



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 friend. Thanks for joining me today. So glad you're here. I am very excited to talk to you today about this topic. As I started digging into it, I started realizing, like, there's so much here, I'm barely gonna scrape the surface on this.

So my goal here today, as I talk to you more about self-compassion, is to give you a taste of what's to come when you start to develop your ability to offer your self compassion. And, you know, just open your mind up to this idea. And if it's something that you want to take to deeper and deeper levels, there are so many resources out there that are excellent. I will give you some ideas of places that you can go, and you can decide how far down the rabbit hole you want to go, hopefully at least a little bit, because this is really kind of an under-recognized gem in the world of well-being and mental health and things like that. It's something that I feel like a lot more people know about, but still, a lot of people have trouble figuring out how to do it.

[00:01:42] It's something that comes up in the weight Loss for doctors only program quite a bit. Um, recently I coached on it again where it's kind of like, yeah, I guess I got to be more compassionate toward myself, but like how, you know, like, how do you start doing that? So we're going to talk a little bit about that. There are there's so much research out there. This podcast episode is very, very, very heavily based on the

research of Doctor Kristin Neff. And if her work is incredible, she has so much research on the benefits of self-compassion.

Like I said, so many online talks. She's got courses online. Like there's so much that you can do if you decide you want to do that. But otherwise, just so you know, it's mostly based on her research, some others as well. I think Doctor Brene Brown, a little bit of hers as well. So I didn't make this up myself and just, you know, so self-compassion, let's just get clear first on what it actually is. Right? Because when we don't know, like, you know, we kind of toss these words around, we don't even really know what they are. I think it's important that we are clear on what it looks like. And we'll talk a little later about what it's not. So self-compassion is the ability that we have to be able to show ourselves kindness, or that could be warmth or tenderness or love.

[00:03:01] I feel like sometimes love feels not as attainable for some of us, essentially showing ourselves kindness. It means accepting our perceived flaws. So just notice that, right? Like not your necessarily actual flaws. It's our perceived flaws. A lot of the flaws that we have, that's our perception. We have decided or we think that they're flaws and then we reject them, whether they're flaws or not is up for discussion. But regardless, we accept what is true, whether we, you know, believe them to be flaws or not. And we forgive ourselves when we make mistakes. That's the thing that I see a lot of female physicians really struggling with, is having this incredibly high standard and being completely dissatisfied, unless that standard is reached 100% of the time, and if it's not reached, then being in the depths of despair, to quote Anne of Green Gables, it's just you're a horrible, horrible person and really beating yourself up and all the self-judgment and all that that comes from that.

So those are the things that we see in self-compassion accepting our perceived flaws, showing ourselves kindness, forgiving ourselves when we make mistakes, when we work on developing our ability to offer ourselves compassion, then ultimately we end up caring more about ourselves, and then we try to alleviate our own suffering a little bit more. And what that means is, when you are struggling with something, when you are having a hard time, say it's with your work, say it's with food and your body and weight and all of that, whatever you may be struggling with.

[00:04:31] Sometimes we want a change, but when we're stuck in self-judgment, beating ourselves up, berating ourselves, we can't even take any action or any meaningful action to alleviate that suffering because we're so stuck in the judgment. We treat ourselves as though we aren't valuable, like we're worthless. And why would you take action on something that you believe is worthless? So this is a way for us to actually start getting the results that we want or move toward that, right? We take action on things we care about when we care about ourselves, and we'll take action to try to improve the quality of our lives. And, like I said, alleviate those struggles and the suffering.

Like I said, Doctor Kristin Neff, she's really kind of like the main, main person. But there's lots of other things out there she's been doing research for, I think, over 20 years now on all of this. And so she has defined self-compassion as consisting of three separate constructs. And those constructs are self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. And I'll talk about each of those a little bit more. But. Before we get into that, I want to talk a little bit about the opposition, because I think there's going to be some people listening and maybe that's you who is going, yeah, but like, so you just sit around, you feel compassionate for yourself all day.

[00:05:49] Like, how do you ever get anything done? I mean, it's just like navel gazing and nobody's actually out there doing important work or, you know, whatever the negativity might be around it or that opposition. And so I wanted to just briefly address some of those things that a lot of people oppose, thinking that working on self-compassion is selfish. Let's talk about that right. There are a lot of people who really have a hard time with it, thinking like, you shouldn't be thinking about yourself so much. You need to be caring for others more and all of that.

