



HEALTHY WEIGHT IN HEALTH CARE

with Katrina Ubell, MD

Katrina Ubell:

Hi, everybody. How are you? I'm so glad to talk to you today. I wanted to record this podcast for you guys because I'm going to be leaving to go out of town next week, and just wanted to make sure I get you guys some really good tips, really good information before I head out. We are heading out to Colorado. We usually try to take a ski trip out West once a year, and I've talked about skiing before on this podcast. We're pretty big fans of skiing.

Our oldest son is on a ski race team here in Wisconsin, and I know it seems kind of funny, like the Midwest is flat. Where would he even be racing? But we do have some, a little bit of elevation. We kind of laugh, like if it takes longer than 30 seconds to ski down the hill, then that's like, "Woo-hoo! This is amazing!" But we are part of a program for kids where they get this excellent instruction in skiing, so our goal for our son is not Olympic-level competitive skiing, but just learning the skills to be able to ski really any terrain in the world. It's pretty remarkable that they can use this little hill in Wisconsin and make that happen.

We got our little kids up last year, so they were two and four last year. Got them up skiing a little bit, and then this year they've been taking lessons twice a week. The place we go, they're excellent. They have lessons for the younger kids, the younger siblings of the race team kids, so they're there anyway, so then they're able to go ahead and get some lessons. My five-year-old just rode the chairlift for the first time a couple days ago. He was so excited. Totally like, "I'm a big kid now," so proud of himself. It's so neat to see that.

Honestly, it makes winter so much more tolerable when you live in a place where spring doesn't come until May, so yeah, so we're heading out to Vail. Our best friends from residency live out in Denver. Super excited to see them, and then we are going to head up to the mountains and do some fun skiing. Although, I am such a fair weather skier now. Seriously, I kind of joke. I'm like, "I go and ski when the 70-year-olds are out skiing, like when the sky's blue and there's a beautiful view from the top of the mountain, and it's all beautifully groomed." That's what I'm talking about.

I'm not interested in poor visibility and just terrible conditions. It's just not my thing anymore. I think just as you age sometimes you're like, "You know, I'm really not interested in hurting myself. Not interested in paying \$150 to do one run and

decide I'm done," so I have some plans to do a little pampering for myself, and a little working too, creating some great stuff for you guys, and some rest and relaxation as well, as much as you can have when you go on a family trip, right? I always joke that a family trip is like a business trip. It's not a vacation. Vacation is adults only, but it should be getting better every year. We finally figured out that none of us do that great in the high altitude, and so we usually take some altitude medication preventatively and that's actually helped a ton. We sleep so much better, and don't have headaches, and just everything's better. Anyways, that's going to be real exciting coming up. It's fun to get to have a little getaway every now and then.

Today, we are going to talk about decisions ahead of time, and pretty soon you'll understand what I mean by that. In previous podcasts I've talked about food journaling, and making the commitment to documenting everything that you eat to increase your awareness of it, and to help you to be able to make decisions about how and what to eat based on actual data, not based on drama that we're creating in our heads. An example of this is when we're convinced we're not losing weight.

I see this with my clients all the time. They tell me, "I'm not losing weight. What do I need to do? I need to change something. I'm not losing weight," or, "I'm not losing weight fast enough," so then me, as the outsider, I go back and go through their food journal and look, and actually they've lost like five pounds in two weeks, which is fantastic. I remind them of that, and then they immediately change their thoughts about it. Instead of thinking, "Oh, I'm not losing weight," they think, "Oh yeah, I am losing weight," and immediately they feel so much better about the process. They don't believe that they need to change anything and we just stay the course.

We're interested in the actual facts of what you're eating, so in order to obtain those facts you need to keep careful documentation of the facts. That means journaling everything you eat. I want to just tell you again, I do not encourage my clients to keep extremely detailed journals. You don't need to measure things out. You don't need to assign points. In fact, I actually don't want you counting calories, but your journal could be very simple and when it's simple and basic, it's so quick to keep up. This is not very taxing on your day at all. Your journal could look like breakfast at 6:30 a.m.: coffee with cream, two hard boiled eggs, and raspberries. Lunch at noon: spinach salad with avocado and grilled salmon. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.: chicken and rice soup, mixed veggies salad with ranch. I mean, you can see how quick that is.

