



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Well, hello there, my friend. Welcome to today's episode. Today I'm excited to talk to you about something that I actually coach on and my team. We coach on this a lot in the weight loss for doctors only coaching program, and it's not something that I've talked too much about here on the podcast, so I wanted to spend a little time on it to just help those of you out there who are struggling with this and to help you see how coaching can really help when you deal with this.

So this is an issue that a lot of doctors struggle with. Not every doctor though. Not every doctor, but a lot do. So what I'm talking about is when you have erratic work schedules or unpredictable work schedules, and how to deal with that while you're trying to lose weight, or even if you're not trying to lose weight, just trying to maintain your weight, maybe you've lost weight and want to maintain that. Or maybe you're just in a stage where you're just like, I just want to get through this and not gain a bunch of weight.

Because these types of situations with unpredictable and erratic work schedules, they often are dealt with by us with snacking and food and some extras here or there, and that can result in that weight gain, particularly as we get older. So how do you deal with this? What I hear from a lot of people when they struggle with this is that they just are kind of blaming work, because my work is like this. That means that I struggle in these ways and very often the primary solution that is present for folks who deal with this in their minds is to find a different job.

And I'm not negating that because sometimes it isn't the right fit for you anymore, or something has changed for you and something different is going to be better. And that may be the case. So I don't want to take that away. But I do want to say that there is a

lot that you can take control of that a lot of people do not recognize is within their realm of control. So I want to talk about that today because it's worthwhile to practice these things. If you're in a work environment where things are like this or predictable or erratic. And honestly, even this applies also to home life too. Like when I'm thinking about for like unpredictable or erratic schedules is like sports. You know, if you have kids, sometimes you're like, I thought we were just doing this one thing.

And then you find out there's two more games that you have to do, or just the game runs way over, or, you know, there can be a lot of unpredictability in that as well. But on this episode, I'm going to be focusing mostly just on those work schedules. If this is something that you're dealing with, that there's really a lot that can be done from a mindset approach and from just like a planning and problem solving approach can make a big difference. And if you apply that to your current situation, you can see like you could get to a place where it actually does work for you and it's fine.

And you don't need to switch jobs, you don't need to find something else, and that can be nice as well. The best solution isn't always going and trying to find a different position. So what I'm talking about when I talk about unpredictable or erratic work schedules, I just want to be clear on kind of what I'm thinking of when I talk about this. So I'm talking about times when maybe, you know, you're going to be working, but you don't really know in what capacity or what that's going to look like. So the first thing that comes to mind, of course, is taking call. And some people are like, well, when I'm on call, I'm in house and I know I'm going to be up all night working.

And that's not really unpredictable or erratic. It may not be something I love, but I know what I'm going to be doing. But other people are taking in house call, and a lot of the time there's not much going on and they have time to rest. They are pretty much fine, except for the times when they're up all night or they have had really interrupted or broken up sleep having to go deal with this and that. And that can be unpredictable, right? In the sense of am I going to be able to sleep tonight while I'm in the hospital? Or will I not be like, what is the day going to be like?

What is the evening going to be like? I have no idea. So sometimes it's that sometimes it's taking call from home, but knowing that you might be woken up a bunch of times or that you might have to actually go in. So again, very unpredictable. You have no idea

what you're going to be dealing with. You just never know, right? So even if it's home call, you just don't know what's going to be happening. You don't know what is the night going to be like. So that I can predict what my day tomorrow will be like. If I have a super busy day tomorrow, it may not be great if I'm up the whole night before, just things like that.

This is something that comes up all the time in coaching. Rotating shifts is another big aspect of this. So this can be when sometimes you work day shifts, sometimes you work evening shifts, sometimes you work overnights. And the different ways that those get assigned to you essentially. So you will know your schedule, obviously, but you'll know when you need to report. But it may be erratic. It may not be the most conducive to circadian rhythms. You might have to switch with people or cover for people or things like that, and that can end up being more erratic than you would prefer.

