



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Well, hello there my friend. Welcome to today's episode. Thanks for joining me. I am super glad you're here with me.

I hope your summer is going well so far. That is if you live in the northern hemisphere. Most of my audience is in the northern hemisphere, but if you're not, then I guess you're heading into winter and I hope that that's going okay. But overall, this is the time of year when it's just so nice to live in Wisconsin. So we just wring every moment out that we can try to really enjoy every stretch of it.

So this actually leads me a little bit to today's topic, because when it's nice out and the weather is warmer, you know, we often change what we're wearing and sometimes some body image and body composition issues and concerns start to surface. And so today, I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about body composition – and not so much about how to change your body composition a ton. But kind of the question of, does weight loss end up making you skinny fat, or is there a way to lose weight so that you don't end up having a body composition that you're not happy with? And I think it's a good question.

I think, though, that it's also an issue that a lot of people are a little bit fearmongering out there. I think not everybody by any stretch, but there definitely are people out there who are like, well, I lost weight. And then I found out I was skinny fat. Oh my God, the horror. And then like, and now I had to do something different or whatever. And so I think there are people then who are like, well, if I lose weight, then I'm just going to be skinny fat and then I'm going to have to do all this other stuff. And it's, you know, like the drama, the mind drama that goes along with that. So I just wanted to dedicate an episode to

talk about that. Like, does weight loss equal skinny fat? Let's talk about it. Let's even talk about what skinny fat means. You know, I think the answer is yes and no, because everybody's on a different journey and has different kinds of assignments, so to speak. You know, it's like if we're all working on getting a degree in permanent weight loss and peace and freedom around food, it might be that the curriculum for each of us is not the same, even though we end up with the same degree at the end.

And so let me first explain what it even means to be skinny fat. Maybe you're familiar with that term. Maybe you're not. But skinny fat basically means that you have a BMI that's probably in the acceptable range, or maybe even below it. So you might be actually considered underweight. And of course, right. We know that BMI is not perfect by any stretch. So just recognizing that here. But it's the best of what we got for the moment. So you've got a normal or possibly even low BMI, but you have a higher body fat percentage and a lower muscle percentage than would be recommended. So you look thin, you know, like your clothing could be small. People might even be saying to you like, oh my gosh, you're tiny. Or you know, all the things that people feel entitled to say about your body to you. You know, you're so small and things like that, but you still may have more fat than muscle, like your overall muscle mass might be relatively low. And so that means that what's filling up the rest of you is fat. And that fat for a lot of people tends to end up being more visceral fat. It also can be under the skin, under the surface. It can be a combination. But for a lot of people, it ends up being more visceral, fat.

And we know that that is obviously not great from a health perspective long term. So you might be wondering, well, how do you figure out if you are skinny fat? There's different measuring things that have, you know, certain degrees of error involved in them, but getting a DEXA scan is probably the best way to be able to find that out. Now, I want to caution you before you're like, okay, sign me up, let me do a DEXA scan. Like you just have to kind of decide, depending on where you are in your journey, whether that is even helpful or not, because I can see for some people, when they find out this information, when they're in the middle of things, it can kind of spiral them. And why do that to ourselves if it's not necessary? Right.

So let's talk about the causes of skinny fat. Like what makes you skinny fat. Well, genetic predisposition is a big part of this. So just putting that out there, you know, like

for some people it's just kind of like, you know, they just are lower muscle volume people just in general. Not that they can't change that, but just naturally that's just how their bodies are. So it could just be genetic predisposition. But outside of that, there are some other factors that can be contributors to being skinny fat. And so one interestingly, is excessive cardio. And you know, when you hear so many people who are like, especially I feel like a little bit less now because we know, you know, that the data shows so clearly that exercising for weight loss doesn't work.

But, you know, back in the days when it was like all about cardio, doing so much cardio and people would do all that cardio and often wouldn't actually notice a lot of results on their bodies. So interesting right? Excessive cardio can cause it crash. Dieting can cause it. Sudden weight loss, right? So we can lose weight quickly and not be actually trying to crash diet. But in any case, losing weight quickly can contribute to this. A nice little plug for why rapid weight loss is not always the best, you know. So I'm kind of like speaking to all of you out there who are in a rush to get to your goal weight talking to you. Uh, this is something we talk about in my program a lot, where it's like, people just want to get that weight off as quickly as possible. They just want to get to that goal. So sometimes, you know, our clever brains will start doing some things that are maybe a little bit more diet mentality in order to get the weight off quickly. But, you know, if you recognize that that might increase the risk of you being skinny, fat and still having to do some body well, you don't have to do.