Do we eventually need to know volumes? Sometimes. Sometimes as we start getting really close to goal we need to have a lot more precision with what we're eating, and so sometimes we do start weighing or measuring, but not always. Why do something that isn't needed at first? At first what we're doing is we're developing the habit of keeping the journal and we are accumulating data points so that we can see what our results are and then go back and reassess. Is it working? Is it not working, and if it's not working what do we need to change to change that

up?

If you're snacking, or taking a few sips of wine, if you're eating a few leftovers as you're packing them up, all of that needs to be written down too. We so often try to forget that stuff so that we don't have to write it down, but really that's a manifestation of perfectionism in your life, that not wanting to journal it if it won't be "perfect," whatever that means, because who gets to decide what perfect is? This creates a big negative impact for you. It does so many things. When you don't see results on the scale, you start to believe that even when you eat "perfectly" you don't see results, so you might as well quit and self-sabotage.

Even if you're managing your thoughts and genuinely looking at your journal with curiosity to see where you can tweak to start losing again, you won't have all the data you need to make a logical and informed choice. You're cheating on yourself behind your own back. You're constantly showing yourself again and again that you don't have your own back. This habit completely breaks down your relationship with yourself, and that perpetuates all the negative self-talk, the self-loathing, the berating thoughts, and all the suffering that comes with it. It seems like the easy way out in the moment as you decide not to journal what you ate or justify that what you ate won't matter, or just promptly forget that you ate it, but it has so many downsides for you down the line. This behavior of doing this definitely does not serve you in your attempts to lose weight, so I want you to commit to documenting every single food and drink substance you consume. Now, water and sparkling water you don't need to document, and honestly, unsweetened tea probably not either.

Okay. A big gift that you can give yourself when it comes to journaling is called decisions ahead of time. What this means is that when you decide in advance what you'll eat, you're making the decision from your prefrontal cortex, which is your critical thinking brain. You aren't influenced by urges and desire like you are when you make a split second decision in the moment. When we are looking at the split second decision, the part of your brain that's making that decision is the primitive part of your brain, and a way of looking at the primitive brain is as though it's a toddler with a knife. It's very cute and sweet, and it doesn't have bad intentions. It's very, very pure, but someone's seriously going to get hurt, right? A toddler with a knife is not a good thing. A toddler with a knife definitely needs supervision, right?

The part of your brain that supervises it is your prefrontal cortex, so I think of the prefrontal cortex as like the supervising mother, the mother who's got the eyes on the back of her head, the one who's cleaning up the kitchen but has that eye over there, "What's going on," or even just listening. You know how that when all of a sudden it's too quiet and you're like, "Something's not good here. I got to go figure out what's going on"? That's where you want to be coming from. You want to live as the supervising mother in your prefrontal cortex, and you're going to notice what your primitive brain, the toddler with the knife, is doing.

You're totally monitoring and paying attention to the toddler, but you are the one who's the adult, right? You're able to keep that toddler in check. You're able to keep the toddler safe, and you're able to tell the toddler, "Of course you want to play with a knife. It's shiny. It's sharp. It's not something you're allowed to play with. Of course you want to do that, but I'm going to take that away from you because that keeps all of us safe."

Think about how many decisions we end up making about food every day. I mean, I started to list this out and it was really pretty amazing, so here we go. What am I going to eat for breakfast? Where am I going to eat it? What am I going to eat for lunch? How am I going to get it? Will I have time? What do I feel like? Is that healthy enough? Should I eat more? Should I eat less? What should I have for dinner? Should I have an appetizer? Should I just stop for fast food? Do I have time to make that? What can I have quickly because I'm so tired? Should I have a dessert? Should I have a snack? I mean, right? This is what's going on in our brains, and this is probably just a subset, a subsection of what we're actually thinking.

When you plan the night before, you eliminate all these questions and decisions. This is such a gift to yourself. The way this can look for you with journaling is by writing out the next day's food journal the night before, so like tonight you're writing out what you're going to eat tomorrow. By doing this, you're learning how to deliberately think about what you're going to eat that will serve you. You schedule it, and then you honor your time and commitment. Getting into the habit of doing this basically removes all that brain chatter about food for the entire day.

