



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: You are listening to the Weight Loss for Busy Physicians podcast with Katrina Ubell, MD, episode number 70. Welcome to Weight Loss for Busy Physicians. The podcast for busy doctors like you get the practical solutions and support you need to permanently lose the weight. So you can feel better and have the life you want. 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, hello, welcome my friend to the podcast today. I am so excited to bring you this interview that I did with Aimee Gianni. She is such a fantastic coach, oh she's just amazing, and she taught me how to be a coach. So everything I know I learned from her, she's fantastic. Aimee has a background as a licensed marriage and family therapist, which she did and was very happy to do that for quite some time. She learned about life coaching and what she learned completely transformed her life as she was diagnosed with an autoimmune illness.

She's going to tell you the whole story in the interview, so for sure listen in how she just completely changed her perspective of her chronic autoimmune disease by applying so many of the similar life coaching tools that I've actually taught you here on the podcast. She is not only just this amazing, lovely, lovely person, she's also a fantastic, fantastic coach. And she is definitely somebody

that you should hire if you're struggling with any issues with autoimmunity.

And you should refer her information on to any of your patients that might be struggling or could use her help or anybody that you know. So many people are struggling with autoimmune diseases and just don't really know what to do to feel better. She really is this unique person in terms of what she's offering from a life coaching standpoint. So, for sure, don't miss this episode and please enjoy. See you next week. Hey Aimee, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Aimee Gianni: Thank you for having me, I'm excited to be here.

Katrina Ubell: We have been talking about having you on for many, many months and it was, I will take full responsibility, it was me flipping out, "Oh, I need to have you on." But I'm so excited because it's actually perfect timing for you and it just works out with the slice. See, my flakiness sometimes it comes in handy.

Aimee Gianni: Worked out perfect.

Katrina Ubell: Okay, so what I want to start with is having you tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into life coaching, and how you specifically got into life coaching people with autoimmune illness? That's kind of hard to say, isn't it?

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, it's a mouthful, right?

Katrina Ubell: Mouthful, I talk too fast, that's my problem. Okay, go ahead.

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, so I've been a marriage and family therapist for like over 20 years and I've always been like I was always really fascinated with the connection between mental emotional health and our physical health. So I always incorporated both pieces into my practice working with people. But then about, it was probably like I don't know,

eight or nine years ago these series of events happened where I was diagnosed with an autoimmune illness. I was in the best shape of my life, I was taking care of myself, I was doing all the right things, I thought, right?

And then my body just started falling apart and I'm like, "What's going on with me?" Anyway, I have Hashimoto's, and so that was going on for me personally. And then a few years into that, I decided to take life coach training with a life coach school, and I was doing it professionally. I wasn't doing it for myself, right, I went thinking, "Oh, I'm just going to add more tools to my toolbox and I'll be able to help my clients better." But while I was doing that, I started applying the work to myself and it was like life changing for me with my illness. I should say, simultaneously, I discovered functional medicine too.

So the combination of a functional medicine approach to my health and then these new life coaching tools that I was learning, I always say life coaching rescued me from my own brain.

Katrina Ubell: Love that.

Aimee Gianni: It changed the way that I thought about my illness, the way I experienced my illness, and it just made ... So not only was I feeling better mentally emotionally, but I started feeling better physically. So I'm not cured, I still have Hashimoto's, I still have to take medication every morning, but I take less medication and I don't have as many symptoms as I used to. Anyway, when I did all that work for myself I'm like, "These are my people, these are the people I want to help."

I really want to help people with autoimmune illnesses learn how to function better, learn how to think about their illness differently because it totally has a huge impact on their life. So that's kind of a short story of how I got here.

Katrina Ubell: I love it, that is fantastic. So, you talk a lot about the idea of you and your body being on the same team, and I talk

about that a little bit in terms of weight loss. Like your body, you and your body, both want you to lose weight but you talk about it I think in a really great way about making your body really be your best friend. So tell me more about that.

Aimee Gianni: Yes. So many times when I start working with clients, and this was the case for me too, they feel like their bodies betrayed them and so they feel like they're against their body because all of a sudden their body is not working the way that it used to and they are trying to take care of it but it just is not working, right? And they're miserable and so-

Katrina Ubell: And so they force it, right?