But what research has actually shown is that more self-compassion is associated with greater giving behaviors and attitudes. So it's not even just like what people believe and think, but it's what they actually do. So people are actually more giving and do more for others when they feel more self-compassion. So it actually is not selfish. Another thing that people criticize about self-compassion is that it's kind of just being really passive. You know, like if I'm just like totally compassionate with myself, then I just will never do anything and I'll just sit around all day and I'll never try to achieve anything and I'll just

like, sit around like eat all day and never go to work and whatever the bad thing we think.

[00:07:05] But that's not actually what the research shows. So self-compassion is actually associated with less procrastination and more time devoted to self-improvement. So that's really interesting. So it's the opposite of that. No, we're actually more active. We get more done when we procrastinate. We're getting little done when we don't procrastinate because we have self-compassion, we actually get more done and we're putting more things of value out into the world. Also, some people will say that it's, you know, just kind of like overly optimistic.

It's kind of like sugarcoating things. It's like, you know, just not telling the truth or reality or whatever. But what we find is that people who have more self-compassion, they have more compassion towards pain. So it's not like they're walking around all day going like everything's great, there's no problems. You know, it's not a toxic positivity kind of a thing. It really is. When you have compassion for yourself, you can have compassion towards others and their pain as well, which is an important thing and something that I believe is, you know, pretty strongly lacking. So if there's any part of you that's still kind of resistant to self-compassion, I want to read off. These are many different individual people or groups who've done studies on self-compassion and using Kristin Neff's Self-compassion scale, which if you just Google Self-compassion Scale, this is a widely accepted free resource translated into 18 different languages, and you can go in there for free and take the test if you want, and it'll give you a score if you're interested in doing that.

[00:08:46] So it's a way that they've tried to measure self-compassion and things like that. There are lots and lots of studies using this scale. What the results show is that self-compassion improves self-reported emotional well-being in adults and adolescents. So do you want more emotional well-being? If you do, I think you do. It could be worth it. Self-compassion reduces self-judgment, feelings of isolation, and overidentification. We'll talk a little bit more about overidentification a little bit. Self-compassion mediates the impact of body dissatisfaction and unfavorable social comparisons on psychological quality of life. So think about that. If you don't like the way your body looks and you're comparing yourself negatively with others, it helps to mediate that so that your quality of your life is better.

Okay, so this like directly impacts people who struggle with food and weight. Self-compassion can assist in the reduction of compassion fatigue and burnout in practitioners and caregivers. You interested in that? I think so just look at the study data. Doctors are struggling. All right. Self-compassion significantly reduces shame proneness. So how prone you are to shame feeling shame. It significantly reduces irrational beliefs and symptoms of social anxiety. Super good, super good. Self-compassion is negatively associated with procrastination, like I mentioned. And maladaptive perfectionism. Think about that maladaptive perfectionism.

[00:10:19] Sometimes we're like, oh, but I'm a perfectionist. And that makes me like, you know, thinking that that's good, right? But maladaptive perfectionism is what most perfectionism is, which is it actually holds you back from doing your best work and makes you procrastinate. And all that and actually is a really a negative influence for a lot of people. And so self-compassion is negatively associated with that, which means you procrastinate less and you have less maladaptive perfectionism. And then finally, self-compassion results in more motivation to change for the better. Try harder to learn and avoid repeating past mistakes, particularly with health related behaviors. So if I've lost, you, come back to me, such as sticking to a diet, quitting smoking, or starting a fitness regimen.

I'm just gonna like say that again because it's so important. That's why we're talking about this on this podcast. Self-compassion results in more motivation to change for the better. Try harder to learn and avoid repeating past mistakes, particularly with health related behaviors such as sticking to a diet, quitting smoking, or starting a fitness regimen. So so so so so good okay, okay. So let's talk about those three constructs. So self-kindness common humanity and mindfulness. So sometimes I think it's helpful to recognize like what the opposite is. Like there's a thing where we want to create or we want to get better at or improve or develop, but what are we moving away from? Like what's the opposite of it? And the opposite of self-kindness is self-judgment.