Tonight you would write in your journal or type in the app you're using what you'll eat and drink all day tomorrow. Again, this should be super easy and quick because ideally you aren't snacking. You aren't making impulse purchases in the Starbucks line. You aren't eating a couple doughnut holes that you discover in the physician's lounge. You aren't eating cookies or chips in front of the TV at night, because none of that is on your plan that you decided on in advance. You write out what you'll eat for each meal, and then this is the brilliant part. The next day, you just only eat those things. The decisions have been made for you in advance by you, and not only just you, it's with that supervising mother, the prefrontal cortex, and she always has your best interest at heart.

I will tell you, the next day, your brain is going to try to come up with all kinds of reasons why this won't work and why you can't follow this plan, so let's go through some of them. You've been up half the night on call with the pager, so you start off the day hungry. Not a problem. It's so much easier when you're exhausted to not have to make decisions. You're tired. You're hungry. You just do what you said you were going to do. You just eat what you decided and nothing more.

Next one, you'll have to race out of the house in the morning before you could eat your breakfast because of an emergency or to be able to finish rounding in the hospital before clinic starts. This would happen to me when I was in practice all the time, because babies are born all the time, right? We never really knew where we

had to go in the morning, because we went to five different hospitals to see babies, and so there was a lot of divide and conquer and a lot of organizing that first thing in the morning. I might even show up at a hospital and find out there are one or two extra babies that I didn't know about, but I still had clinic starting at the same time, so there's a lot of that upheaval that might happen.

That is not an excuse to go off plan, so if you've decided ahead of time what you're going to eat, you've anticipated that this might happen. Generally, these things are not a surprise, right? You know you're on call. You know you might be called for an emergency. You know it's a possibility. If I was working the next day, I knew that it was possible that my morning could blow up in the sense that there were babies or multiple hospitals I had to go take care of. You may not have known that it was going to happen, but you knew it was a real possibility, and you always make sure that you take that into account. One option is to have your food all packed up the night before you go so you only have to grab it and run out the door. Another one is to have a bag of nuts already ready to grab and then you can just have that for breakfast as your plan B, or you can have them in the car, or if you forget all that, you need to still have then plans C, D, and E as well.

An example of that would be to come up with what I call a food resource list. To create this list you sit down and think about all the restaurants, fast food places, and grocery stores, like all the places you could get food on the way to and from your job, or school if you're dropping the kids off or whatever. Then you look at all the options on their menu of foods that are on your plan for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and then you make a list in your Notes app on your phone so you can always easily access this list when something comes up last minute.

Your plan would be to first eat what you packed, but if you forgot it or something happened, like someone in your house snacked on it after you went to bed or something, something you really didn't know would happen, then you know you can run through Starbucks and get this or that thing, or you can pop into the market and get a piece of fruit and a couple hard-boiled eggs, or you can make yourself a big salad with protein and fatty dressing from the grocery store salad bar, or whatever works for you, whatever ends up being on your eating plan, on your protocol, but you've made all these decisions ahead of time so that all you have to do when this happens is pick a place, go there, buy the food you already chose, and eat it. This is going to be such a lifesaver for you so many times over. Your clinic runs over, cases run long, you had to pick the kids up, you don't have time to make what you had planned. Then you just always go to your food resource list.

Let's talk about that again. Your case runs long, and you don't have time to eat lunch before clinic starts, so again not a problem. If you know that this happens sometimes, which if you're going to be in a case, then you know that there's always a possibility of that happening, because just delays, delays with anesthesia, patient coming late, I mean, so many different things can happen. Case is harder than you expected. If you know this is going to happen sometimes, you can choose

something that you can eat quickly while you're driving or while you're walking to clinic. You can eat your lunch in a few segments while you're charting between patients if you have to, right? Just kind of divide it up like I'll just chart here and for two minutes and eat this part, and then I'm going to go see a patient, come back, and the next little chunk.

