



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 friend. Welcome to today's episode. I'm so glad you're joining me today. I really love talking about stopping eating at night, because if you would have told me ten years ago that I could stop doing it, I would have called BS on that. I would have just been like, I would love to, but don't know that it's possible because I had been eating at night or in the evening or before bed literally my entire life, and it was a habit that I just did not think that I could ever stop doing.

I know that this is something that so many people struggle with. You might too, and if you do struggle with it, it can feel really, really hard to stop. I know this because I have been coaching, um, many women physicians for many years, and it's not a problem for everybody, but it is a problem for a lot of people. And when you're one of those people, it can feel uniquely difficult. I remember when I was back in practice, there was a woman who worked in our back office doing some billing, and I remember talking to her one night about weight loss or eating or I don't know what we were talking about.

[00:01:45] And she shared, she's like, oh, you eat at night? She said, no, we make dinner and clean up the kitchen and then that's it. And I remember just kind of being like, what? I just couldn't even imagine doing that, like that, just wow. And that definitely was not the environment that I grew up in. So in our house, we didn't have dessert with

dinner, we ate dinner. And then a few hours later we had our dessert, which typically was more in the evening time or kind of a little bit before bed.

And that, like I said, for as long as I can remember, since the time where I didn't eat dinner and go straight to bed, I had been doing that. So it was really something that I had to work to overcome. And having done it for a very long time and guided so many people through it, I feel very confident that I can help you to stop eating at night. This is definitely something that you can learn how to do. Now I want to say there is nothing inherently wrong with eating at night. Number one thing we have to talk about is there's no shame in eating at night.

[00:02:44] Sometimes I get the sense that people feel like it's somehow like morally wrong or something is wrong with you. If you eat at night and you have a hard time stopping. And I want to be really clear, this is just a habit. It oftentimes stems from something that makes so much sense. It could be a level of comfort that you're seeking at night, especially if you are really busy during the day. Maybe you often are actually underfed, and rather than eating more nutritious food in the evening, you end up eating more snacks and whatever. The same thing that I'm going to talk about here goes for drinking alcohol as well.

That's your version of eating at night, your version of a snack. So number one, we just have to lay the groundwork here that there's no shame in this. If this is what you do, there's nothing to be ashamed of. There's nothing to be embarrassed of. There's no reason to think. You can't stop doing this. You absolutely can stop. You are not broken. Okay, so this is truly a habit on actually a couple of levels. And like any habit that you want to break, it takes some effort, it takes some awareness, but it's totally something that you can do. Next, let's talk about some patterns. And this is a big part of the habit. Very often there are certain times of our lives, like periods of our day, that are very repetitive.

[00:04:10] A lot of people end up eating if they eat breakfast. They eat kind of the same stuff, at least most of the time for breakfast. Like their breakfasts are not that varied. It could be your morning routine, so to speak. And I'm not even saying like, oh, you get up and go for a jog and then you meditate and then you journal. Like, I'm not saying that kind of morning routine. I'm saying like, you get up and get ready for work or get the kids

out the door and then go to work or whatever it is. That tends to be pretty similar for a lot of people.

Now, of course, people who work shift work, it might be a little bit different, but I would even venture to guess that when you're working a day, shift your day at least parts of it look pretty similar. If you're working a PM shift day looks pretty similar. If you're working an overnight, right, there's certain parts that look pretty similar. So a lot of that is habit. And if you think about it, it makes a lot of sense for our brains to do that. Because when we can just repeat things, then our brain does not have to be on like full blown critical thinking level. It can kind of downregulate some of that stuff so you don't have to think in the morning so much.

[00:05:14] Okay, what do I do next? Oh, it's take a shower okay. So what do I need to be able to take a shower? Well, I need my towel. I need to hang my towel up by the shower. Okay. What else do I need? Oh, right. I have to take my clothes off. Okay. Next. What what what's next? Oh, I got to turn the water on. Right. You see what I'm saying? You just take a shower. You're not thinking so hard about it. Or, like, why do so many great ideas come to us in the shower?

