



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

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 episode. Thanks for joining me. This is an episode I am really excited to bring to you. It's something that I didn't even know existed.

I think I heard the term Sunday Scaries. Gosh, maybe like seven, eight years ago. That was the first time I ever heard it, but I'd been experiencing it for a long time. And if you're a doctor, [00:01:00] you can have Sunday Scaries you can have Monday Scaries Tuesdays Scaries Wednesdays scaries. It just can continue on from there. I think the reason that this kind of was brought to my attention was, as I was trying to figure out why I would often stay up way too late, and when I stayed up way too late. I also would often eat too much. But I really had figured out the eating thing. But I still sometimes stayed up so late knowing that it wasn't good for me, that I felt better when I had more sleep. All of those things that I just couldn't figure it out.

[00:01:39] And it took a long time. And then I finally figured it out. You know what? I don't want to go to sleep because then I'll wake up and then it'll be the next day, and I'm going to have to go do the thing that I don't want to do, which typically was work. So that made so much more sense for me. Right? It wasn't that I was [00:02:00] undisciplined. It didn't mean that I didn't understand that sleep is good for you. It didn't mean that there's something wrong with me that I got sucked into the couch and wanted to watch all the

shows. That was all just a symptom of the bigger issue, which was that I did not want tomorrow to come.

And this is something that we coach on a lot in our weight loss or doctors only program. It's something that's becoming more and more common. And so I thought it was time to devote an episode to it. So maybe you don't identify with the Sunday Scaries term, but a lot of people do identify with the term work dread. We know what that means, right? Dreading the work coming up. So Sunday Scaries it's really the feelings that people feel typically on a Sunday, like before the week begins, a new week, they feel dread, they feel doom, and it's super common. So in 2018, LinkedIn did an informal survey of over 1000 adults, and 80% of them said that they [00:03:00] have Sunday night anxiety.

[00:03:02] So in case you think that it's just you, guess what? It's not like most things, right? It's like, congratulations, you are human. But lots of people experience this, so that doesn't mean that you don't want it to go away, or that you don't want to do something to try to make it less of an issue for you. But just so you know, you're not alone. And this worked. Read the Sunday Scaries. This is a huge reason why we stay up too late, but it's also a huge reason of why we overeat. A lot of us end up eating to try to manage the feelings of dread and anxiety and doom and all those really uncomfortable emotions that we're experiencing.

So you might think, well, you know, what is it with the weekend? The weekend is really a problem for me. I mean, I'm not saying it's not, but this could be a huge factor in that. And really what happens is you stay up too late, you eat too much, [00:04:00] you don't sleep enough, and then the next day you are extra tired. Maybe you didn't sleep as well because of having a full belly. Your quality of sleep was maybe down if you ever drink alcohol to try to manage that anxiety the night before, then maybe. Maybe not like a hangover, but maybe again, it negatively impacted the quality of your sleep and it just becomes a slippery slope.

[00:04:26] Now you're starting the week you feel even worse because you're exhausted. You know, it's just it becomes this kind of perpetual nightmare for us, right? It's like this rinse and repeat. Then we eat more to try to give ourselves energy and to stay awake. And the cycle just continues. So really, the Sunday scaries it's anticipatory anxiety. So you're thinking about what's to come and you're getting really worried or anxious or

nervous about it, or you just don't want to do it. You just feel really resistant and reluctant [00:05:00] and you don't want it to come.

This is often for doctors, worsened when we log into our electronic medical record the day or night before telling ourselves, hey, you know what? I just need to check the census. I just need to see what I'm walking into the next day. I'd rather know what I'm dealing with and just walking in sight unseen first thing. And then we got sucked into the Sunday scaries. You may start going, oh, what's going on with this patient and that patient? And then now you're checking notes and labs and imaging, and you're totally getting sucked into it. I've talked to so many doctors who get stuck with this over the years. You know, we start telling ourselves that we're kind of like doing something good by prepping for the week, but really, then the anxiety just kicks in.