And then another thing with shift work is it's easy for people to think like, okay, well, like when your shift's over, you're done. Well, often that's not the case, right? Often, technically, your shift is over and the new shift of people have arrived, but you're still maybe spending even hours wrapping up some things before you leave and not really knowing when you're going to be able to go. It's not like time clicks over and you're walking out the door necessarily, although sometimes it may mean that. Right? So again, it's just unpredictable. You might be able to leave, you might not and you just don't know. And then another aspect of this I'm thinking about is not having really like a hard end to your day. This is how this presented for me when I was in practice as a pediatrician.

I have no idea how the practice runs things currently, but back in my day, we basically just kept seeing sick kids until everyone who had called had been seen for the day. So basically, once the final patient who'd called was in the building, we would switch over to the answering service. And so we would be working thinking, okay, it's not so bad.

And then there would be this huge rush of phone calls, and all of a sudden we were working another hour or hour and a half or longer because all these people were needing to come in so very unpredictable of when I was going to be able to leave, what was going to be happening for what I could do for my family and things like that. That was very challenging. And then finally, I was thinking about people who will do weeks on

service or some sort of chunk of time on service. And so when you're on service as well, it's not like you don't know, okay, this is a service week coming up for me. It's going to look like me needing to take care of the hospital patients and things like that. Like you do know that. And you probably know about when you like to start, but you may not know when you're going to be done for the day. And if you're doing a whole week at a time and you don't know if you're going to be able to leave at 6 p.m. or 8 p.m. or 11:30 p.m. and then get up,

Quick turnaround and start again, maybe at 637, 738 in the morning the next day, and then doing this day after day. That can be very difficult too. Definitely unpredictable. You never really know what you're going to be dealing with and things like that. So all of that unpredictability can really, really be difficult for us. Just baseline a lot of us, just like having some structure to our days. We like knowing what to expect and often that's just not available to us when we're working as doctors.

So just in general, the opportunity to work on creating some comfort within the discomfort, creating some stability for ourselves within the instability, that's something that we can definitely work on, but particularly when it comes to losing weight and food, What we end up often focusing on or end up using to help ourselves get through these difficult times is food. Partly because when things are erratic and unpredictable, we may have thought we would have time to go run to the cafeteria or order food in or whatever, like get out early enough to run to the grocery store. So we have food for the next day, and all of that may not happen. And then when we aren't able to get the food necessarily that would be most supportive to us, then we're just like eating whatever's around. There's a shared bag of Doritos.

We're like, let's do it. You know, like, screw it all, forget it all. It's time to just eat whatever we want, whenever we want. And so that can be difficult when you have other goals in mind for yourself, right. So as far as solutions go here and how to deal with this, in my mind, I broke it up into two separate pieces. There's kind of two chunks of work that I want to invite you to consider, and both of them are really important. The second one is the one that we maybe are most used to doing, whereas the first one is arguably more important. So the first one is managing your mind. I'll talk more about this, but really working on your thinking and your feelings around this. This is the one that a lot of us I just want to skip over.

We don't think it's as important as it is. It's super, super important. The second part is getting solutions focused and creative. So I'm going to talk about both of those a little bit separately. Give you some true actionable ideas. But also I want you to really be thinking about your thinking. Don't skip over that part. That's the part that we often don't want to spend time on. So, okay, the way that you think that creates your feelings, that's your emotions and your emotional life. How you feel creates your entire experience of your life. So if you are not feeling great about your erratic or unpredictable schedule, and you know what it looks like to live a life like that, we often want to look at the facts, right? We don't want to look at what is actually creating our experience, which is the way we feel.

And what creates our feelings is the way that we think. So what I want to propose to you here is that your experience of the current schedule, your current life, could become much, much better. Your experience could improve dramatically by looking at the way that you think and the feelings that creates. Very often we are not aware that the way we're thinking is really thinking like we think that it's truth facts. It's um. Here's an example. It's hard to work a schedule like this. I mean, that could be true. That could be your current experience of it.

