



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey there, my friend. How are you? Welcome to the podcast. So excited to talk to you today, as always. I am attempting to record a podcast with a puppy in the next room. We shall see how this goes. She's been pretty quiet. It's going to be fun. I like to challenge myself.

Let's talk about fun. Fun is something that seems kind of elusive. Sometimes, things are fun, and a lot of times, things are really not fun. We want to have more fun, and we have a lot less fun as we get older. I know that's for sure been the case for me. I don't know about you, but it's like adulthood gets more serious and more serious, seriouser and seriouser as we go along, and it's less frequent that I would use the word fun to describe what it is I'm doing or the experience that I had. What often happens is, "Oh, yeah, we had a good time, but then these other things happened," or, "These were the things that were challenging about it," or, "This was what happened that was really hard."

I think that if you can continue to have fun in your life as you get older, it's one of the best things you can do for your overall satisfaction of your life and also for just your overall mental health because if we're waiting for fun things to happen to us, we might be waiting a really long time. I think that's why sometimes we put so much pressure on ourselves to have such an amazing vacation because the rest of our life is really not that much fun, and we're like, "No, this vacation's going to be so fun," and then we go on that vacation and the kids are off because they're jet lagged or they get a little sick and they're whining and complaining, and then we're totally having a hissy fit in our heads, like, "This was supposed to be fun. Why isn't this fun? We need to be having fun."

Have you ever been like that, maybe even just in your head? When we are putting so much pressure on a situation to be fun and thinking that it's the scenario, the situation that creates the fun for us, it just makes us kind of like crazy people. We end up just putting so much pressure on it that the result is that we end up not having that much fun, and then it's kind of an disappointment.

I looked up the definition of fun. I was like, that is interesting. I'm not sure how the dictionary would describe it, so I looked it up in Merriam-Webster, and the definition is very simple. "What provides amusement or enjoyment."

That's it. "What provides amusement or enjoyment." That makes so much sense. That's why one person will think something's fun and the other person doesn't because we enjoy different things and we're amused by different things.

I also want to point out that I think that we often think that having fun means having the absolute time of your life, like it was fun if it was like the best time, like we were just loving it so much and just having so much pleasure, but if you're like most of us, most of your day consists of just regular repetitious behaviors. You get up. Ready for work. You go in to see your patients. You go to meetings. You care for the people in your life that need caring for. A lot of these things don't really seem that much fun. How many people are like, "I love going to meetings. It's so fun. Meetings are my favorite." Not many people are like that.

What makes something fun or not? How do you create fun in your day-to-day life when it's pretty repetitious, and right now, your experience of those repetitious behaviors is that it's not that much fun. What makes something fun or not is whether you experience amusement or enjoyment during it or not. Interesting, right? It's just your experience for it. It's just your emotions that you feel.

But then what determines whether something is amusing or enjoyable? Of course, the answer, as you know, is always your thoughts, but we think that experiences are inherently fun or not fun, and it turns out that that's not true at all.

A very good friend of mine, ages ago in college, had a job where she sold treadmills over the phone. Sounds fun, right? Or not, having to be that person cold calling people or answering phones on a call center, these people who are just maybe wanting a treadmill, maybe not, and just spending hours trying to sell people on treadmills. She talks about how she and the other students there would try to make it really because otherwise it would be so boring. Of course, they're college kids, so they're all about having fun, making things fun. One of the things they would do, they would make these little games, and they would challenge each other to see who could say a certain word the most number of times in their shift, just bringing it organically while they were talking to customers and potential customers.

One time, she was saying that they had to say bar mitzvah as many times as they could in there. They're probably like, "Well, listen, do you have a bar mitzvah coming up because you're going to want to be in shape, and so this treadmill is going to be able to help you be in shape so you can wear that outfit that you've always wanted to wear," and so she would just think of all the different ways she could bring up bar mitzvah. This is just so brilliant. It just makes it amusing and enjoyable to do what you're doing already. It just adds a layer of fun with your thinking. Then, of course, they would all talk about it, and everyone would share their stories about how they were able to put the word bar mitzvah in there, and everyone would laugh. So much fun was created.