Aimee Gianni: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: You can't like log into submission.

Aimee Gianni: Right, exactly. It's not something you can just think your way out of like, "Oh, I'm just going to decide to feel better, right?"

Katrina Ubell: Yeah.

Aimee Gianni: Anyway, betrayal is something I hear, a word I hear a lot from people like, "My body has betrayed me, I don't know what to do." And they're very disempowered, and so that's one of the hardest things I think about having any kind of illness is just the disempowerment because you feel like you have no control over your life or your body. So I really help move them into a place of empowerment by talking about their body is on the same team with them, and the more that they can learn to listen to their body and work with their body rather than against it, the better they're going to feel. Not only physically but mentally emotionally.

Because you know what, it's so easy to get stuck in victim mentality with it. Like I know that's where I was, I was like,

"This is not fair, why is this happening to me?" That just doesn't take you anywhere good, right?

Katrina Ubell: Right, exactly, so then it's like your body is the villain, the illness is the villain. Possibly the doctors who are maybe misdiagnosing you or trying to help you figure out what's going on, they soon become the villain because for sure as a physician, this definitely happens where you're really trying to help somebody and you just feel this animosity coming back at you and you're like, "I don't know what's going on here." I'm just trying to help you but you can see how that ends up, or what's playing out for the person on the other side of that.

Just like I am full on the victim here in all areas, it's not right. And it is so disempowering because you might even offer something that's really good advice or might really be helpful, and sometimes they are just totally shut off. They're like, "No, not going to work."

Aimee Gianni: Nope.

Katrina Ubell: And you're like, "Well, can't we discuss it? What about trying it? Do you want to feel better?"

Aimee Gianni: Yes, and when they can grasp that piece that they are on the same side ... Like you said, it's so much of what you do too, like your body wants to be healthy. I do think that our bodies are made to heal if we can give them what they need and with care. And so once you can kind of get on the same side and know that you're on the same team, it really is just life changing in so many ways.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, and really becoming the expert in your own body because you had to figure out specifically for you what works best for you and that may not be the same as someone else with Hashimoto's.

Aimee Gianni: Exactly, yes, that's such a good point. So there's all these recommendations and there's diet plans that have worked for a lot of people, but you have to figure out what works

for you whether it's what you're going to eat, how much exercise, when to exercise, how much sleep you need. All of that is so individualized and so it's really helping people tune in and figure that out for themselves.

Katrina Ubell: Honestly, it's the same thing with weight loss too, right?

Aimee Gianni: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Like this diet plan works for this person but not for that person, it's figuring out what really, really works. Okay, it's so good.

Aimee Gianni: Fantastic.

Katrina Ubell: So behavioral change is important in managing autoimmune illness, so how do you lead your clients through that process because that's hard, right?

Aimee Gianni: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: For all of us to change our behaviors.

Aimee Gianni: Yes, it is, and so that's when I always say there's two main things that I work with people. One of them being the behavioral aspect of it because a lot of them will come and say, "Okay, well, my doctors told me I need to make these dietary changes and I need to change this with my exercise. I need to be doing this with my sleep." And they're like, "I know what to do but I don't know how to do it." It's the compliance piece that's hard for all of us, and so they're like, "My doctor said to go off gluten and dairy but are there other foods besides gluten and dairy?"

Katrina Ubell: Right, like what's left, lettuce only?

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, and so all behavioral change begins in the mind because otherwise they're just trying to do it with willpower. They're trying to white-knuckle it and then that we all know that willpower only lasts for so long and then it runs out and then they are right back to where they

started. So what I do with them is the same thing you do with yours, we look at their thoughts of what they're thinking about their dietary changes. When they can change their thoughts, it changes how they feel, which then changes the behavior and it makes it that they're able to follow through with these long-term changes without relying on willpower.

That right there is so empowering for them because they come in and they're like, "I've just white-knuckled it for so long and I can't do it anymore." And I'm like, "Guess what, you don't have to. We can get to the root cause and we can change the way you think about it, which then will change your outcome."