You can choose to just get a coffee with heavy whipping cream, which is just straight fat, and drink that for lunch and not eat the food if you don't have time. This is what's called an insulin fast when you just eat or consume, in this case you're drinking, straight fat. What's happening there is you're getting some energy from the fat, and it provides considerable fullness for you, but your insulin levels remain really low. Like we talked about before, in order to release fat and become more fat-adapted we want to keep those insulin levels low as often as possible.

This helps you to become more fat-adapted so that your body can easily access your fat stores when you don't have time to eat, and it does all this without making you feel like crap. It's basically how our bodies were designed to function, so once you become really fat-adapted, if something happens and you can't eat, you can also just choose to have some water or sparkling water and just not eat at all. You may not even need the fat, because at that point the hunger is not that intense, and it maybe only lasts for 10 minutes and then it goes away. Your body just taps into your body fat supplies, the stores that you already have, and it uses that for energy. This is how we lose weight, right? If we have all this extra body fat yet we're starving, it doesn't make sense, right? The body fat is there to support us when we can't eat, so why is our body making us feel like crap when it has plenty of food? It just has to access the fat.

Here's another example. A clinic runs over, you're totally hungry. You're maybe physically tired, but mentally tired, and you get home late. Your kids are whining. They're complaining. You're going to want to pour a glass of wine, feed the kids chicken nuggets out of the freezer, and make yourself a dinner out of chips, crackers, popcorn, or anything else snacky that gives you quick energy and makes the hunger go away. This is totally what I did, especially toward the end of me working in my practice. I'd come home so tired. I totally believed my story about how hard my day was, lots of self-pity, and I'd open a bottle of Prosecco, because I do like my sparkling wine, and then I'd eat a big bowl of popcorn for dinner and that was basically it except for maybe some dessert after.

I would tell myself that it wasn't that bad, because it was air-popped popcorn with just a little olive oil spray, right? Now, knowing what I know about how we need more fat, I probably would've been better off popping it the traditional way on the stove with lots of oil. It tastes so good that way anyway, but regardless, this was certainly not a nourishing meal. It was not giving me the results I wanted. It was not giving me nutrients that my body needed, but what it did give me was weight gain, poor sleep, dehydration from all the salt and the alcohol, and no energy to get anything done around the house after I ate. I was basically totally camped out on the couch after this, and then that perpetuated my story of I'm too tired to keep up

with the housework. I don't have any energy to fold the laundry, but one of the reasons why I felt that way is because what I had just fed myself.

When you've already decided what you're going to eat, then you just make that and you eat it. You still might do something quick for the kids, but what you're going to eat you just make that and you eat it. This is the really important point that I want to make to you. It doesn't matter if that's what you want to eat, want to make, or feel like doing at all in that moment because almost never will it be what you want or feel like doing. That doesn't mean that something has gone wrong. You just do it anyway. It's like going to work. Do you wake up every morning bounding with excitement to go to work? Of course not, but you get up and you go anyway even when you really don't want to, even when you feel sick, even when you're exhausted, and the reason you go is because you've made a commitment to your employer and your patients that you'll show up, and you've made a commitment to your family and yourself that you'll make money and support them.

When you've made the commitment to yourself to treat yourself well and feed your body foods that serve it, you also prepare the food you decided to eat ahead of time no matter how much you don't feel like it, and you can choose to not be mad about it or to have a little mini tantrum. You can just notice all your negative emotions about it, feel them, make the food anyway, and eat it. Give this a try, because I can see ... I can tell some of you are going, "That sounds really bad," but you know what is also really bad is overeating, eating things that you know you shouldn't be eating that make you gain weight, that make you feel bloated, give you indigestion, and make you sleepy. It's like, take your pick. Which discomfort do you want?

Finally, nighttime rolls around. The kids are in bed. It's like the finish line, right? You finally have that moment to yourself. No one wants anything from you, and you may or may not be hungry. It can be irrelevant, but you've eaten everything you had planned for and there's nothing left on the plan. Does that mean you go eat? I used to do that, but no. You honor that plan that you created knowing that hunger is only the body asking for some fuel, and if you don't provide it with fuel from food, it will just access your fat stores for energy and you'll lose weight. Again, like I was talking about, this is called dining in. You are eating. You're just eating your body fat. I know that sounds gross, but that's basically what's happening.