If you believe that it's hard to work that kind of a schedule, you will either consciously or subconsciously create an experience where it is hard because we know that the way we think always shows up in our results. So if we want to have a less hard experience, it might be beneficial to us to consider not thinking about it in that way anymore. So we're not saying this is easy, I don't care. We're not gaslighting ourselves, but we're no longer entertaining that thought of. It's hard or it's impossible. It's when I hear a lot, it's impossible for me to take care of myself working this kind of a schedule.

Well, if that is what you're thinking, what are the chances that you're going to come up with a way of doing like, other possibilities, like very low because you've just convinced yourself that it's not possible. So this is the thing about it. Like when we're willing to kind of humble ourselves enough to go, okay, yeah, there are challenges to this kind of a life. And some of those challenges are self-created with the way that I think if we can humble ourselves enough to admit that, then we can start looking for those thoughts and understand those feelings that we don't love, that don't make us feel great and start

to work on whether there's a different way of thinking that still feels true and believable, but gives us a different result, gives us a different feeling that drives a different action, that creates a different result.

Okay, you might be like, okay, I don't know, like, I mean, I hear what you're saying, but how do I do that? I mean, that's what we do in coaching, in weight loss for doctors only, like, this is what we're doing, in case you're wondering, like we're actually working on this because I can't tell you, like, oh, this is the thought. This is the magic thought for you. I can give suggestions, but even still, you have to try it on.

You have to see what really works and resonates for you. So really understanding on a deep level how your thoughts are creating your experience, how your feelings are changeable. By thinking differently is the most important thing to do when it comes to this. So this comes just your general experience of these work experiences, but also what it's like to lose weight or work on your eating while you are doing this right. If you have a thought like it's too much to do both, then you won't be able to create success in creating solutions in that environment. It's just how that works. You know what I mean? So if you want something different, you have to decide to think about it differently. So that leads me to the next step, because another part of managing your mind that would really, really benefit you is to increase your belief that solutions not only exist, but that they are available to you for who you are currently like.

You don't have to change. You don't have to be different. The rest of your life doesn't have to be different. And not only does one solution exist, but tons of solutions exist. I like to think that there's hundreds, maybe even infinite numbers of solutions, and I only have to find one that works. There's so many. They're everywhere. So many solutions. I just have to find one. It's very different than, well, finding a solutions like a needle in a haystack.

Very different. So when you work on that belief, like, I can feel good, I can have the results that I want. I can make changes to myself in my life and still work my work schedule as it currently stands, like you work on that belief that will get you very, very far. It will be very energizing. A lot of people will say to me, oh, I just lose all motivation. It's just so hard to get going. Well, sometimes we forget how depleting the way that we think can really be, and we don't like how we're feeling. But remember what creates our

feelings the way we think about it. So practicing belief, the solutions exist and they're all available.

There's so many they're available to you right now is a really, really great first or second step to get you moving in a direction where you can deal with this positively. Next, I want to encourage you to shift your mindset in whatever way you need to so that you are open to iterating to find solutions. So many of us are like, okay, fine, I believe a solution exists. I'm going to try this solution, this one that I've come up with. And basically it better work. You know, like we're like, yeah, I'm not interested in finding any other solutions. I found this one and I would like it to work the first time. That is not always the case. Sometimes we think one thing is going to be great, and then we try it out and we realize, nope, that was cute.

But no, like, good try. Didn't work this time. It might be a massive failure. It might be that parts of it worked and parts of it didn't. It could be that, wow, you're like really on the right track and it just needs some editing, you know, some some iteration, some nuances need to change. But otherwise you're in a good place, right? We have to be open mentally to the idea that we're going to have to continue to come up with solutions. So we're not thinking like, okay, I found the solution and this better work for the rest of my career, right? Lots of things can change. Our bodies can change, our demands on our lives. Otherwise can change.