But deciding that you might want to do some body composition work at maintenance, like maybe we could slow down. Maybe we don't need to rush so much other causes of skinny, fat, chronically poor eating habits specifically like very high carb and refined sugar type of diet can contribute to that type two diabetes, particularly the insulin resistance that's involved in that. And hypothyroidism can cause it as well. Some things that I read, some medications can sometimes cause it as well or contribute to it. And then I didn't want to put this down as a cause, but it definitely can contribute and is something that is important to recognize because it's not mentioned. We talked about excessive cardio, but little to no strength training definitely can contribute to this as well.

So going back to, you know, not that long ago and the decades prior to that, where it was, particularly for women, all about cardio, you don't want to lift weights because you're going to get bulky, you know, don't lift anything over 3 pounds or whatever. I think

that's what Tracy Anderson used to tell me back in the day. Um, you know, you don't want to bulk up all those things, like being so scared of having muscles. That really has changed. I think for a lot of people over the last maybe five, ten, 15 years, something like that, that's still kind of maintained. It's like we want to be fit, but we want to be super tiny at the same time.

So a lot of women still are not doing that much strength training. But even outside of body composition, it's really important to recognize that muscle mass is really, really important for women, particularly as we age. It's so important for our bones for preventing falls, um, preventing osteoporosis. It is linked with longevity and health in longevity and things like that. So it's definitely something that I have been focusing more on because I want to be strong and I want to feel good and I want my bones to be healthy. So I've been working on it more. But just mentioning that, you know, for so many of us, it was like all cardio, all the time, very little strength training. And it's what we're used to, you know, it feels familiar.

And for some of us, it can be hard for us to shake those old fears that we have that, you know, we're going to get too big. And that's not a feminine look or whatever the old stories were that we had. What it comes down to with skinny fat is and these body composition types of things is that we have to like, zoom out and look at the big picture, and we have to recognize that there might be different stages for us in the process. So here's what I'm talking about. You could start working on losing weight and absolutely work on preserving the muscle mass that you have.

You could even start adding on more strength training and really working on adding muscle. I'm not saying that. I'm suggesting that you go and do bodybuilding or bikini competition type of stuff or anything like that, but if you look at those people, there are some lessons that can be learned. So what the people who engage in that have figured out are really effective ways to increase their muscle mass and to become more lean right, to get fat off. And what they will all tell you is that when you are building muscle, you need to eat. That's not the time to be trying to lean out.

So their terminology is like you're either in a bulking phase or you're in a cutting phase. And when you're in a bulking phase, you're eating more and you are lifting a lot of heavy weights. And that will contribute to growing your muscles, but it will also contribute to

some fat gain as well. And then they go through these cycles. I mean, listen, I am no expert in this, but I do have a little bit of working knowledge – I don't take people through. This is not my area of expertise at all, but I still think there's some good things for us to learn here. So they go through a phase where they build muscle and they gain some weight intentionally, and then they go through a cutting phase where they're maintaining the muscle that they have built and they are restricting in order to get that fat off.

Now that cutting phase. Well, first of all, if you talk to anybody who's gone through it, you're going to know. And if you do any reading about it, the way that they do that is through calorie restriction. And a lot of people talk about how it's really not fun and they really feel very uncomfortable, which is one of the main reasons why I don't take my clients through that, because many of us, that's just not the experience we want to have. But they go through that, then they lean out and then maybe they go through more cycles of this, or they're leaning out for competition. And then like after the day after the competition, they're like eating again and they gain. Some of that way back again, I will tell you that eating disorders and disordered eating are rampant in that community. So just letting you know that. But here's the thing that I think is important to recognize is they have periods of time where they're working on building muscle, and then they have periods of time where they're working on leaning out. They're not trying to do the two at the same time. And I think that's important. The way I've always kind of thought about it is when you are building muscle, you're in an anabolic state.

When you are leaning out, like when you're trying to get fat off your body, you're in a catabolic state. And those two things are like, if we're asking for our bodies to be doing both of those things at the same time. It just can be more difficult. Now what I'll tell you that I've seen over the years is that when people are trying to lose weight, they often want to see some result on the scale, and people will sometimes really have a hard time mindset wise if they're not seeing that.