[00:05:50] Maybe you are feeling like you don't know how you're going to take care of all those people. You don't know if you are skilled enough to take care of them, depending [00:06:00] on what their problems are. And of course, this depends on lots of factors, particularly what your specialty is. But this is a big issue for people who have a hospital based practice. Really, what a lot of people experience when they're experiencing this work dread or these Sunday scaries is they just feel irritable, restless, kind of uneasy. They just don't feel good. You know, some people have some stomach upset, and that can be another reason why people eat, right?

They have an anxious belly. So then they try to eat to settle it down. Some people have trouble sleeping. Some people find that they have intrusive thoughts about the upcoming week. You know, it just it really can take over. So when this is something that's going on for us, obviously it would be beneficial for us to figure out a way that we can settle this down. I will also point out that for some people, they have this experience when they're going into call. So say, you know that the next day you're going to be on call. Maybe that's when you have this dread, [00:07:00] or it could be the day leading up to maybe like an overnight shift or something like that, just to point out that there's different ways that this can manifest.

[00:07:10] So the good news is there's lots of things that you can do to try to improve this. And I'm not going to say like do these things and then you're going to just be easy,

breezy, totally carefree. It's not going to bother you at all. You're going to totally look forward to the weekend.

I'm not going to say that that's necessarily going to be your experience, but if you're finding that this is definitely something that is impacting your life and negatively, then you're going to want to work on it for sure. So I have several different things that you can consider. There's one that I think is non-negotiable. I'll tell you about that one when we get to it. But the others, I think, can all be really helpful. And if this is something you'd like to improve on or work on for yourself, then just think about with what I say. Like, you know, maybe there's one thing that really resonates, one thing that feels really easy, [00:08:00] one thing that feels very accessible to you. I'd focus on doing that thing first. Let's just try to do one thing. Often we think we have to do all the things all the time, and then what we end up doing is a big ol nothing. I mean, at least that's my experience.

[00:08:12] So let's just try to make this as easy as we possibly can and see if there's maybe 1 or 2 things that really would move the needle for us. Maybe that's all we need. Okay, so the first thing is naming it. This can actually really help people. Instead of just feeling bad, wondering why you're feeling bad, if you're able to just recognize it and say, oh, you know what? This is Sunday Scaries I'm just feeling Sunday Scaries right now. Just recognizing that that is what you're experiencing can actually help it a lot. Often it's the resistance to how we're feeling, right? There's a way that we feel, and then our thought that we think that we shouldn't feel that way.

That's creating the resistance. That is the worst part of it. So when we can drop that resistance instead, go, yeah, sometimes this happens. Sometimes on Sundays I get some Sunday [00:09:00] Scaries there's some stuff going on this week. I'm, you know, feeling the emotions that I feel when I anticipate that happening. That's what's happening right now. Even that alone might reduce the intensity of things. So simple, right? Just keeping your eye on it. Oh, this is what this is. Nothing's wrong with me. This happens to a lot of people. And maybe it's even partly situational. Maybe you have something specific that's happening this week. You know, maybe some really big, important meeting or performance evaluation or something that you're anxious about.

[00:09:33] So then you can just remind yourself, yeah, of course you would be feeling some dread around this week because this big thing is coming. And that's okay because you're still going to get through it. It's going to be okay. But it makes sense. It's normal to experience some emotions about that leading up to it. Just normalizing it for yourself can be very powerful. Okay. Next, see if you can find the cause. And I mean this. Don't kill yourself over this. I [00:10:00] think that probably you could find some parts of the culprit, you know, like what is actually creating this?

I think that could be very, very helpful, for sure. But I don't want you, like, racking your brain. Like, if I can just find the cause, then I can make this go away. I wouldn't look at it that way. I would look at it as maybe more like building your awareness around what's creating this for you, just so that if you know a little bit more, maybe you can change things or adjust things a little bit. So it could be helpful to know what it is. So some examples could be just like general busyness of the week. It could be that with all of your responsibilities between work and family and whatever else you have going on, it could just be that the days are really packed, really busy, and it just feels like a lot coming up.