[00:11:51] I think many of us, the majority of us are pretty familiar with self-judgment. So when we offer self self-kindness, what we're doing is we're showing kindness to ourselves, showing understanding to ourselves, particularly when we fail or are hurt, you know, emotionally or even physically. I've worked with a lot of people who are physically, you know, injured or have some sort of physical ailment and are very, very

harsh with themselves. So with Self-kindness, what we do is we recognize the negative influence of that self-judgment. Right?

And we recognize, oh, when I'm in a very self judgy place, that's not good for me. It has a negative influence on my life. And then we offer ourselves something different instead. So warmth, patience, that kindness, tenderness. Sometimes I think about it. It's like how we would want to be treated when we were, say, 8 or 9 years old and something happened and a caregiver, parent or someone else who we really loved and respected, how we would have loved for them to approach us. Now, maybe you had that experience where someone did approach you in that way that you would have loved, and you can remember that and kind of channel that. And for some people, they really don't feel like they have that. A lot of people don't. And so we have to kind of create it from scratch. We have to imagine what we would love and then practice offering that to ourselves.

[00:13:22] So self kindness means that you treat your worth and your value as unconditional, like it's non-negotiable, even when you fall short of expectations, when you fail, when you feel inadequate. I see this a lot with weight loss. What if I try this and I fail? Well, there's only going to be a problem if failure to you means complete self-judgment, treating yourself terribly. And if that's what happens, if that's how you treat yourself when you fail, then of course you would be hesitant to try new things, because what if you fail? If you know, I'm going to try this, I'm going to do my best. And if I fail, it's okay, because I love myself anyway. And that doesn't mean anything about me as a human being.

So like, the worst thing is that it just doesn't work, then that's very different than the worst thing is that I have to endure, you know, my own self-judgment, which can be very, very mean, very harsh, very painful. So with self kindness, we recognize that imperfection and failure are inevitable. This is just who we are as humans in the world. None of us are perfect. So therefore, if we're imperfect, there will be mistakes and there will be failures. And the more we can open up to accepting that, the more willing we are to fail. And the people who are more willing to fail have a much greater likelihood of creating whatever results they want in the world.

[00:15:04] They're willing to try things and not have it work to continually move forward until they figure out what will work, and that is what is required to create permanent weight loss. So much of what we do is experimentation. I was coaching today. It's like, okay, we can let's try this, try this, try this. Let's just see what happens. Try that, see if that works. Come back and tell me what parts worked, what didn't. Like we're we're going to create an individual solution for each person that we work with because it has to actually work for you. And if it doesn't, then there's going to be a different solution and we'll find that. But we have to be willing to try things and have it not work.

So really, ultimately you approach yourself from a more gentle place. When you do fail. People with self kindness are gentle with themselves and they're not angry with themselves. There's some frustration or something. They don't spend a lot of time there. They're kind and gentle and understanding. Okay, now let's talk about common humanity. So common humanity. Is really just it just means understanding that adversity is an inevitable part of life. I think that we know this logically, cognitively we know this, but often we really are just kind of like, I don't want that. You know what I mean? No, that's for everybody else.

[00:16:34] But for me, I wanted to always be smooth sailing. And I think the thing that's tough is for a lot of high achievers, a lot of the time it was smooth sailing. Or if you just worked hard enough, you were able to move through that. But that does not work the whole life, you know, your whole life. Common humanity. In terms of developing self-compassion, it means that you really deeply understand and recognize that challenges and personal failures and things like that, these are something that all of us share. There's no human who gets out of this place without having challenges and personal failures, and recognizing that there's nothing especially bad when we struggle or mess things up.

So we just have to recognize that failure is a part of life and everyone goes through it. Right? So when we're so afraid of failure, it's as though we think we're, like, going to be able to avoid the normal human experience. And that just doesn't work. In fact, usually what happens is when we're trying to avoid failure so much, we just hold ourselves stuck in a situation that we don't want. So with weight loss, right, there are people who are like very dissatisfied with their relationship with food, feel very uncomfortable with

their bodies, all of that, but they're afraid of failing. And so they won't try something different. They won't try to make a change.