Something came up in my daughter's life at the beginning of the school year this year. She had been going to school during the summers for kind of part-academic thing, part-fun thing most days, and she loved it and did great. Then the day that school started, she was suddenly afflicted with a terrible stomach ache. Have your children ever done that?

She's five, and I cut her some slack because she had been spending the prior two weeks back to back traveling, and we had just gotten back the night before from Europe. I thought, "You know what? Maybe she's just really tired. Okay, we'll allow her to miss the first day of school. It's kindergarten. It's fine." That was fine. She was feeling great the whole rest of that day, and then the next time, suddenly, she was afflicted again. It's amazing when these things happen.

I was talking to her, and I was trying to find out from her, "What is the problem? Are you nervous about something? You've been going there. What's new or different?" She had not wanted to do a day that had specials. That's what they call it at the school. Specials is when you have music and gym and art, kind of the extra fun things. She loved going to specials last year. She was so excited when she could be an extended-day kid and go do all the specials. She never had a problem with any of them, and here she was full-on in tears over the whole thing.

I said to her, "Think about what it is. What is the problem so you can tell me?" We're driving to school, and she's like, "I think I know what it is." I'm like, okay, this is going to be juicy. What is it? What is she so worried about? She's like, "It's art." Art? Of all things, art? Okay. "What's the problem with art?" She always loved art last year. She's so proud of her art. She's like, "Art is, it's just not fun." I was like, interesting. Somehow, somewhere along the line, she changed her thinking and started believing that art wasn't fun.

Of course, I asked her if something had happened, if there was a problem with the teacher, anything? No, no, no. Everything was fine. She said it's just not fun. I told her, "Here's the best news. It's not art that's fun or not. You make things fun or not fun. Art class itself is not inherently fun or not fun. You bring your own, and that's the best news because then you can make anything fun. You can be like, 'I'm going to make art fun because art's not fun or fun. I'm fun or not fun, so I'm going to make it fun.'"

Of course, her little five-year-old brain, she's like, "Oh. Okay." I was like, "Okay, so you go into art class today, and you just go, 'You know what? Art's fun. I'm going to make this fun,' because you are a fun person." She's like, "All right." She goes in there.

I go and pick her up. "How was your day?" "Great." All smiles. Everything's great. "How was art class?" "Oh, it was so fun." I was like, "How'd you do that?" She's like, "I don't know, it was just fun." But this was what's so great. She wasn't going in there necessarily having to think like, "Okay, now I gotta make this part fun, I gotta make that part fun." No. She was just like, "Oh, turns out, art's fun because I make it fun, so I'm just going to have fun in art," and it totally worked.

These are some little easy examples of how you can make something fun, but as adults, as grownups, as we're adulting a lot, many of us really lose that connection to having fun, so I want you to think about how much fun you have on a regular basis. It might not be very much, especially if you're not regularly thinking thoughts that create amusement and enjoyment for yourself. You have to think those thoughts on purpose. You can't just wait for your brain to show up with them. It tends to not do that. At least, mine doesn't. You have to create the fun.

Let's talk about something that most of us would agree is not fun, and that is taking call. You're like, "Oh, no. She's going to make me make call fun. What? No." You understand the concept that circumstances are neutral, correct? If you don't know what I'm talking about, you can just hit pause here and go listen to the first two or three episodes of this podcast. You're going to understand a little bit more what I'm talking about, but taking call seems like an exception. Taking calls is circumstance, but it's not neutral. Everybody knows call sucks that's a fact. If we all agree on it, then it's a fact. But here's the thing. Not everybody minds taking call. Seriously, there are people out there. It's true. Most of think call suck mostly because of the culture of medicine that we learn during our training.

Everyone around you seems to think call sucks, then it's easy to adopt the same thoughts. You are a medical students, and all the residents are burned out and thinking call sucks and talking about how much call's awful, and you're like, "I guess this is how we think about call." Now you believe that too, and you go through your residency, and you hand down that same belief system to your medical students, and on and on it goes. That's that culture of medicine.