[00:10:48] And you know, you're not going to have a lot of downtime. That's to a certain extent where I'm at in my life right now. There's a lot going on. It did not realize or maybe remember what senior year in high school is like. So now I'm [00:11:00] being reminded. So it could be just general busyness. It could be general overwhelm, there could be lots of tasks, and you have a lot of thoughts about your ability to get them done. It could be that too, just feeling like it's all a lot. I've definitely coached many, many doctors who have a significant amount of fear. That they won't be able to handle what comes in the next day.

So it could be anticipating call. It could be heading into the unit. And there's whatever, you know caseload happening there. It could be that you just are generally afraid that something will roll through the door. You'll be the one responsible and you won't know what to do, or you'll do the wrong thing. So that fear is possibly a cause. It could be that you want to avoid some interpersonal conflict, or maybe because you avoid interpersonal conflict [00:12:00] and you don't resolve it, you know that there's going to be conflict coming up this week, and you'd like to avoid it by not going to work. Right. So

you're dreading going in there because you don't want to have to work with that person who's such a challenge for you.

[00:12:14] You know, those are just some examples, some possibilities when you can kind of narrow it down. Is it like everything about the week? Is it personal stuff? Is it work stuff? Is it everything about work? Is it one part of work? It can be helpful, right? Because then you can tell yourself, well, it's this one part that I actually feel worried or nervous about, but the rest of this is fine. It's helpful when we can tell ourselves really the truth about what's going on for us with that. Okay.

Next let's speak to the overwhelm piece a little bit. If you're feeling overwhelmed by all the things that need to be done, one of the very best things you can do is write it all down. You got to dump that out of your brain and get it down on a list. So you can do this digitally. You can do this with paper, but you want to get it out of your head.

[00:13:00] When you don't believe that it's captured anywhere. Your brain will be looping and looping and looping on it to try to make sure that you don't forget. And then you might be mad that you keep thinking about work on a Sunday. Like, why am I thinking about this all the time? Right? So write it all down.

[00:13:19] Whatever comes to mind, write it all down and know that you will give it its fair due and whatever it deserves. The next day coming up next is just to offer yourself grace. If you put a lot of pressure on your weekend to be something right, it could be that you think that you need to get a lot of personal stuff done on the weekend. It could be that you kind of deep down believe that the weekend has to be super fun, because the rest of the week isn't fun at all. So you need to get in all of your rest and all of your fun, and all of your exercise and all of your what I call extracurriculars, like all of your things that are like the things you like to do [00:14:00] for yourself. Like you have to get those all done.

Then by Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, you might be getting down on yourself for not doing enough on the weekend. You know, for being behind, for maybe wasting it. Maybe, you know, I've had thoughts like that, like, oh my gosh, I shouldn't have watched those three episodes of that show. What a waste of time. I could have done other things that were more productive than I'd feel better right now, I tell myself. Well, no, the way I'd feel better is I would be thinking about the fact that I watched three shows differently.

[00:14:29] Right? That's how we change our emotions. But if we're putting a lot of pressure on the weekend to be super, super amazing, then Sunday Scaries can be worse, right? It needed to be super amazing. If it didn't live up to that expectation, then you're going to feel even worse about the weekend ending and having to go into whatever your expectation is of the week ahead. Okay, next, notice the urge to check your electronic medical record. For people who do that. My [00:15:00] recommendation is to process that urge instead of acting on it. I have coached many, many female physicians who have told me no, but it really does help me.

Then I know I can plan, I know when I can get to work or when I should get to work. I have a better idea of how many people I need around on and what that's going to look like, and I can plan my week out if doing that helps you to feel better in the sense that you have a plan and now you know what you're going to do, and then you can just put it down and stop thinking about it. And I have no problem with that at all. But what I found is that that's often not the case. The urge to check the EMR, when acted upon, often actually makes the anxiety worse for a lot of people, in the sense that now you're thinking, oh my gosh, how am I going to do all this? This is too much.

[00:15:48] Nobody's going to help me. And, you know, all the kind of like, horrible thoughts about that. So what I would suggest is if you really do want to check [00:16:00] or you find it, at least in some ways it's very useful or helpful to you, then make sure you set a timer on your phone. Give that some boundaries, like you get 20 minutes or 10 or 30 or whatever you need, and these are the things you're going to look at and check, and then you're going to turn it off and you're going to go do something else, you know, maybe even decide at what point in the day is a good time to do that.