Sometimes this hunger combined with other emotions like exhaustion and self-pity are pretty uncomfortable, and when this happens to me, I often just try to go to bed because I know I really need the sleep. Sleep is really the answer, and then I also won't be perpetuating the negative emotions. I don't look at going to bed as an avoidance strategy. It's really more of a self-care strategy because I'm giving my body the gift of rest, and I'm honoring my prior decisions ahead of time and allowing my body's hormones to reset by not continually eating at night.

I just also want to note that there are going to be times when you've planned your food out and then the next day you're totally mad at yesterday you for not putting

more food or some different food on the plan, and this is totally normal. Be careful to not make this mean that you're doing it wrong, or that it isn't working, because ultimately all those thoughts are irrelevant because you're just going to eat what you decided, no more and no less. This is like when the toddler, remember that primitive brain, the toddler has the fit that he wants lunch dessert, and you remind him that in our family we don't eat lunch dessert. Your primitive brain may have a total meltdown tantrum, and that's okay. Totally feel sorry for ourselves and be mad.

We expect our actual human toddlers to act that way, right? It's developmentally appropriate, so when you notice your brain tantruming like that, you can approach it in the same way you'd approach a human toddler. You don't scream at him. You don't tell him he's stupid for wanting dessert. You don't tell him he's such a glutton and he has no self-control, because those are sometimes the thoughts that we have. Instead you tell him that of course it's normal to want dessert, but dessert is just not available at lunch. Then you patiently wait for the tantrum to pass, as they always do, right? You make sure that your child is safe, and you let them have their moment, and then you move on.

There's really never a reason that you need to go off plan. When you make these decisions ahead of time, you're deciding what to eat based on your best interest, and then you create multiple layers of safety nets to make sure you never fall through the cracks no matter what life or work throws at you. When you develop this kind of relationship with yourself, it gives you so much confidence. You know that there's never a time or a situation where you need to indulge in being out of control. You have so much more brain space when all that mental chatter about what to eat, and when, and how, and in which amounts, when all that is gone.

You can use this skill in so many other ways too. You can decide when you're going to exercise for the week, and what you'll do, and then you just have to get dressed and do it. There's no negotiating about which class to take, or if you should just swim, or just do the elliptical. You've made the decision, so you do it. If something comes up that's not negotiable, then you have your backup plans, and those plans can be taking a walk in the neighborhood, doing a video at home, or doing high intensity intervals in your basement for 10 minutes. You can decide that if everything falls through then the absolute minimum for what you will do for the day is some foam rolling, or stretching before bed, whatever will work for you, but you've made the decision and then you honor it to yourself. There's never an option to do nothing.

You can decide ahead of time that you're going to put some date nights on the calendar, and arrange the sitter way in advance. It might not even matter what you go do, but the act of planning that reinforces for yourself that your marriage is important to you and that connection with your spouse is worth your time and energy. You can decide ahead of time how you want to spend your weekend. You could commit to one hour of decluttering in a closet, washing and folding the laundry, and grocery shopping. You will not want to do those things when the time

arrives, okay? That does not mean something has gone wrong. You do it anyway because you committed to yourself that you would, and then after it's all done you have free time to have fun and relax, but you also give yourself that sense of accomplishment that you get when you didn't choose to blow off the whole weekend and you start the coming week ahead and in control.

Decisions ahead of time don't take much effort at first to create, but it might require a lot of effort to uphold if you're used to not honoring your decisions for yourself. Your primitive brain will want to think that these decisions are optional, okay? Just expect it, and continue to stay aware of your thoughts and remind yourself that cheating on yourself and not honoring your commitments to yourself is not how you roll anymore. This effort will eventually result in you automatically and habitually honoring your commitments to yourself because it really is how you roll.

Tell me what you think about this. I'd love to help you with any questions you have, and I also wanted to ask if you are on my email list, because I have some really very exciting things that I'm going to be offering coming up here in a couple months and I want to make sure that you don't miss anything. My email subscribers will always be the first to know about new things and will often get special pricing, bonuses, and extras when I have new material coming out. To get on that list, head over to katrinaubellmd.com and click on Get Started Losing Weight Now, which is on the very first page when you click on that. Talk to you guys next week. All right. Take care. Bye-bye.