problems for us and get to a point where really the way that we're interacting with them no longer serves us. So then now we're in a similar position, right? Like food itself is not bad, but when we over rely on it, it can become a problem for us. So we don't want [00:04:00] to recreate a similar situation. And those things like the shopping, the social media, the shows and even, you know, other substances that we can use, they're readily available, really easy to access. They take very little of our time and effort to engage with them.

[00:04:16] And so it makes sense that that would be something that, you know, those are the first things that we basically turn to. And so what I want to offer to you are some things that you can do not like a list of actual activities as such, but a way for you to

think about what those activities might be for you, some things for you to kind of consider and brainstorm around and as I was thinking about this, like the first word that came to mind for me was hobbies. And the thing with hobbies is I feel like hobbies. That word creates some problems with some people, I think.

I think it did with me a little bit too. I felt like kind of like a lot of pressure and it felt like it would be a lot of work. And, you know, it's funny, I'll just speak for myself. [00:05:00] I felt like hobbies end up meaning a lot of clutter in my house. Maybe that's because I have a very, very creative mother who does beautiful, beautiful, creative work. And I have just seen my whole life, like when you really go down deep rabbit holes in certain kinds of creative pursuits, there's often a lot of stuff that accompanies that. And I don't like having a lot of stuff in my house that I like having things much neater and tidier and a lot of empty space.

[00:05:32] So to me it sort of felt like, yeah, but if I do a hobby, then I'm going to have to have a whole bunch of stuff I don't want. Well, so that would prevent me from engaging in any hobbies, right? So we can call these hobbies. That's, I think, hobbies. The things we typically think of as hobbies are part of the activities we're going to be talking about, but it's not all of them. And so I think a better descriptor of what we're talking about is more doing things [00:06:00] that fill you up inside. Okay? So whether that's a hobby or something, you wouldn't call a hobby, but still an activity that serves you. That's what we're aiming for here.

So doing things that fill you up inside. I would argue that excessively shopping does not fill you up inside, right? More stuff actually creates more problems for us. Once you have the things that you need and everything looks beautiful and your closet is, you know, containing, you know, clothes that properly fit you and express your personality and that kind of thing. Like more of that does not actually make you happier. It's kind of like there's data that shows that from a certain point, like if you're in abject poverty, then certainly more money does make you happier and make you more content. But then at a certain point it actually levels out. It kind of like tapers out and more money doesn't actually make you any happier at all.

[00:06:57] And I think it's similar with, you know, food. [00:07:00] Obviously, eventually you end up you know, if you don't have any food, it's not good. Once you have some,

yeah, you feel better. And then when you have more and more, you actually feel worse and worse. And at the same is the case with substances, social media shows, TV and stuff like that. More and more shopping like those kind of consumption types of activities and behaviors. So let's talk about ways to think about doing things that fill you up inside, like how can you find those things? Because if you think about it, what are you asking the food to do? You are asking the food to fill you up inside, literally and figuratively. So right.

Eating food does fill you up inside, right? You end up feeling full like your stomach is full. But usually when we're eating at night or eating during these times when we're doing this anyway, when we're over eating or emotionally eating, we're not eating out of physical hunger anyway. It's not because our bodies actually need food. So there's something else. There's another emptiness that we're trying to fill up or trying to make go away. And that's often like an emotional [00:08:00] emptiness, right? There's some sort of emotional experience that we're having and we want it to be different. So rather than processing the emotions and actually changing our thinking or doing things that actively and positively change our emotions, we're just trying to change the experience that we're having in our bodies.

[00:08:18] Like if I'm feeling a lot of stomach distension, I'm feeling very full, then I maybe won't feel the resonating experience of that emotion in my body. What I mean is like sometimes people talk about an emotion, like a vibration in your body, and this really just, you know, a series of chemicals in your body that creates an experience in your body that eventually goes away. Because, of course, our bodies are always going back to homeostasis and processing different things that are released.

But what we're trying to do is we're trying to change that state. We want to feel differently inside. And so we're using, you know, abdominal distension as the way of doing that. And there are lots of other ways. So let's talk about what they could be. The first thing I want to [00:09:00] offer to you is that I really, really, really want to encourage you to do nothing work related for this. What I often hear is like, Yeah, what I really should be doing instead of watching this show is reading medical journals.

No. I mean, might it help you to read some medical journals? Maybe. You know, that's a totally separate issue. That's not what we're talking about here, because you are never

going to really feel excited about reading those medical journals. If you did, you would already be doing it. So it's kind of like a punishment.