Well, we are still showering. It's because we don't have to think so hard about every single step. And what's the next thing that I should be doing? So a lot of the time it's just an energy conservation kind of a situation. It makes a lot of sense that if we do the same thing the majority of the days, that we would be able to do it without having to think too much. It's kind of mindless. It's just like what we do. And so I want to offer to you that eating at night for a lot of people is similar to that. It's kind of the same thing where if the majority of the time, like if you are home and nothing big has happened or whatever, like something major, then what you will be doing is roughly the same.

[00:06:15] There will be some sort of evening meal that you'll consume most of the time, and then there will be some sort of tidying up or cleaning up or sort of finishing up for the evening, and then there will be some sort of relaxing time to come that can look like lots of different things, and it may not even be that relaxing. I mean, it could be you're working on your charts, but you're doing it with a glass of wine by your side, or you are tidying up the house a little bit, or you're getting through emails or going through the mail or whatever.

Some of those things are folding laundry, whatever that may be. But for a lot of people, there is in that evening time, a chunk of time set aside to kind of wind down. That makes sense. Like, I remember working shifts in the emergency department, and there's no way that I could work an overnight in the E.R. and come home and go right to bed. Like it doesn't work like that. You know, you need a little wind down, period. At least I did. I wasn't that tired. I mean, resident level tired. Yes. Then you can just sleep anywhere. But a lot of the time you're tired, but you still need time to transition your brain from that high intensity work environment to a period of time where it can actually relax and go to sleep.

[00:07:20] So oftentimes during that wind down period is when we eat. And so that could be your reading a book and you're having a snack, you are watching a show and you're eating something. You are on your phone, you're shopping for stuff, mindlessly scrolling whatever. Like any of that could be things that you do and maybe other things too, like maybe there's some sort of hobby. I know some people like doing a hobby in the evening, because it often keeps your hands busy, and then there's less opportunity to be able to eat. But I would love for you to just not eat regardless of what you're doing.

Not needing a hobby in your hands so that you don't eat, you know what I'm saying? So if you think about it though, like if that's the typical routine, let's just say for an hour or so, or maybe longer, maybe a little less before you go to bed, there is this wind down period, and you probably do similar things. You probably sit in a similar place, you probably do similar things. And if one of those things that you do on a regular basis is to eat something, then again, it's just kind of a down regulated thing. It's like your brain's oh, right, I know what comes next. The next thing that we do is we grab a snack. The next thing we do is we go rummage around the pantry and find something sweet to eat, or find something crunchy to eat.

[00:08:30] Or we go in the freezer and get some ice cream or whatever it is. So like often people will say, well, I don't even feel like I'm thinking about it. Like all of a sudden I'm just eating well, right? Because it's not something you have to think about so hard because it's a habit. It's something that you do most of the time. So this is where building awareness, actually being present, keeping your brain 100% fully online during that time can help you to recognize, oh, right. So I'm going to want to eat now because that's typically what I do. I'm working to stop doing that.

Therefore I need to be awake and present and here with myself so that I don't just all of a sudden kind of go offline. And before I know it, I'm eating a snack because that's what I typically do, right. So that's why it makes sense that it can be hard. Like you have to actually pay attention similarly to if you are a nail biter or you chew on your cuticles or something like before we know it, people will say, all my nails were gone. What you have to do to stop doing that is you have to be aware of you putting your hands in your mouth. That's one of the first things, right? I mean, very, very helpful.

[00:09:33] So breaking those patterns is very helpful. Like your brain expects to eat when you usually eat. So it will create urges. It will just make it very effortless for you to float into the kitchen and find something to eat. This is something I'm going to give you some thought mindset things, but I'm going to give you some really like effective, hands on actionable. You can do this kind of a thing to help with this too, because often it's actually just the first couple of weeks that are the hardest with this. And when you get over that hump, it's actually really not that difficult anymore, which is really cool.

So if your brain is like, hey, guess what? Here's an urge to go eat, because this is what we typically do in this kind of environment. Then it makes sense that changing the environment, breaking the pattern of that environment would be an effective strategy to be able to kind of throw a wrench in things in terms of your brain switch it up so that you don't feel such a need or desire to do that, that can look like, well, if I usually sit in my living room on the couch and I watch shows and I have a snack, maybe instead what I'm going to do is I'm going to get ready for bed early, and I'm going to go sit up in my room and read or watch a show on my iPad, you know, or on the laptop or on the TV in my room or whatever it may be.