So sometimes doing a lot of heavy weight lifting while trying to lose weight, like maybe you are changing your body composition, but if you're not checking that really frequently and keeping close tabs on that, it can be something that can be mentally kind of more disappointing for people because they start making it mean that like nothing's happening, that what they're doing isn't helping when we actually don't even necessarily

know that that body composition, like everything that I've kind of researched, shows that like changing that body composition is not something that's usually super quick meaning like adding more muscle and leaning out. It's not like, oh, eight weeks and you're going to have dropped 6% body fat or something like that. For most people, it's going to be something that's going to be a much slower process, which means that you probably won't see those results that much, or it'll take a while before you see them on your body or in the way your clothes fit.

And then the scale might not move at all because you've replaced some of that fat with muscle. So if you want to do that, you just have to really work on your mindset to be okay with that. I don't think it's a bad thing. I've just seen a lot of people really struggle with that and not like that's what's going on. And we don't have to be like all or nothing about everything. It can be like, well, maybe I'm not doing super high intensity weight lifting, but I am toning muscle. I am putting some strength training into what I'm doing, trying to maintain the muscle mass that I have while I work on losing weight, and then knowing that I can always build up more later. I think that what also is not addressed in this at all is the whole mindset approach.

If you need to go through the process of essentially losing weight, then end up wanting to change up your body composition a little bit for whatever reason, whatever you want to do and that is the result. Or because you have needed to work on your mind a lot, like you needed to focus on mindset and really working through all the things that I teach in my program, *Weight Loss for Doctors Only*. Like if you need to work through all that first and that's where your focus needs to be, which I would argue for so many people, that is the case.

Like there's always time to lift weights later, like we can always do that later. But if we do that all first and we still have this very difficult relationship with food and we still feel a bunch of over desire and we're still hungry all the time and emotionally eating like, what have we accomplished? You know what I mean? Like I said, like a lot of people like, will do those competitions and do that training and are having trouble with bingeing and things like that. I've known people who struggled with that.

Actually every single person that I know who's ever done that has ended up with disordered eating and bingeing. I'm just thinking now I'm like, yeah, I can't think of one

woman I know who did it, who didn't have that experience. So not to say that doesn't happen. I'm not saying 100% of people do that, just nobody that I've ever met. So we can take the bits and pieces that help us and factor them into what we're doing. So the cool thing about my program with weight loss doctors only, like already baked into the program, we work on increasing your insulin sensitivity, which helps. I recommend that you don't participate in excessive exercise of any kind, but particularly excessive cardio. I've seen this time and time again when people want to try to do my program and train for marathons at the same time, and they don't get results.

It's like the body is hanging on to that fat because the excessive cardio is very strenuous. And when I say excessive, it sounds like it's judgmental. I think there's totally a role for those types of races and all of that. I usually just suggest how you just take a break from that level of training. It's like it doesn't mean you can't train, but just that level of training. Let's dial it back a bit, get the weight off and then you can go back to doing it again. And of course we work on improving eating habits big time.

One of the biggest things that we do is take a break from those refined sugars and really just take those out so that the body can function better. And if it's something that you are interested in working on, there are foods that you can prioritize which like already things that we know healthy fats, getting enough protein in complex carbohydrates, eating your vegetables like getting fiber in like this is all stuff we already know. It's like sometimes we're just like, oh my gosh, what's the trick? And it's like, there's no trick. It's like what we already know. And so my spin on it is like, yeah, of those foods, find the ones that you really like, find ways of preparing it that are simple and easy for you.

And you like eating them and it tastes good to you and do those things. Right. So recognizing though, that like some of us, because we might have a genetic predisposition toward being skinny fat, it might be that kind of we just aren't that muscular of a person. Like there just might not be that much muscle mass. And so we always were kind of low on muscle mass. But once we lose weight and find out we're still low on muscle mass, we're like, oh my gosh, I'm skinny fat. It's because I lost weight and the weight loss made me lose my muscle mass, whatever. And maybe it did contribute like you probably will lose some. Some ass with some dedicated weight loss efforts.

And there are things that we can do to try to prevent that or minimize it. And also like you get the weight off and then you can absolutely add more strength training in to build that muscle back again. So this is something that I think is important for us to recognize, particularly as we age. Sometimes people tell me, well, in my mid 50s, I did a weight loss program, lost a bunch of weight, and it was great. And then I tried that same one again ten, 15 years later and it didn't work. Like, what's the difference? And one thing that I wonder is how active the person is. Could be that your muscle mass and your level of activity the first time was different than what it is later, particularly as we get older, we tend to be more sedentary and it's something that we have to decide to not do.