[00:09:35] It's like you don't get to do fun things. You don't get to enjoy yourself. You have to go read journals. No, that's not what we're doing. So I would just really, really encourage you to have the things that you take part in and what we're talking about here, not be work related at all. And I also want to encourage you to think about ways for you to use your brain in different ways [00:10:00] or another way than what you're used to. So let me give you an example of how this has happened for me since earlier this year, really. So I learned to knit from my mom.

I think I can't even totally remember. I think it was maybe the end of high school, beginning of college for sure. Beginning of college. And then for a couple of years I did a lot of knitting and basically knit all my friends in college, you know, hats and mittens and scarves. And then again it was like kind of like the stuff like, where is that supposed to go? Like, how many hats do you need? Like, how many mittens do you need? It just seemed a little excessive. So I stopped doing it and then I didn't do it for at least 20 years. And the only way that it even got back on my radar is that last year. So this was in 2022. The Canadian Women in Medicine Conference actually had this little session on like an introduction to knitting.

[00:10:57] And I was there anyway, and I was like, Oh my gosh, I haven't [00:11:00] knit in so long. I should go and do that. That might be fun. And they gave you materials and stuff and it didn't take long and it came back to me and I was like, You know, this actually is pretty fun. And so on the way home, on the flight home, and it was a pretty long flight because the conference was in I think it was in Victoria, British Columbia. I worked on that project a little bit more and thought, Oh, this is really fun. Like maybe I could get into this a little bit more.

Then I got home and I promptly didn't touch it again at all because I got busy doing other things and just didn't do it, you know, like how these things happen. And then what happened was earlier this year, I mean, maybe it was even the end of last year, but earlier this year my mom meets up with several of her friends at this awesome bed and breakfast in Michigan every year, usually once or twice a year. And they get together and they quilt like day and night into the wee hours and cooked amazing food. And they

get to all hang out and have social time together. [00:12:00] But they also really get a lot done on the projects that they're doing. So they bring all of their stuff.

[00:12:03] Their cars are packed to the gills with all of their equipment, and at this bed and breakfast they have a whole separate outbuilding that can be used and has like really good tables and a lot of outlets and good lighting and like all the things that they need. So they've been doing this for many, many, many, many years. And my mom had always said, hey, you know what? It would be so fun for you to come to the Rustic Gate sometime Like that would be so great. And it just never worked out time wise. And it always ended up having some sort of, you know, obligation or conflict.

And then even for this spring, I was going to try to go and then I had a speaking gig and so couldn't go. Well, they ended up changing it. They changed it to a different date. And I thought, oh my gosh, I can go that date. Actually, I can go and do it. I'm going to come. I'm going to finally do it. Just kind of really thinking like, you know, this will be something that eventually, some day I'll probably regret that I never did. So I'm going to go. So I do not quilt. I know how I have [00:13:00] been taught. I do know how to use a sewing machine, but I just really didn't want to start a quilting project. It was just a couple of days. I had to come a little bit late.

[00:13:08] I don't remember why. I think I actually had been somewhere else and then kind of did a quick turnaround and went there. And so I thought like, what's a project that's kind of small? Doesn't take up a lot of space, is something that I already have some skill level at and could be just kind of easy. And I thought, Oh, maybe I should knit. And then I'd also spent a weekend with a friend maybe a month prior, and she had brought her knitting project with I didn't even know that she was knitting. So throughout the weekend she was knitting and I was like, Oh, that's so neat.

And I was asking her more questions about what she'd made, and she showed me different things and different patterns she's used and stuff. Like, I didn't know how to read a pattern. I didn't know how to do anything. My mom just basically had helped me back in the day. And so I thought, Oh, this would be maybe a fun thing for me to do at this retreat with my mom. Like I could do some knitting and I could see how it was just a fun little side thing [00:14:00] that my friend did just for herself. Like just a little fun thing for herself. Like no pressure, no deadlines, like just something fun. And so I thought,

okay, that's it, I'm going to knit something. But I also don't want to just like knit the proverbial scarf.

[00:14:16] Like, let me actually do something different than I haven't made before. So I found a shawl pattern that I thought that I could do that had a little bit of some details of some things that I didn't know how to do yet. But mostly I knew how to do it. And so I started working on that. And throughout the course of getting that done, I kind of fell more and more in love over the last many months with just these kind of creative projects. It was something that I hadn't really realized was missing in my life, and once it was there and available for me, I was just like, Oh, this is really good.