So many things change our health. We have to be open to iterating. We have to be open to essentially failing, trying something, having it not work, and coming up with more ideas. The thing that's so great about you is that you have a really smart brain, and you really know how to problem solve already, so it's a mindset issue. That's the block. It's not your ability to find solutions, right? It's whether you allow yourself to utilize that strength that you have or not okay. So so changing your mindset so that you're open to inner iterating. And then finally for this managing your mind piece, I want to talk about recognizing the predictability that exists within the unpredictability, because it's easy for us to tell ourselves a story about how awful it is, or how unpredictable or erratic it is.

But when you really, really zoom out, you start to see no, but even within that, there is some predictability. So let's just say we're talking about being on service. I mean, you

could do this in a data driven way, or you could just kind of go based on like what your memory serves, but you really can think about it like, okay, so typically on a regular workday when I'm not on service, I'm able to, you know, leave by 536. And that's pretty consistent. I'm making this up, but let's just say right. So but on on service, I mean pretty much I'm usually leaving between 7 and 830.

That's pretty typical right? So that's already pretty predictable. Like you're probably going to be leaving between 7 and 830. And you could be like, yeah, every now and then something weird happens and I got to stay past nine. But really, for the most part, that's just that's very few and far between. So yeah, there is some unpredictability about when you're going to be done. But for the most part, within that unpredictability exists, the predictability that you're probably going to be leaving between 7 and 830 for the most part, and then you can plan accordingly around that. Okay. So same thing with working shift work.

Maybe you work in an urgent care or emergency department or something like that. Could be like every now and then I leave, like basically right after shift change. But most of the time, not most of the time, I end up having about 45 minutes to an hour of, you know, work to do to just tidy things up, finish notes, do whatever. So pretty much an hour after I'm usually leaving. Or if there's like a trauma that came in, it might be up to three hours. But even that, even if things are really, really pretty crazy going on in there, I mean, it's very unusual for me to have to stay longer than three hours after.

So there's some predictability within that. Like pretty much within 1 to 3 hours after your shift, you're going to be done. So you can plan on that. You obviously have no idea if a trauma is going to roll in or not or what's going to be happening, but for the most part, with few exceptions, it's going to be in that range. That's also really good to know. So that predictability that exists within the unpredictability can give you some of that structure and stability that you really crave and want. So part two is getting solutions focused and creative. And what I mean by this is often we're just like, ah, I mean, what can even somebody do a lot of rhetorical questions I mean, what are you even how are you supposed to even figure this out? How are you supposed to lose weight when this is your life? And like, your brain's like.



Yeah, how? I don't know, they're not really asking it very good questions. You're not saying. I know there are so many solutions. What could some of them be? It's not a brainstorming kind of activity. It's a I mean, honestly kind of a self-pity. Poor me. Kind of an exercise. Right. So what you want to do is pay attention to where you struggle and then create specific plans around that. And this is something that I think a lot of people don't recognize can be a great solution. It's something we talk about in our program all the time and we help people with individually.

Sometimes you're going to need to have some, like maybe your regular plan and then some extra backup plans or adjunct plans, some additional things that help you during these times when things are more erratic or unpredictable. So similarly to what I was talking about earlier with understanding, okay, I typically am going to be getting home between this time and this time, or leaving between that time and that time. You can make a plan for how you approach that. You can make a plan for how you set yourself up for success leading into that. So that's leading into a week of being on service. Like probably maybe make sure that your house is stocked with food.

I mean, or have groceries delivered and is someone there to receive them middle of the week or something like that? Like plan ahead for that. If you're on call, plan on how you can support yourself. I remember so many times I'd end up staying up late thinking, well, I don't want to go to sleep because someone might call and then I'll be woken up again. And then no one called and I should have just gone to sleep like there was not great prefrontal cortex driven. Thinking always around that. And it would have I would have benefited from that. So you want a plan for how to support yourself leading up to it, but also afterward? Because that's a time when a lot of people struggle with overeating. You can imagine you're going to feel super, super tired, probably physically and probably emotionally too. Mentally very tired. Are you going to be doing your best thinking and planning and decision making at that time, particularly when it comes to food? I mean, maybe not, probably not. So it could be that the best thing to do is to make sure you've got everything that you need already in the house, and this is your plan. You want to come home, you're going to eat these things, and you're going to be laying down by whatever time or like you're planning. You already know, like if I'm going to be probably tired from being on call all night, then I have a full day of work and then a meeting after, and I know that I'm going to be picking up this food that's on plan and works for me, and I always enjoy eating on my way home from work.