Katrina Ubell: Don't you think it's so important too that when a doctor tells you, "You should be doing all of these things," and you might not necessarily really want to do them like that's not that motivating. For any kind of behavioral change, you really have to be committed and you have to know why you want to do it. If it's because my doctor told me to or something really extrinsic like that, it does not really last very long versus I really want to feel better. And I believe that it's possible that these recommendations might be at least starting me on the path to figuring that out.

That is totally different in terms of motivation to continue and to really try to have the new lifestyle become the normal, like the new normal lifestyle for them. It's a sign of weight loss. Oh gosh, I didn't realize I had so many parallels.

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, exactly.

Katrina Ubell: If you want to get a pen because whoever's wedding is coming up, like, "Okay, I wish I can do that for a little while but it's not going to be lasting."

Aimee Gianni: It's not going to be lasting, yeah. So it's looking and helping them identify those thoughts that are going to be

motivating for them and giving them that control. Like the idea that making these lifestyle changes will actually make a difference for them. Sometimes they don't even believe that, they're like, "Yeah, whatever."

Katrina Ubell: Gluten and dairy, everybody talks about gluten and dairy. But for some people it makes a huge difference.

Aimee Gianni: It makes a difference, yeah.

Katrina Ubell: It's worth it just trying it, and I think having an outlook or a mindset of just being patient in the process of figuring it out is the key too. It's the same thing with weight loss, like some of my clients will be like, "Well, I haven't lost 15 pounds in the first five days, what's wrong?" It's like, "Well, let's just give ourselves some time to work through this." And understandably because all of us want to feel better immediately.

Aimee Gianni: Of course.

Katrina Ubell: But I always tell them the only reason we want anything is because of how we think it will make us feel, so of course we want that very quickly. Having that patience to go through the process of like, "Oh, I thought maybe this change was going to be the solution," and it turns out that's not the solution. That doesn't mean there are no solutions, it means I just need to do something else. Yeah, so taking back that power, right? When you're disempowered in victim mentality you're just getting nothing done absolutely.

Aimee Gianni: Not going to work, yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Okay, let's talk about stress. So stress reduction is a huge part of caring for yourself with this kind of stuff, so how do you recommend approaching stress reduction? I think everybody wants to know that, I want to know that. So Aimee tell me, how do you do this?

Aimee Gianni: Yes, I know it's so true because everybody is like, "Oh, yeah, I need to reduce stress," and we talk about it but what does that really mean. Does it mean more bubble baths? Does it mean I quit my job and move to an island? So when we look at stress, there's so much more to it, and with the way that you think about things, that's really how people can reduce stress. So I always start by introducing the idea that there's acute stress and there's chronic stress, and we were meant to handle acute stress. That's like the lion chasing us and we're like, "Ah." And then we get away and then the stress is gone.

But we turn acute stress into chronic stress when we start ruminating on things and thinking about things and carrying it out throughout our day. So if somebody cuts us off in traffic, the event is acute and it's over but it's when we think about it like, "Oh, that person shouldn't have done that, what a jerk." You know, whatever, and that acute stress is actually what feeds autoimmunity and is so dangerous for us. So the way that we reduce that is by just looking at the different things in your life and changing the way that you think about things, so like relationships is a big one.

Relationships can be wonderful for us and necessary for us because we need that connection. But I was just reading research the other day where if you have an argument with your spouse, your inflammatory cytokines will be elevated for up to three days.

Katrina Ubell: Oh my gosh, are you serious?

Aimee Gianni: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Holy moly, look at the people who are fighting most days, right?

Aimee Gianni: Right, yes, and so it's-

Katrina Ubell: And then they're like, "Maybe gluten will do it." No, because it's not happening...

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, whereas like things like gratitude or just focusing on the things that you appreciate and that you love about your life, that will raise things like growth factors and opioids and other things that help decrease inflammation in your body. There's all this research on Psychoneuroimmunology and how the brain and the way that we think about things impacts your immune system. And so when looking at stress, that's really what I look at with people, it's like what kind of a community are they a part of? Do they have connections? Because that connection is so important for them and it's helping improve their relationships and just all those other pieces that come together.