We have to actively work against it. It's like different when you have little kids and you're running around like you don't have a choice, you have to be active. But when the different stages of life, we don't necessarily have those demands. And so it's easy to just kind of fall into more sedentary kind of a lifestyle without even planning on it. Like we didn't even try to or mean to. It just kind of happened. So we have to be thinking about it consciously so that it doesn't happen. Right? We have to actively work on that. So I just want to say that I think that there is nothing wrong with deciding to approach weight loss with a mindset approach, particularly if you haven't been exercising. I don't find it to be particularly helpful for a lot of people to start doing significant exercise right in the beginning. You can definitely move. I mean, I think it's great to get outside, go for a walk, do some yoga. Like I have no problem with that whatsoever. But to be working on your mind, probably changing up how you're eating and start adding exercise in. I just don't find it really to be sustainable for people and I'm all about it being sustainable.

So if you haven't been exercising like you can know, like, yeah, okay, I'm going to get this weight off, I'm going to work on my mind. I'm going to change my whole relationship with my body and with food and my emotions, and figure out how to support myself emotionally. That doesn't require me to eat or drink. And then I'm going to kind of do the next phase, which might be more physical activity, building up our muscle mass and things like that.

So when people are like, oh my gosh, I lost this weight and then I had to gain muscle, I'm like, right, that's probably pretty normal. Like, you know, like it's just part of the journey. It's not necessarily something that's so bad. And, you know, over the years I've

had plenty of program members that I've worked with and even just with myself where it's like, yeah, we kind of realize, okay, I worked through all that and that's amazing. And so my next goals for myself are these things. And it could be changing body composition. It could be that we realize, okay, yeah. You know what? Now I am a little skinny fat. That's good to know. And now I'm going to start taking action to address that and build up that strength. And of course if you have hypothyroidism, of course you want to get your thyroid under control. Right? There's other things that are at play that are not just about exercise and how we eat and stuff like that, but you just want to put another plug in.

That slow and steady weight loss can be really beneficial. Like if we don't do like excessive fasting or different kinds of things that really make us drop weight quickly, we might be more likely to keep our muscles. And that is kind of a nice thing. It's hard work building muscle back up. We know this because we have to lift heavy weights and that's hard work. So if you're somebody who struggles with the rush, with struggles with wanting to have that off right away, struggles with having patience with the process, maybe this could be something that would help you to be able to slow down. Just going like, you know what? Like faster is not always better. It could be trading one thing for the next. Do I want to do that? Maybe I could just take my time and keep working on this consistently, knowing that I'm going to get there in the end. It's like the same work regardless, you know what I mean? So that's what I want to say. I'm not over here going like, you should just be skinny fat. It's not a problem. I mean, yeah, people have identified that there are some health risks to it, but it doesn't mean that it's the end point for you and that you did something wrong.

That's really my main point. It doesn't mean you did anything wrong. Like, yep, this is how this goes. Definitely for some people, not necessarily with everybody, but definitely for some people. And then once we know what we know, we can make adjustments and make changes and do what we need to do. I want to say one more thing, which is that I have found that when a lot of people like, look, I'm not saying you should just like be satisfied if you're skinny fat, but when people are like want different body composition, like, of course I'm not judging that everybody can do whatever they want.

But I do think that sometimes it's like we get the weight off and then we're just continually dissatisfied. Well, now I still don't like my body. Okay, maybe I need to totally

change my body composition and like, go to CrossFit or do whatever, you know, and totally lean down so I can finally like my body. And I want to let you know that there is an invitation in there to learn to like your body at whatever way it looks. You know what I mean? Like that. You don't have to keep changing it. So that you can feel that your body is acceptable. That is also a mindset piece to work on too, which is loving and appreciating and accepting your body no matter what state it is in. We don't want it to be that you have to get to this place where you're like, super lean and super fit for you to look acceptable because people who have that mindset, even if they can create that for themselves, eventually something ends up happening.

Whether it's age or an illness or an injury or something happens and it can really send people to a dark place, because so much of their acceptance of themselves and their body comes from what it looks like and what it can do, and that can be really difficult later. So the invitation is to work through that, accept it exactly as it is at any time. Big, small, more muscle, less muscle, more fat, less fat, and then deciding to change things just because you want to, right?

Like doing it because you think it's fun or it feels good, or you have less aches and pains when you're stronger or you want to prevent osteoporosis or things like that. Right. I really would strongly recommend that. So it doesn't just keep turning into this race to try to change things so you can think different thoughts about yourself. You can actually think different thoughts about yourself now, today. Okay, okay. That's my final thought. I'll leave you with that. Thanks so much for joining me. Thanks for your attention and I hope you have a great rest of your week. I'll talk to you next time. Bye.