[00:18:01] So by not failing, we're like trying to avoid the negative emotion or experience of failing, but in doing so are basically signing up for a lifetime of discomfort and dissatisfaction and self-judgment. That's not great either. So when we are working on self-compassion, part of that is that common humanity, and that ultimately decreases our feelings of isolation when we think that other people have it all figured out and they don't fail and they have that perfect life, even though, again, logically, we know that that's not the case. But when it seems like something's uniquely wrong with us, that terminal uniqueness, then we feel very, very isolated.

And when we're isolated, we feel a lot of shame. And it's just it's, you know, a bit of a spiral there. So that's where common humanity fits in. And then the third construct is mindfulness. Mindfulness I feel like is one of those words. Even for me, I'm like, oh God. Well, mindfulness, you know, like you're that word sometimes it just doesn't resonate that well with me. But really, what it is, is it's the opposite of avoidance. It's being willing to be here for what's true now, like developing acceptance for what is. And that means, like what you're thinking, what your emotions are, the sensations in your body. You're here for all of it. So here's something that's really, really interesting. Kristin Neff has been quoted as saying, you can't ignore your pain or suffering and feel compassion for it at the same time.

[00:19:36] So that's kind of interesting, right? So if you want to be developing self-compassion, you have to be willing to face the pain or suffering. And I have to say, even several years ago, hearing pain and suffering is like, oh my God, it's so dramatic. But what that means is just like negative emotions. So that's, you know, emotional discomfort, not feeling great whether it's mentally or physically. Right. So very important. Right. If we want to ignore our pain and suffering, we're gonna have a very hard time having compassion for ourselves and for it.

And what I have found is at times, sometimes people will say, well, I want to feel the self-compassion first so that I can feel the emotions. And it's like, yeah, but it kind of they both develop at the same time. Like you kind of need to be in on both to be able to develop them both, which is, you know, more self-compassion, but also being willing to

face the pain and suffering and, you know, look at it head on and figure out what's going on with it and increase your capacity to be with it. So, like I said, with mindfulness, with self-compassion, negative emotions are accepted rather than being suppressed or avoided or denied. And really, when we're eating food excessively, right, more than our bodies need, what we're doing is we are suppressing or avoiding or denying our emotions.

[00:20:55] So instead of eating to suppress them, we want to accept those negative emotions in the way that we can really do that is by developing self-compassion. So this is actually a lot of what we do in coaching with mindfulness. Like what it really means is building awareness of your thoughts and then acknowledging them rather than reacting to them and eating in response to them is a way of reacting to them. So with mindfulness, we're aware of the painful thoughts and emotions, but then we don't ruminate on them. We don't get like sucked into them like this, like vortex.

You know, we keep perspective on what is happening for us. We recognize that none of it is permanent and it will change whether it's good or bad. It will change. And we keep perspective on when we fail, really recognizing it for what it is, not overblowing it or making it into something that it's not. And then also with mindfulness that looks like approaching our emotions with curiosity and openness, which is what we do in coaching all the time. That's something that we really, really work on a lot. Another thing Doctor Neff is quoted as saying is that self-compassion is a practice of good will, not good feelings. So I think this is really important too, in terms of the actual like what to expect as you're starting to do this kind of a thing.

[00:22:23] If you really think about it, it's like self-compassion. It sounds like it's like rainbows and like, ah, it's so great. And that's not actually what self-compassion is. It's that practice of good will. When you're not feeling great, you know, offering yourself that good will when things aren't going so well. Right. So I think that sometimes there's lots of different things we can try. I can feel overwhelming. And I want to offer you just two things to choose from when it comes to kind of initiating a little bit of a self-compassion practice or ideally, hopefully, it just becomes kind of how you approach yourself or it's not something that you have to maybe think so hard about eventually. It's just how you do this, how you do life.

I think the first, I don't know, I think this one's kind of the most important, and that is practicing treating yourself as you'd treat a friend. I mean, I've found that the vast majority of the people that I work with are just so lovely, are just such wonderful, wonderful, kind, lovely, caring human beings to others. But not to themselves. So I was thinking about this as I was preparing. I'm like, it's kind of like the reverse golden rule. That's what what I want to suggest you work on. So the reverse golden rule, which is to treat yourself the way you would treat others. I think that's something that would be very, very helpful to practice.