Katrina Ubell: Right, exactly. Like just their outlook on everything. Like really relationships just as we interact with people all the time is most of it, but I feel like it's just your outlook on just your life as a whole or what your job is, or if you don't have a job, what you think about the fact that you don't have a job? Because maybe some people really are ill enough that they are disabled or can't work, and then also just thoughts about money and just everything. It all creates that stress, for sure, for sure.

Aimee Gianni: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I think that's amazing. So one thing you talk about, I love these two terms, emotional autoimmunity and emotional inflammation. So what do these mean and can you talk more about them?

Aimee Gianni: Yes, so one thing that I started finding with a lot of my clients is that they were so self-critical and so I just started calling it emotional autoimmunity. Because we know when we have an autoimmune illness our body is attacking itself, and I found that emotionally they were doing that. They were just very hard on themselves and so I really helped them take a look at their relationship with themselves, do they know that that exists? A lot of people don't even think about that, but talking about that

relationship with themselves, how they treat themselves matters.

Like the self-talk dialogue that they have going on in their head all day really matters, and they don't want to be emotionally attacking themselves as their body is physically attacking themselves. So we spend a lot of time focusing on that and kind of unraveling that and helping them have a better relationship with themselves.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, I love that, that's so great. How do you handle expectations? I think that I remember talking about this even way back in medical school days like if you expected to be done at 4:00 in the afternoon and you got out at 6:00, you were like, "Oh my God, this is, you know, I can't believe it." But if you expected to be there till 8:00 and you got out at 6:00, you were like, "Sweet, I got out two hours early." The outcome is the same, it's all about your expectations, so I was thinking about with autoimmune illness the idea that a lot of people have of like, "I shouldn't be feeling this way, I shouldn't be going through this."

They had this expectation of what their life was going to be like or their physical health would be like and now not only do you have some disease process that you're working through, but it's probably going to be ongoing chronic for the rest your life for a lot of people with some ups and downs. Because I think even when you're doing well, you can get flare ups again for whatever reason and it's just this ongoing issue. So how do you help your clients deal with that in terms of expectations?

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, such a good question, because it's so true because they have these expectations of what their life was going to look like and how they were going to be and then they don't live up to that. But they still hold on to all those expectations like, "I shouldn't be this tired, I should be able to keep up." I had this cute little newly married bride, she has an autoimmune illness and she just she was like,

"I'm just so nervous that I'm not going to be able to keep up with my mother-in-law. I have this really fun energetic mother-in-law and I'm not going to be able to keep up with her."

So there's so much shame because they have these expectations of what they think their life should be like and then because their body isn't working the way they want it to, and also their illnesses aren't visible. It's not like they have a broken arm or they're walking around with crutches, so it's kind of an invisible illness to the outside. And so they have all this shame and embarrassment of like, "Oh, I should be able to function like everyone else."

So, anyway, to answer your question, I help them ... I talk about not arguing with reality. First, we need to take a look at what are your new realities?

Katrina Ubell: Acceptance.

Aimee Gianni: Right, yeah. This is what you're dealing with, "Okay, you have a reduced amount of energy and so when you have this much energy, let's set up realistic expectations for how you're going to manage that energy." And, actually, energy management is a whole other thing that I work with them on and just shining a light on things. When we talk about shame, shame can exist in the dark, and so we just talk about it, get it out there, and have them start dealing with the realities of their life really.

Katrina Ubell: Like what you're saying, arguing against reality, accepting reality and then going, "Okay, now that we know this, what now?"

Aimee Gianni: Yes, what now?

Katrina Ubell: What are we going to say for the future what you want your life to look like that works within the parameters of the energy that you have? It might be very little, like

maybe you can do one thing a day and that's it, okay, well let's make it awesome.

Aimee Gianni: Yes, exactly. With energy management, kind of going off on that, there's different types of energy. Like sometimes people are physically tired, sometimes they're like mentally emotionally tired and so it really helps to help them figure out ... And that goes back to listening to your body like, "Okay, what kind of tired am I?" And then giving your body what it needs. Because if you're physically tired thinking, "Oh, I'm going to go do some exercise," that's not what your body needs.