[00:10:51] If you have a TV and just switch up where you are so it can look like lots of different things, different room typically will help different environment. Like maybe you get ready for bed early or change into your pajamas or something like that's different. You're just kind of changing the whole scenario. Some people say like, well, brush your teeth and then you won't eat. Well, I don't know that that's always effective for everybody, but if one of the things that you find is that you're like eating and then you're like dragging it out because you still have to get ready for bed and you don't have the energy to do that.

Yeah. If you know you're not going to eat anymore because you're working on stopping eating at night, yeah, you can brush your teeth and then that's done and that's cool. And that's one less barrier to you getting to bed. So same thing if you have a routine where you take your makeup off or do anything to your face or moisturize or like any of that stuff, it can be helpful to do that first and then have a wind down period closer to where you are going to be sleeping, or at least just in a different place.

[00:11:48] So it doesn't mean that you won't get any ideas about eating. You won't miss any of that stuff, but it does change it. It makes it harder. It helps you to be more aware. It helps to prevent you from slipping into that fog where you just do what you always do. The next thing that I want to really make sure that I emphasize is that when you're stopping eating at night, it's important that you make sure you had a solid, satisfying evening meal. So some people will find that they just kind of snack this and that, ate some things off the kids plate, had a little of this and a little of that. Maybe. What, you weren't really that hungry for dinner. And then 9:00, 10:00 rolls around and you're rummaging for a snack because you are legitimately, physically hungry.

Same thing can happen for people who end up skipping meals and not really being prepared to skip them. And what I mean by that is not making sure that then the meals that they eat afterward are properly satisfying. So something that can happen is say you eat three meals a day and you had breakfast, but then you would plan to eat lunch. But for whatever reason you got busy, you couldn't eat. Then you eat regular dinner. Well, you might be hungry again 3 or 4 hours later, depending on how late you stay up and how early you eat dinner, because your body's like, where's our third meal? Right? So we want to make sure that we're doing our best to have some regular meals, particularly during this time when we're trying to stop eating at night and make sure that you have that solid evening meal.

[00:13:17] What I mean by that is not overeating, but what I mean by that is that you eat a proper meal that actually has some fiber in it, like some vegetables, ideally some good healthy fat that's very satiating and keeps you feeling full so that you know that you have had enough food. I've talked about the hunger scale before, and maybe it's something to review on here. Again, the hunger scale. You're using the scale to help you to know when you've had enough food. And so honing that in and going, okay, yeah, I didn't overeat, but I have had enough.

I feel a nice content, positive feeling of heaviness in my stomach. This is good. I've had my proper nutrition for the night. Then, you know, like anything that comes up for me later this evening is really probably not going to be physical hunger. If it feels like hunger, it might be emotional hunger. Maybe that would be an opportunity to help identify the difference between the two and process that emotional hunger. But then you just know there's no part of you that's going, yeah, but did I eat enough today? Like, you know, you ate enough.

[00:14:16] You're fine. Like, you know, you're gonna be okay. It's like when my dog has put himself to sleep upstairs in our bedroom, and then he comes down for some reason, then all of a sudden is acting like he wants to go out. I'm like, you were just in bed 30 minutes ago. I think you're okay. You don't really need that. So I will say that if you are someone who is eating a dessert on a regular basis, a lot of the people that I work with, especially for a period of time, while we're really working on understanding our body's signals, we take a break from eating flour and sugar.

But if you are not doing that for any number of reasons, and you are having some sugar in your life, and often that sugar is in the evening time, I would suggest that you eat it with your dinner. So rather than like okay, rather than four hours after dinner having my snack, I'll have it two hours later. What I would instead suggest, like say you like to eat chocolate or whatever. Like that you have your chocolate actually with your dinner. So if there's going to be any sweets involved or anything that you kind of deem as dessert, have it with the meal. Now that's also something that I work with my clients on.

[00:15:20] Sometimes we have to kind of like undo that kind of dessert mentality. But we're not talking about that today, because today what we're just working on is stopping eating at night. So if you're going to have something typically or you want that little whatever, have it with your dinner, okay. So that way you have gotten what you need and you know, everything that your body needs has been done. I mean, honestly, just as a side note, this is something you can do even when you're not trying to lose weight.