If you do that right before bed and that gets you all riled up, probably not a great idea, especially if you want to get to bed at a decent hour, right? So maybe you do it later in the afternoon. But if you find that all evening you're thinking about it, okay, maybe try something different, right? My point is to be real careful with the stories you tell yourself on your need to check that EMR. And I would just encourage you to explore whether it's possible that you really don't need to do that, that it's even possible that you could just keep yourself from experience so much anxiety by knowing the day before. [00:17:00]

[00:17:00] Instead, get to bed earlier, wake up earlier, and just plan on going in you know earlier. If there are a lot of patients, you will learn about them, then you will take care of them. You will do what needs to be done, and if there's not that much going on, then you'll get some other things done and go, you know, have coffee with a friend and do one of the many other things that I'm sure you have on your to do list. Next, if all the things that you have on the calendar coming up for the week, if you feel like it's just a lot like your thought is, I don't know how I'm going to do all this, or I'm going to be feeling like I'm sprinting from, you know, the minute my feet hit the floor to when my head hits the pillow at night.

It can be worth it to have a look at the whole calendar and then start asking yourself like, okay, what can be cut? What does not have to be done by me? What can be rescheduled? You know, it could be something you were really looking forward to visiting with that friend. But you know what? This week, it's just not a good week for it. Maybe it just needs [00:18:00] to be rescheduled. What can you delegate to somebody else? What can you get help with? And be real careful about telling yourself, you know what no one else can do about me.

[00:18:11] Doubtful. You know. Or like what? I have to be the one to make my child's birthday cake. Because I have never bought a store. Bought one for any of my kids, ever. Well, there's a first time for everything, right? Like, maybe that is really a priority for you. And you want to do that and you want to find that time also. You know, what can be really fun is a cake from Baskin Robbins. You know what I mean? Like, sometimes it really doesn't have to be us. And there's ways that we can change our thinking and still have everybody be totally delighted and get what they want.

Okay, finally, with that point, planning the week out can just be very helpful. Sometimes our brain's just spinning on all the different things, all the different, you know? Then I have to go here and here, and I don't know who's going to pick this kid up from there [00:19:00] and, uh, you know, so getting that settled and figured out can just help your brain to rest. Everything's accounted for. All I have to do is the next thing whatever's on the calendar, I just have to do that. And I don't have to think about it so much. Finding something to look forward to on Monday, I think is a huge, huge thing.

[00:19:17] This isn't the most important thing I'm about to get there. I'm going to do that last. But finding something to look forward to on Monday or whatever day you're going to work, I think is really, really, really a big kind of like hack and even like that word. But I think it's a good trick when we're dreading going in. We don't want to go. If we can find some reason that we're looking forward to going, it really can help things a lot. It does not have to be a big deal. I remember one client talking about how she was so excited to use this new water bottle that she had gotten this, like, really fun water bottle she got on Etsy that really expressed her personality and it just delighted her.

And then every single time she left a [00:20:00] patient's room, she saw it and it really helped her. So something like that could be helpful. Maybe at the start of the week you bring in some fresh flowers. You know, it doesn't have to be a lot. I mean, Trader Joe's, Costco, they sell flowers that are really nice for not very much money. If you're a flower person, maybe that just brings a little joy to you to have that there with you. When you're at work, maybe you have a favorite coffee, maybe you have a favorite tea.

[00:20:25] You know, maybe there's a favorite coffee shop that just on Mondays you swing by there and you get that coffee that you really, really like. Just those little things to give yourself, something to look forward to. And it could even be that you've been really working on your charting, you know, refer back a couple episodes ago where I talked about charting. It could be that you have some new efficiency strategies or tactics that you are looking forward to trying. You know, maybe you're really working on getting out of a patient room at an appropriate [00:21:00] time, you know, feeling more like you're leading and in control of the interaction rather than whenever the patient's done with you, you can get out of there, which is. Very often.

What my experience was did not feel good to feel stuck in a patient room. So maybe there's some new things you're going to try. If some new templates for charting, you have a new strategy on how you're going to try to keep up with closing your charts down in a more efficient manner, like that can be something to look forward to. I'm excited to try this thing and maybe it's going to work. Maybe parts of it are going to really help and I can get home earlier. Taking care of yourself on that Sunday or whatever the day is for you is so, so, so important. So a reminder of what that can look like.