[00:23:46] So you let yourself make mistakes. You keep that perspective, right. You recognize that things are not usually as bad as it seems. And, you know, if you think about what you do as a friend, typically your friend comes to you and is like, oh my gosh, listen to this. This is this thing that happened. And you're like, oh my gosh, that I cannot believe that. That is awful. You're right. That's horrible. I'm so sorry. What can I do to help? Like, uh, you know, like, so what you're doing is you're at first validating the friend's experience.

You're not like, well, clearly that's all your fault. And, you know, like to immediately attacking them. What you're doing is you're validating going, yeah, that sounds so hard. And like, wow, I really feel for you. That is really tough thing to go through. And I'm sorry you're going through that. You can literally tell yourself the same thing I just was telling today on this coaching call. I was telling my client, I was like, literally, this is like a script of what I will sometimes say to myself. And that is, this is what it's like to live a normal adult human life. This is what it's like, and you don't have to like it often. Doesn't feel very good, but this is normal. It's telling myself like, this is normal. This is what it's like. Because so much of what is so painful is my resistance to that thinking.

[00:25:04] It shouldn't be that way. But yeah, actually it should. Actually, it totally should. Remember, that's that common humanity. This is what it's like. This is what everybody goes through. We're not extra special, messed up and broken. It's just not a thing. Okay? And the second thing is just increasing self-awareness. And that's what, you know, we talk about in coaching all the time. We have to understand what's going on for us first before we can really shift anything. So becoming aware of that inner narrative like that self-talk that you have, like, what is it like being you?

How do you narrate your life to yourself in your head? What is that filter through which you see things? When you really start to understand that more and more, and you look at it with that openness and that curiosity that we were talking about, you're able to so much more easily understand, like, oh, no wonder I struggle in that area, you know, like, no wonder I feel like I'm beating my head against the wall in that area of my life or whatever it is. Right? Like we start to be able to get some perspective and think through a more solutions focused mindset, we start to see problems that seemed like they were unsolvable become solvable. We just start to understand and own our part in creating the results that we have and, you know, moving forward from there.

[00:26:27] So really ultimately treating yourself with kindness, with respect and offering yourself some grace because you are a human. And like I said, I mean, just going back to the mindfulness component, learning to actually be with yourself and those emotions is huge. Think about all the times that you want to eat. You either have urges to eat or something else is going on in your life and you know your brain's just screaming, let's eat something. You know, the more we can expand our capacity to feel what that is that's going on, the less we need food. And this is how, you know, I talk about this all the time.

Like what we need to do is let food be food, you know, some occasional pleasure and then approach our emotional lives separately from food. That's what we're doing here. That's what this is. It's a huge, huge, huge part of it. So I'm going to end it here because of time. But I just want to let you know, like just type in Self-compassion Scale or Kristin Neff and Google that. And there's such great, great support out there. More to learn. But more importantly than learning applying okay, take what you learn and then actually start putting it to the test, trying it out in your life. There's so many resources out there. There's all kinds of like affirmations and worksheets and journaling prompts and all kinds of things.

[00:27:43] So I'm not gonna throw that all on you here. But if you're ready to really dig into self-compassion some more, definitely check out Kristin Neff's work. It's so good. And you know, there's plenty of others out there as well. All right. Well, thank you so much for being here with me today. This was actually really interesting for me to research and learn more about. And it was reminding me, I think even a few years ago I thought like, oh, I should do one of Kristin Neff's courses.

And I was like, oh yeah, I should still do. I never did that. I should do that. I'm sure it would be amazing. And like I said, there's other amazing, amazing people out there as well who can help you with this, but it's an important piece of the puzzle. When I talk about doing the work before losing weight, or doing it while you're losing weight, this is what I'm talking about, right? Like you can lose all the weight and. Then you're still going to have to work on not treating yourself like a bag of garbage. Okay, so that's what we're talking about here. I'm going to wrap it up. Thank you so much.

I hope you have a great rest of your week and I'll talk to you soon. Bye. Ready to start making progress on your weight loss goals? For lots of free help, go to katrinaubellmd.com and click on Free Resources.