Or you could be like, you know what? Like I'm not actively really working to lose weight right now. I'd like to in the future or whatever, but I can still work on stopping eating at night, right? So it's like often the all or nothing thinking that we have makes us think that, like, if I'm going to stop eating at night, then I need to be actively trying to lose weight.

You really don't. This is something you can do even if you're eating all the things. In fact, it would be interesting to try it, right? Maybe you're like, yeah, I'm kind of in precontemplation I'm not really ready to lose weight yet, but yeah, I could maybe try this and see if I can just stop eating at night. It would be interesting to see what would happen with your weight. You might even lose weight. I bet a lot of people would.

[00:16:21] Okay, so make sure you have that. So then next some people ask me about what you can have in the evening time. Then like some people really like having some hot herbal tea, some decaf coffee, like some things like that. Absolutely. You can have those things for sure. Now having 3 or 4 cups of decaf with heavy cream and like, you know, thinking that's fasting. No. And that's not what we do. That's too much. But if you just like having something. Warm. I live in a typically cold climate, so I really do enjoy a mug of peppermint tea at night. It's something that for years and years I've really enjoyed having, and there's no downside to it.

So there's literally no reason why you can't have that. So it's not like you stop eating at night and all you can have is water after that. If you want something else that, like I was saying, like decaf coffee, hot tea, things like that, you absolutely can still do that. I like to think of it as, does it cause a problem for you? Like me, having a mug of peppermint tea at night does not cause any problems for me. The only main issue would be like if I drink too much of it right before I go to bed, I might have to wake up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, which isn't ideal, and I don't love that.

[00:17:32] But you know, that's the only real downside of having it. So just think about that. If you're like, well, every time I have decaf coffee, it just makes me want to have more. Yeah, then that's maybe not so great. Maybe we don't want to do that. We want to choose something that isn't going to create more problems on the other side. Okay, so you're in a different place. You have your mug of tea, you've gotten in your jammies. You're like changing your routine. Whatever it is that you've decided and you still want to go eat, congratulations. You are normal. That is okay. Totally normal.

But this is where the mindset part comes in, okay? Because you've done all of these things for yourself and that's amazing and great. And the opportunity here now is to figure out what it is that is the problem that you want food to solve for you. Okay. So you want to eat something to change your state, to change how you feel in your body. So

what is that feeling and what is creating it? For some people they're surprised, just like restlessness. They just feel restless and they just feel like they just want to eat something. Okay, cool. Really good to know that's what it is. For some people, it's a boredom. For some people, it's dread. It's like those Sunday scaries which you can have any night of the week.

[00:18:48] It can be any number of things. Right. What's really important is for us to spend some time understanding what it is that we're trying to fix with food, so that we can do something about that. Right? Let's just say we'll go with the restlessness thing. That's definitely something that came up for me. And still from time to time, I feel that at night. And so okay, so this is restlessness and I understand what that feels like in my body. And then I can figure out what I want to do about it, if anything. Right.

I can just let it be there. Sometimes it's kind of like a I need to move around kind of energy. And honestly, even depending on how long you've been doing this and how difficult it is for you to stop, you might even want to distract yourself for a little bit, but not with six hours of shows. And now you're up till 3 a.m., right? You would want to distract yourself with one chapter in a good book, or watching like one 30 minute show or one one hour show, and then knowing it's done and then just moving on from there, you know what I'm saying? Like, we don't want to create other problems, but sometimes it's just like, yeah, like not feeling great, really want to eat. And so I'm gonna distract myself for a little bit because I'm not quite time to go to sleep.

[00:19:53] And then I'm gonna go to sleep and just move through this. And so particularly in those first few days, the first week, the first two weeks, it can be a little challenging. And that's okay because you can do that. Like you can do challenging. It's okay. But we need to know what if the reason you want to eat at night is because you have intense dread, you really don't want to go to bed because then tomorrow will come and you're going to have to go to work. And there's all these things about work you don't like that's important. We need to know about that, if that's what's going on.