But think about the first time you ever took overnight call as a student. It was kind of exciting, right? It was a little thrilling. You get to see what it's like after hours, like the behind-the-scenes stuff. "Is it really like the shows on TV? I think some of it might be, some of it might not. I really want to see what this is like." There were definitely elements that were enjoyable. You maybe got to do some procedures. You maybe got to learn some really cool things or see some really unusual things. You very likely had some fun, but once the newness wears off and you've taken enough q2 or q3 or q4 call, we adopt the same viewpoint everyone else seems to have. We're like, "This is awful."

For many of us, call seems like this horrible oppressor. I see this so often with my clients. We go into it bracing ourselves for the worst. So many of my clients talk about this anxiety that they have leading up to call, like, "I really have all these thoughts of ... I really hope that I'm going to be able to handle whatever comes in the door, and what if something horrible happens? What am I going to do?" They have themselves all worked up over what might happen, like they're living in the future because right then, they're home. They're not even there. They're already at call in their minds and experiencing this terrible experience of it, but they're not even in the hospital yet. So interesting.

We brace ourselves for the worst, and we have these thoughts like, "I hope this doesn't suck that bad," or, "I hope it's not horrible." Of course, the keyword, "I hope it's quiet," but we would never say that out loud unless we jinx ourselves.

It's as though what we see, like which patients roll in the door or what we do determines whether call sucks or is horrible or not, and that's not what determines it. You can have the same patients come in, the same calls over night, the same times being woken up, the same admissions to do, the same deliveries to do, the same procedures, operations, cases to do, and it can be fun.

How can it be fun? All you have to do is find some enjoyment or some amusement. Enjoyment is going to be something that you intentionally think about. "God, I love operating," as you're operating.

"This is why I became a surgeon. It's actually really fun to do these cases, even if it's at 2:30 in the morning. It's okay. This is fun. Look what I get to do. I get to save this person's life. That's awesome."

Now, the bigger one that I think is easier is amusement, and by amusement, I don't mean mocking people or making fun of them at their expense. I mean just finding some amusement. Have you ever see someone who's screaming and yelling, and it's kind of actually funny. If you just could mute them and you didn't know what the scenario was and you just saw them yelling and flailing their arms around and stomping their feet, it's kind of funny.

You can find amusement with that disgruntled family member who's yelling at everybody. You can find amusement into something silly that happens. You can find amusement in anything, really. You can just be like, "This is ... Oh, that was a good one." Say you have a patient who's slinging insults, like, "No, that's a pretty good one. He's helping his game today. Wow, that's a pretty good one." You can find that amusement, like, "This is going to be interesting. This is going to be fun." I love that thought. "This is going to be fun," because then your brain's like, "How is this going to be fun? How am I going to be amused? How am I going to enjoy myself?"

In your specific situation, whatever you do with call, if you take call, you can think about that, like there's this dad who's super mad and worked up and anxious, and his wife's in labor, and things are a little touch and go right now. We don't know what's going on. He thinks that screaming at everybody is going to make us do a better job. Maybe you can't really find enjoyment in that, but you can certainly find some amusement.

That doesn't mean you're laughing at him to his face or something like that, but just in your mind, you're just being amused. Just let yourself be amused. What's so interesting is when you are amused, you're not feeling defensive. You're not feeling all up in your head about, "Well, you might be mad at me if I do this or that or the other thing." You're like, "Huh. He's over there having his experience of this. That's really interesting. I'm going to be over here manhandling this baby that's about to be delivered," so ... Should we say woman-handling? I don't know, maybe we should change that word.

But I'm just saying that you're not going like, "Now I've got all these patients. I've got the woman who's in labor and the baby and the husband that I have to deal with." No. Let him do his own thing. Let him have his freakout, and just be amused by it. So great.

Here's another example. Your children are fighting, and maybe they're screaming at each other, or maybe they're actually physically fighting. Maybe they're wrestling on the ground ripping each other's hair out, and you're like, "Screaming at them doesn't seem to work. Punishing them doesn't seem to work. Maybe I should just be amused." I want you to really think about that because immediately, we're like, "Oh, my god. A good mother wouldn't do that." No. "That's not, like, I can't be amused by that. Amusement means that if it's fun to watch them fight, then that means that I'm condoning their behavior or I'm thinking that what they're doing is okay."