So for clients that have control over their schedule and they can say, "Okay, I'm going to schedule this 30 minutes for a nap every afternoon because every afternoon I'm physically tired." But somebody might be like, "Well, I'm just mentally emotionally spent in the afternoon, I'm not tired enough to take a nap." So for those patients, it's more helping them like maybe taking a walk will help them mentally emotionally or taking-

Katrina Ubell: Clear their mind, get some fresh air, yeah.

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, exactly, or doing a meditation or just having a break from technology, like those type of things or even doing a thought download. That's kind of the answer to help them manage their mental emotional fatigue. So, anyway, that's another-

Katrina Ubell: That's like they're so similar to, "Am I actually physically hungry or am I emotionally hungry right now? Like is food really going to fix this?" Oh, it turns out it's not.

Aimee Gianni: Exactly.

Katrina Ubell: You know, that's actually what is going on for me. So you had touched a little bit on gratitude and I just wanted to finish up with talking about that a little bit more specifically, and how you feel like that helps people who have autoimmune illnesses?

Aimee Gianni: So I always have my clients have a gratitude practice because I just think it's so vital for them. Like I say, they're starting to do research talking about the health benefits of gratitude and having a gratitude practice. So I'll talk to them about just how it will help with their inflammation, like it helps them physically just as much as it will help them mentally emotionally. And so some of them want to just write down three things a day that they're grateful for. Some of them like to do gratitude visualizations where they take a few minutes and close their eyes and picture all those things that they're grateful for.

And sometimes they'll even go in and picture what they want their life to look like. Given that they have an illness, so not like fantasy like, "Oh, my life will be perfect." But given my reality, I would be really grateful or I am grateful for the life that I have and this is what I see my life going forward and doing even those visualizations are really helpful for them too.

Katrina Ubell: Oh, I love that. It's fantastic. So Aimee, thank you so much. This is fantastic, so good, this is as good as I knew it was going to be. So if anybody's interested in getting more information or finding out more about working with you or possibly referring their patients to you, where can they find you? What do you have going on?

Aimee Gianni: Okay, so you can find me at theautoimmunecoach.com, that's my website and if you go to my website there's all sorts of information there including you can get my five tips to thrive with autoimmunity. And it will talk about ... It talks about some of the things we discussed today, and also I'm getting ready to launch a podcast that's upcoming, and so you can watch for that. If you go to my website you'll be able to see that when that launches. I do have business cards that I can send out too if that would be helpful for anybody.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, because we were talking before we started recording and I told her, for all you doctor listeners, I told

her sometimes business cards are better than brochures because they're easier to organize and they don't get lost as easily. And they are easier to send. So if you think that you have any patients who might benefit from this for sure, I mean, this work I think would just absolutely change so many people's lives or does change some people's lives who really have that chronic illness and want to just completely change their experience of it.

And not look at it like it's just the end of their life as they know it or those like before autoimmune disease and after. But more looking at it like, "Yeah, that happened but then I just created this whole new life for myself which is equally as awesome or maybe even more awesome." This is how I went about that, this is the help that they need to be able to do that which is fantastic. Love it, thank you Aimee so much.

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, and I guess I should say I do work one on one with clients. I also run groups every once in a while but yes, I do, I have a restoring balance program that I take clients through.

Katrina Ubell: Perfect, and so this is really because you do it all online, it doesn't matter where people are so that's just an important thing too. Like you don't have to get people to come in one on one, you just do everything over the phone or video conferencing and then maybe even with email or other forms of communication online. It makes it so anybody can get your help.

Aimee Gianni: Yes, absolutely.

Katrina Ubell: Perfect, love it.

Aimee Gianni: Yeah, thank you so much for having me Katrina.

Katrina Ubell: You're so welcome. All right, take care, bye, bye.

Aimee Gianni: Okay, bye.

Katrina Ubell: Thanks for joining me today. If you like what you heard here, be sure to hit subscribe in your podcast app so you never miss an episode. You can also get my Busy Doctor's Quick-Start Guide to Effective Weight Loss for free by visiting me over at katrinaubellmd.com.