That explains so much why you want to eat that night and then why when you ask yourself to stop eating at night, why it's so hard. So what? Stopping eating at night will do for you is help you to understand yourself better and help you to understand where there are some areas to work on. And of course, coaching is magnificent at helping you

to work through those things to figure out what your next steps are, whether it's staying there and working on your thoughts about it and processing your emotions, whether it's finding something different, whatever it is, once you identify that coaching can be incredible. Now, of course, if you can't or don't want to have coaching in your life something you could bring to a therapist, it'd be something you could journal on yourself.

[00:21:06] Just trying to understand that some more. Okay, so when those urges come, don't think of them as so annoying and trying to resist them and just push them away. There's a lot of really good, intelligent information in there and you want to tap into that. Find out what it's all about, understand yourself better. That's the opportunity right there. This is so, so, so important. And I will say that if you're kind of in your old spot on the couch with a TV on, you're gonna have a harder time understanding this stuff.

So I think changing the location, breaking those patterns really helps to figure this out some more, too. Okay. And then finally, as we wrap this up, I do just want to say that sometimes it's just hard and you don't like it and you're just in a mood and. It's not there. And why can't you just eat? And if that's the case, I want to suggest that you just go to sleep. Just go to sleep early. Just go lay down. Put yourself out of your misery and just go to sleep. Because honestly, you probably need the sleep. I mean, who are we kidding? You probably need it. And getting a good night of sleep is only going to make the next day better.

[00:22:12] And when you are less exhausted, it is a lot easier to not emotionally eat. So you're just setting yourself up for success for the next day. So sometimes you're just like, I've tried all the things. This is hard. I don't even know, you know, made sense when Katrina talked about it, and now I'm doing it. It feels hard. Just go to sleep then, okay? Make sure you got a good comfy setup. I haven't talked about it too much on here, particularly recently, but if you are too hot at night, you might want to check out the eight sleep. The number eight sleep. That's my favorite thing in my life.

Before that was my chilly pad, chilly cube, whatever it was called. And then I upgraded a little bit ago to the eight sleep and super loved that as well. Really amazing. Particularly for women of a certain age who have some temperature regulation issues at night like myself. But even if not, like there's lots of people who love this stuff and just

make your bed like a really comfy, welcoming, enjoyable place for you to be so you can work on getting to sleep okay. And some people like taking magnesium at night to help them, whatever those things may be. But you know, the more you break those habits, the easier it's going to get. It's going to feel more normal to not eat. And what will happen is those neural connections that connected evening time.

[00:23:28] And it's time for winding down, and you're sitting on the couch in this particular spot. It's time to eat. Like it'll start to break those connections. So it's not like you can't ever go and watch a show in that place again before bed. But for the time being, we want to break those patterns and shift it and change it, mix it up a little bit so that the brain is not sure what to expect next. But if you like, go to that different place and you start snacking their brains like, oh cool, we snack in two places. So we want to try to try to keep it clean in that sense, like without that association. So I want to encourage you to really try this.

If you struggle with eating at night, this is something you absolutely can stop doing and it can not feel like a hardship. You know, it's like, well, sure, I can not eat at night and then I'll be miserable and I'll hate every minute of it. I would say I understand that line of thinking, but at the same time it's kind of like, well, if that's the main way to get pleasure out of my life or my evening, maybe it's time to think about, like, other ways to get pleasure out of my evening. There could be other ways that ultimately end up feeling very satisfying as well, and are not causing weight gain.

[00:24:33] Right. And results that we don't like. All right, friend, listen, you can stop eating at night. I want you to really work on doing this because it's a possibility. And when you can do it, this is a little bit like the snowball that starts the avalanche, like when you're like, oh my God, look at me. I'm not eating at night. And it builds your confidence. Like, what else can I shift with my eating? There is more that can come from this and I'm going to do that. It can be a big motivator and and really help get you moving.

And I'd ask that you would share this episode with somebody who could benefit from it. I know sometimes sharing weight loss stuff can feel a little like you just want to be tactful and not insult people or hurt their feelings, but you probably know somebody who's

shared that they struggle with eating at night too, and they would definitely appreciate getting some help. So go ahead and share that, if you wouldn't mind, please. All right. Thank you so much. Thanks for joining me. Thanks for your attention. And I hope you have a really good rest of your week. I'll talk to you next time. 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.