So it's not like, oh, maybe I should go here or there, or where should I get food from? It's like, it's already done. It's already planned. It's just all you have to do is follow it. That's sometimes the biggest gift that you can give yourself. It's like you already just decided it all and you just have to do what you decided. Another element to this is having some backup plans for your backup plans, because you could have it as you have this secondary plan, and then that's not going to be so great. So it sounds like, oh my gosh, it's all this planning.

But it doesn't have to be so difficult, particularly when you end up doing these things again and again, like if you have weeks on service periodically, right, or you're working overnights periodically, there's ways to think about this. So it could be you can again get creative and the release solutions focused. So one of the times that I really kind of struggle, even if I have a plan, is when this happens. And so if that happens then I'll approach it this way. Like we can't obviously think of every single scenario that could ever come up for ourselves, but we really can set ourselves up for some significant success by just thinking about like, well, what are all the issues? What are the things that have happened before that I had a hard time with, and then making adjustments accordingly? And then finally, I just want to encourage you to advocate for solutions, you know, ask for what would help you.

This could be in your personal life. Like, it's okay to ask the people who love you, who are in your life to help you when you're going through these times. Often they want to help and they don't even know how, and so there might be certain things that you can do. They can help, maybe hold you accountable, or maybe they can help provide some of the things that would help you a lot, that you won't have time or energy to do, like some food prep, or getting food from places, or even just companionship. Someone to talk to about something like whatever it may be. But it also could be advocating big picture for some solutions in terms of what it looks like to work these types of schedules. So, for instance, say that you are finding that when you have weeks on service, things have gotten so busy that you are regularly staying past 11 and then you're back at it again at seven. And it's just this is untenable. This is not something you can do long term.

It might be time to talk to your department about having some sort of backup system, or somebody to help out during the day to relieve some of the pressure on getting things done. Could be that it might be time to start looking at your efficiency. And maybe other people are not having such struggles even when it's super busy. It might be time to start looking at like, well, why is it taking you longer? And what efficiencies can we build in? Maybe there's some mindset things. Maybe you're taking longer than is probably necessary to be researching everything on every patient, whatever it may be. Right? There might be some room for movement there.

Another thing, though, I think that can be very helpful, particularly for people who work shift work and it is erratic and all over the place is to advocate again with the department of whoever's making these decisions. There is research on ways to have people go through the process of doing shift work, where it is not as taxing on bodies, on minds, on things like that, like working with the circadian rhythm a little bit better could be that there's just some shifts. You could propose some ideas, especially if there are research backed people would be probably more interested in that and advocating for things that are going to work for you and where everyone will win. The patients get taken care of, and everyone's experience of working in this way improves.

So as much as it's like, yes, we can do a lot of work to make our experience of these types of schedules better. There's nothing to say that you can't or shouldn't ask for ways to change the actual system as well, to make it even easier and even better. Okay, that's what I have for you today. I have worked with so many people over the years who have unpredictable and erratic schedules. I always just, I always look at it. I'm like, okay, cool. We just got to find the way that's going to work for you. So let's get to work. Let's just do it. And I think that mindset has really always served me well in my life and served others as well.

And I want to encourage you to adopt that as well. Like, all right. So this is what we've got. So how can we make this work? How can everybody be winning, including me, and opening your mind up to those solutions so you can really figure it out? Because I know that there's not just one solution. There are dozens and hundreds and thousands and millions, infinite number of possibilities. And you just got to find one that works today. All right, my friend, thanks so much for your attention. Thanks for being here. And take care. Have a great week.