Well, maybe that they're doing is okay since it's what's happening. The reality is, that's what's happening so maybe that's exactly what needs to be happening but just play around with the idea of being amused. They're insulting each other, and you're like, "Eh, good one." They're totally pummeling each other, and you're like, "That one's scrappy. Nice. Nice work." Especially when they're older. You're just like, "You guys gotta work this out. I don't know. I love you both. I'm just going to watch and have fun while I'm watching you."

Here's another example. You have this review article you have to write, and you have been putting it off forever, procrastinating, you don't want to do it, mostly the reason why is because you don't think it's going to be fun. It's definitely not fun. It's way more fun to get on social media or to shop online than it is to sit down and write this article that you have to write. My suggestion is that you figure out a way to be amused or find some enjoyment in it. You come up with a little bit of a game for yourself, or you decide to be amused by the topic, and you figure out a way to find some amusement in it. When you make it fun, because, again, remember, you bring the fun, you are the fun, if you bring the fun to it, then writing a review article could be fun.

Some of your brains are seizing up right now going, "No. I'm telling you, it's not fun," but I want you to just play around with the idea, play around with the possibility that I might be right that you could make something like that a fun experience just by changing the way you think about it.

Now, again, because what's fun is so individual, what you think is fun, what I think is fun, totally separate things. There's people who work in the ER that think it's so fun to have someone who's about to die come wheeling in, and they save their life, and look at them, they're amazing. For me, I want to die inside. I'm like, "Could I do it? Of course, I could. I just really don't want to. I don't like that feeling of that adrenaline surge," but other people love it, and it's so fun for them. If that's really fun for you, then you can take advantage of that knowing that about yourself. If that's not fun for you, then you can just be like, "Sometimes, I feel that way. It's not my favorite, but it still can be fun to do these other things that I like. It still could be fun to, within seconds, know exactly what we have to do to save this person's life. That's enjoyable for sure, even if that huge adrenaline surge in my body isn't feeling physically great to me right now, I can still enjoy the results of my labor."

Another situation that I hear a lot about from my clients is when they have a really challenging case coming up, and you're nervous about it. Maybe it's something that you don't do that often. It's just not your usual cookie-cutter bread-and-butter cases that you're really comfortable with, like there's just something that makes it more complicated, and you're really nervous about it. I've had clients who've been just worked up for days or sometimes even weeks anticipating the case. They're so anxious about it thinking that they don't want to screw up, but when you start following that through the model, it actually creates a result of being more likely to screw things up because you're so up in your head.

What I want to suggest is finding a way to make that really challenging case fun. How can you find some enjoyment in it? Maybe it's just stretching yourself out of your comfort zone. It's going to be feel uncomfortable, but it's kind of fun to do things that are different than your usual. It's kind of fun to stretch yourself and challenge yourself to do something different. It's kind of fun to use your brain in a different way that you don't usually use it.

Then I bet you can find some amusement and just even cracking a little joke with the patient before you take them back to the OR or just playing some really fun music in the OR while you're operating. There's so many different things that you can do to make it a really fun experience for you.

There's so much more fun available to us than we even realize. I think this is the best news ever. I have been having so much fun just listening to music. I know I told you guys before that that was one of the huge ways that I found some excitement and entertainment in my life that wasn't food-related, and it never gets old. I'm always so happy when I'm listening to music that I love. It's just fun to get into the music and really enjoy it. It's fun to be amused when my kids are making jokes, whereas before, I would just be like, "Ugh, this is so annoying. Come on, we have to get going. Could you please practice your piano, get your stuff done because it's almost bedtime." That's where my brain wants to go, like we have boxes we need to check so that I can sit down and have a snack. That's how it used to be.

Instead, I have to purposefully slow myself down and find that amusement and enjoyment. The more you practice it though, the easier it gets, the more your brain is trained to start finding those things. I'm finding that the more I practice it, the more it comes naturally for me, and if I'm really not having fun, then I know I bring the fun, that it's not what's happening to me or I'm not at the effect of my circumstances whether something is fun or not. Fun is my determination. It's the best news.

I want you to have a ton of fun this week, lots and lots of fun, as much fun as you can possibly find to have, and then let me know all about it in the comments section for this episode, which you can find at katrinaubellmd.com/98. Have a wonderful, fun week, and I will talk to you next time. Take care. Bye-bye.