Now what's interesting is years and years and years ago, my mom had met a woman who was a pediatric intensivist who [00:15:00] went to like some sort of quilting retreat that, you know, they kind of they didn't live in the same place, but they had met and met each other several years in a row at the same retreat. And that woman was a big quilter. And she had always said, like, you need to have something outside of your work, you need to have something else for yourself. So my mom had very frequently mentioned that to me, and I was like, right on top of all of my other obligations, like, I don't know what I'm going to do that. Like literally one would do that.

[00:15:26] But this whole knitting thing worked out for me because I was realizing like, no, I can literally just knit like one row and depending on your project, one row can take you, you know, 5 minutes or 10 minutes. Like it can be really, really short. And I learned how to read a pattern. I'm like, Oh, wait, I can do this. This actually isn't that hard. And so I finished up that shawl. I was really proud of myself, even learned how to block it and weave in the ends and like actually finish it. And so then I've started on my second shawl, my next shawl, which is different, a little bit more complicated in some different ways, kind of learning some additional skills. [00:16:00]

And I got to choose some really beautiful colors in the yarn. And it's just brought out this other part of me that I didn't even know needed feeding, so to speak. It's been really, really fun. A different way to use my brain. An opportunity to use my hands. In a creative way, but then there's no deadline, there's no pressure to get this done. And so, like, one of the things I was going to suggest to you is like, whatever you decide to do, you know, just make it for fun. Like, don't make it like, well, then have to get this done

because this is going to be a gift for so-and-so or, you know, their baby is coming and it's a gift for the baby.

[00:16:33] I mean, you can do that if you want to, But what I'm talking about here is just enjoyment for the sake of enjoyment, just a creative pursuit without a deadline. You know, maybe you're a surgeon. You use your hands all the time, so maybe you don't need something that helps you to, you know, use your hands more. But maybe there's some other creative pursuit that could be really nice for you. My kids school, their art program is really pretty fantastic. And so every year, at least [00:17:00] once, they'll do some sort of clay type of art project.

And so she's worked with Clay a lot, but what they don't have is a wheel like a pottery wheel, and she would really like to learn how to do that. And so I've found a couple places near here where they offer that. And I was thinking I'm like, you know, that maybe could be a fun thing to do. Just like, learn how to do that. Like no pressure, no stress, don't have to, like, you know, create tableware for my entire family or anything like that. Just something fun to do. Just something different. Like maybe we could do it together. That would be really fun. So my point is this is something that I kind of fell into and didn't really realize. Now, my rule for myself is that I'm not allowed to buy any yarn until I have an actual project that I know I'm going to use it for.

[00:17:46] Not just buying yarn because it's pretty, and then someday maybe I'll use it. Like the whole concept of a stash goes in direct opposition to my not wanting to have clutter in my house principles. So that's that's my rule for myself. So far, so good.

[00:18:00] But that's what I've been just doing from time to time when it feels good. Like I've realized, you know, knitting at night, my eyes don't love that. So it's maybe more of a weekend pursuit for me most of the time. And I know if I just keep moving forward, eventually I'm going to have another shawl.

I'm actually really excited to wear the first shawl that I made. It's just been too warm for it because it's wool. So anyway, okay, I want to encourage you to do nothing work related to think about using your brain in another way. You know, maybe it's playing with color in some way. Maybe it's painting or watercolor or just, you know, there's a gazillion different things. Maybe it's using your brain in a different way where, like, you really love solving like, puzzles and it might be an actual like jigsaw puzzle or it might be more like

the, you know, spelling bee in the New York Times games. You know, they have a bunch of games, New York Times that can be really fun and really help you to use your brain in a different way.

[00:18:54] It could be doing the crossword. Some games like that are really, you know, getting into board games or things like that can be another [00:19:00] way for you to take up new things. And it doesn't mean that you have to be doing that thing all of the time. So what I found in my Google searching and YouTube searching to learn how to do some different knitting things that I didn't know how to do because this is the other thing, friends, it's so easy to get the help that you need. Like basically any help with like any stitch you would need is just on YouTube. It's brilliant.

So easy, so much better than trying to, like, figure it out with a book or having to go to like a shop when they're open to be able to, you know, get help. It's so much easier. Of course, you can always do those things, but it's so nice. And so I stumbled upon these two men who live in Norway, so anybody who's into knitting, they might know Arne and Carlos, they're awesome. So it's been really fun kind of looking at what they're into and what projects they like to do and haven't bought anything from them or done anything like that. But it's just kind of if I'm going to be looking at stuff on YouTube, it's fun. It fills me up in a different way. [00:20:00] It doesn't feel like I'm just getting sucked in and feeling worse on the other end of it, you know? Like you might be reading a blog post about, you know, specific kinds of board games that you like to play or something like that.