[00:21:42] I think having some movement in your life is so, so good and not even think. I know there's so much research that shows this exercising or whatever form of movement you enjoy, this can really help to process that anxiety and move it out of your body. This can then set you up to have higher quality [00:22:00] sleep. So very important, having a good sleep routine where you're winding yourself down, creating a really good positive for you. Sleep environment can be very, very beneficial. This might be the time to focus on that, because you probably already know that this is helpful for you. Taking time to stretch or meditate, get out in nature.

Do some sort of mindfulness practice or gratitude practice. I think it can be so helpful to take a break from technology on Sundays, like maybe even just for 4 or 5, six hours before bed. Just like as a gift to yourself. You know what? We just don't have our phones with us. Like we're not going to be on the computer. We're not doing that stuff. This is when we read a book. We do a puzzle. We talk to a friend. You know, we go for a walk with somebody we love. Right. We just get ourselves grounded and ready to go. I think it can also be helpful to take part in any kind of easy creative activity.

[00:22:57] So this can be something simple just coloring, [00:23:00] sketching, doodling, you know, anything that's a creative outlet for you. I'm not going to list off the jillion different things you can do for that, but that can be helpful too. It just helps you to tap into a different part of yourself. Okay, here's the most important part. So if you do nothing else, please do this part. This is so important.

You got to focus on your thinking and your mindset. Because what creates that anxiety is the way that you're thinking. So there's lots of things you can do to help yourself process that anxiety. And there's, you know, different things you can do that will make it easier for you to think less anxious thoughts. But ultimately, the anxiety is coming from the way that you're thinking. And so if you can identify what the thoughts are that are creating that anxiety, what that issue is, then you can be coached on it. You can maybe you're somebody who has a therapist. You can bring it to your therapist, you can talk it out, understand it better, learn more. A lot of people who struggle with imposter syndrome, this is a big, big, big issue, right? It's [00:24:00] like all of these things that I just talked about, they're not going to take your imposter syndrome away. So what we then are invited to do is to look at our thoughts about why we believe we're not good enough.

[00:24:13] We aren't bringing enough to the table. We won't be able to do what we need to do. You know, sometimes we need to look like, okay, well, is there any truth in these thoughts? Are there certain things that I don't feel as skilled at, particularly early in a career? Maybe there's some things that can be done, some shadowing of somebody to learn more. I mean, you know, there's definitely things that can be done to learn more. Remember, even as an attending, sometimes shadowing a surgeon where I wanted to learn more about some of the basic stuff and find out more like, hey, when do you want us to send them to you?

What kinds of things can we tackle in the office ourselves and how can we do that? Let me learn more. Like, these are things that can be very helpful to make your new thoughts more believable. But getting some coaching on this can be [00:25:00] very, very, very helpful. And it's not just imposter syndrome. You know, a big, big issue with this is fear of the unknown. You just don't know what's going to walk through the door. You don't know what's going to happen. Is this case going to go really well and smoothly? Is it going to completely fall apart and be really, really hard? You just don't know. So figuring out a way to be able to calm the worry, the fear around not knowing and instead work toward acceptance is going to be just a game changer for your whole career.

[00:25:33] Really. So those are all the things that we can do to help ourselves with Sunday Scaries I get them too. Not all the time, but I definitely know when I have them. Okay, there's several things on this list that I just told you that definitely, definitely helped me big time and I'm sure that they can help you too. So I'm excited for you to have help with this. I didn't figure this stuff out for myself or even really understand it [00:26:00] better until I was already working as a coach.

I just can't even begin to imagine how much this would have helped me in the ten years of practice that I had, or particularly even when I was in my training. Wow. It would have helped so much. So I want you to know you're not alone with Sunday Scaries and work dread and it can get better. My team and I can help you or get help from somebody else, because life is too short and too long to be living with weekly Sunday scaries and work dread.

And with that, I wish you a great week. Take care and I'll talk to you next time. Bye.
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