[00:20:13] I think that that is also a reasonable. Pursuit, you know, like when you're like, Well, I'm not going to play that game right now, but I want to learn a little bit more about strategy. Totally. Just something else. So try to find something that you can get excited about. I think a lot of us wish that we would read more and we have all the books and we buy more books and then we're still not reading them. And I mean, might be also talking about myself, but I've also been doing something the last several months. I mean, I've, I've always kind of tried to be working my way through some books, but never kind of as consistently as I would have liked.

And so I started something at the beginning of the summer that has been amazing and I want to offer it to you as well because maybe this is part of it. I will have a book

[00:21:00] that I'm reading and I read ten pages a day, so that's all I have to do. Part of the day is getting ten pages of that book read, and sometimes what I've read is a bit more dense. I just read a book about menopause that was actually really good and it was a bit more dense getting those ten pages done and other times I've read books that are more like a memoir and those ten pages just fly by.

[00:21:21] I am at a point where sometimes I will do a fiction book. I'll do a novel. And also, have you ever started a novel? And then you put it down for six months and you're like, I basically have to start over because I don't remember anything. You know, when you do the ten pages a day, it keeps you engaged, it keeps you moving forward. And even when you're tired, you can get ten pages in, You know, occasionally I'm like, ready for bed? I'm like, Shoot, I didn't read today. And then I get my reading done. And that's not always like, don't always love it when it happens like that.

But when I know I'm going to read ten pages every day, then I find like little creative ways or I'm like, Oh, I'm going to sit in the bath for a little bit. You know what? Let me grab my book. Instead of watching a show, I'll read my book. And then you're actually [00:22:00] getting through books and you can take on that identity of like, you're now a reader. Like, this is awesome. This is a very, very cool. So that might be something that you want to do. Now, let's talk more about shows, because a lot of us do really enjoy our shows. And I want to say that I think some of the things that can fill you up inside are shows that we can connect with others on.

[00:22:19] And so one thing you may not really know about me is that I actually like sports a lot and watching sports, not every sport, but I do like watching a lot of sports and a lot of sports I like watching are kind of more unusual ones because first of all, I grew up with European parents, but then also we would watch on the weekends growing up Wide world of sports. Maybe you remember that show as well. Maybe you don't. But that show would often showcase different kinds of sports that were not the typical most popular sports in America.

So like Alpine ski racing, you know, cycling and different kinds of racing for, you know, car racing and things like that. Plus, my dad [00:23:00] is a total car person, so we'd watch, you know, Indy car racing and stuff like that and growing up and, you know, we'd watch some football too, and things like that didn't really get into football until I was a

little bit older. But what I have found is that sports are just a fun way to connect with people. If it's something that you have any interest in. And so what I'll tell you helps me with these things, not like it's a job, but what really makes it so much more interesting for me is when I watch shows that show me the human side behind the sport.

[00:23:33] So there's a series on Netflix right now called Untold, and they have all kinds of fascinating stories about different sports, things like I just finished a four part untold yesterday about how University of Florida became a really strong football team under Urban Meyer. Like, I didn't know anything about that. And I actually found it really, really interesting. And so now I know a little bit more about Florida and their football [00:24:00] program, and I find that interesting. And it's an interesting thing for me to talk to the men in my life about, and it's a way to connect with them.

Like so many people over the pandemic, we watched Drive to Survive on Netflix totally got sucked into Formula One. My dad's been a big Formula One fan for years. I never had any interest, but once I started understanding who these people were and the backstory and the strategy and all the competition, so fascinating super into Formula One now, I even listened to Formula One based podcasts. I mean, that's where I'm at with it. And then that kind of format, that drive to survive format. They've done shows now on tennis and golf and surfing and Tour de France and all these things. It's so fascinating. I love it all now. I'm like much more into tennis than I was before. And now with golfing, I have some better idea of what's actually happening and don't always fall asleep.

[00:24:50] I did talk about taking a golf nap many episodes ago. Those of you who've heard that one well well know what I'm talking about, you know? So those are some [00:25:00] fun ways to be able to know more about it. So say you have friends or family who are into a certain sport and maybe there is a show like maybe it would be a good way for you to learn a little bit more about it and maybe just see if there is any level of interest there. You know, I find that when I know. Who these people are and their backstory. Like it's just a completely different experience and I just really enjoy that. So also, if you don't like sports, cool, No big deal at all when you're thinking about this activity. So whether you call it a hobby or just something that fills you up inside, it can be a really great way for you to connect with other people.

Or you can also use it to get the alone time that you need. And so it can be good for you to recognize, like, what role does this play for me? Or what need does this fill? You know, there are meetup groups, you can go on the meetup app and find meetup groups about everything known to man everywhere in the world. So if you're looking for people to connect with and you have some sort of activity you like [00:26:00] to engage in or that interest you, it can be a great way to connect with others or even people who are already in your life.

[00:26:06] But also some of us are like, I'm a little peopled out. I would really like to have some time alone, you know, going and doing that activity, whether, you know, whatever it is painting mean any number of things, right? Any of the things that can really give you that time to just focus on something else. It can be almost meditative for some people, like a way for your brain to just be in the present and think about what you're doing and not be consumed by the anxiety and the worry and the stress and all those other things. So just recognize like, what is it that I'm actually needing?

And let me choose an activity that can fulfill that and just recognizing that some activities can actually fulfill both, right? So you can be someone who loves to hike and then sometimes you hike by yourself and sometimes you hike with a group, right? Or you really love to knit. And so often you're doing it at home by yourself. But then also you can go to an open knitting [00:27:00] time at a yarn shop near you or something like that, right? Or maybe even some virtual groups. I do want to point out that this can be exercise related if you want it to be. It can be movement related.

[00:27:12] It can involve being out in nature. You know, it can involve lots of different things. Think when we use the word hobbies, it kind of pigeonholes us a little bit. It makes us limit our scope, our vision of what we're thinking is possible or, you know, what kind of counts. And I want to point out that it doesn't have to be that way at all. It really we can expand that scope and really think very broadly about what this could be.

I also want to point out that taking classes can be a really fun way to just explore some other things, right? Maybe you just want to learn some new things and that's part of what fills you up is just learning new things, you know, just stuff you haven't done before that can be, you know, doing a class on Coursera. It can be taking a class at a university near you, you know, or auditing a class. It can be, [00:28:00] you know,

whatever, learning a language, whatever. The thing is that you've always wanted to learn how to do that can be part of it too. If it makes you feel excited and you don't feel a lot of pressure around it. So what I want to say is that exploring some of these things, finding these things that fill you up inside, they make you feel more like a multifaceted human being. You know, it's not just like you work as a doctor, you do your home and, you know, community obligations, and then that's it for you.

[00:28:29] It just gives you different dimensions, different parts of you. It can make you feel like different parts of you are getting their needs met and you get to explore those various parts of who you are that maybe haven't been given any airtime in quite some time. Right? When you do this, it really overall increases the fulfillment and satisfaction that you feel in your life, which is what we all want. And it's honestly what we're hoping food is going to do for us when [00:29:00] we overeat. We just want to feel satisfied. We just want to feel better.

And as we know, that doesn't really help for very long. These are things that can help for much longer. The other thing that I think can happen is, you know, at first these activities can sort of fill that time that you would have spent eating in the past. And then over time, when it just becomes what you do and you just don't overeat anymore, it actually can start to meet the needs that you probably didn't even know you had. It is a way for you to get to know yourself better, to build your relationship with yourself, to understand what it is that kind of makes you tick. What fills you up inside? What makes you feel good? What makes you feel more wholly, authentically yourself? And then when you know that you can engage in activities that feed that, which is so good.

[00:29:53] So that's what to do when you're not eating friends. You can check out Arne and Carlos. No, just kidding. I mean, you might [00:30:00] want to. But anyway, my point is, there's lots of things that you can test out and try. Just be open to different things unfolding. I mean, literally just started with like, I need a project to do for the three days I'm at this retreat and maybe I won't finish it. You know, no pressure, just something light just to see what we think. And then a little more here, a little more there or trying something different.

You know, my daughter knows how to crochet. My mom knows how to crochet. I never learned. I'm starting to think maybe I should just learn how to do that. Be something

new, something different. I don't use my hands a ton in creative ways. It's kind of a good thing, you know? All right. Well, I'm very excited to hear more about the things that you figure out, fill you up inside so that you're no longer needing food to do that. And that space that food used to take up is now filled with something else. I think it's so great and I'm very excited for you to see what's next.

All right. I hope you have a great rest of your week and [00:31:00] I will talk to you next time. Take care. Ready to start making progress on your weight loss goals? For lots of free help, go to katrinaubellmd.com and click on Free Resources.