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IT'S BIGGER THAN ME Series Episode 2: From Fear to Action:
Approaching Obesity with Your Doctor

Yvette Nicole Brown and guests are all paid spokespersons for Novo Nordisk Inc.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I'm Yvette Nicole Brown. And some of you may know me as Shirley from the sitcom Community or from Disney's Disenchanted. I'm also a frequent guest co-host on shows like The Real and The View. But today, I'm here to talk about the impact of living with obesity, why a doctor could help, and how you can go from fear to action if you are struggling to get to one.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: So we've all been there. We go for our annual checkup and the nurse says, step on the scale. And the anxiousness begins. All the old tapes play in your head, and for many of us, we just can't do it. We actually don't go to the doctor because of it. And then we feel so bad about even feeling anxious.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And then for me at least, we try to figure out ways to relegate it to the back burner. But we're not alone. In fact, according to one study, 32% of women with obesity and 55% of women with severe obesity reported delaying or canceling health care appointments because they knew they'd have to be weighed during the appointment. That's a serious barrier for people who want to get the health care they need.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: So today, I have Lisa Singleton and Dr Scott Kahan to help us untangle the nerves and the fear that can surround taking control of our health. Dr Kahan is a director of the National Center for Weight and Wellness, a multidisciplinary treatment program for health and weight. And he has served on the faculty of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the George Washington University School of Medicine, and the George Mason University School of Nutrition and Food Studies.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Welcome, Dr Kahan.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: Great to be here with you.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And Lisa Singleton's experiences dealing with her weight has led her to become a patient ambassador for people looking to take control of their health, who may need some support. She's here today to detail what that looks like. Welcome, Lisa.

LISA SINGLETON: Thank you for having me.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Okay, let's dive right in, okay? I want to start with you, Dr Kahan. What do we know about the uncomfortable feelings about going to the doctor and why is it necessary to discuss?

DR SCOTT KAHAN: This is such an important place to start, Yvette. Let's dive into some of the possible feelings that may come up. And one of them is fear or anxious thoughts. According to the American Psychological Association, anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes. And people may even avoid certain situations out of that worry. So getting our triggers under control is what I call the first work.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: If you don't get the anxious thoughts to a manageable place with a therapist or by using mindfulness practices, you might not be able to do the work of fighting back against obesity. You need to have a system in place to deal with your fear, and you may need to work at it every day.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: What do you think about that, Lisa? Does that resonate with your experiences?

LISA SINGLETON: That's the God honest truth. Struggle is very real. I think it's worth mentioning that managing fear doesn't mean we can't just tell people that they are stronger than their fears or to muscle through it and just do it. Because if we could do that, we would have already. I think the key is not necessarily waiting until you feel like you've totally overcome your worries, as much as it is about managing it so you can get the help you need.

LISA SINGLETON: You may still feel some apprehension, but be able to do it anyway, which is hard, but also brave.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Mm hmm... You know, I found that taking the first step towards anything important in life is often the hardest, but that second step, that's a whole lot easier.

LISA SINGLETON: Correct.

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DR SCOTT KAHAN: That's an excellent point, Yvette, and I think one that so many of us can relate to. How do you take the first step to conquering something that you feel like you can't control? I have so many patients who feel this way, but there are some tangible steps we can all use to help get started – starting with a focus on self-care and support, and taking one step at a time,

DR SCOTT KAHAN: And then before we know it, we find ourselves moving to a better place.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Yes. You know that theme of small steps adding up to something substantial over time is something that I'm hearing a lot of from our guests as we do this series. Now, Lisa, tell us a little bit about your health journey.

LISA SINGLETON: There was a very specific moment I knew I needed to make a change. It was when I looked down at my swollen feet and ankles and realized that there were the same symptoms my mom had right before she passed. She had diabetes. She weighed more than 300 pounds, and she died before she was even 50.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Wow.

LISA SINGLETON: And that really hit me hard.

LISA SINGLETON: I wanted to live. And if I wanted to live, I was going to have to make some serious changes.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: That's what we often call a precipitating moment. The moment where the status quo causes you more distress than not taking action.

LISA SINGLETON: But I have friends where that doesn't happen. They don't have that light bulb moment. I think it's because there's so much coming at us about our bodies all the time. It can be difficult to drown out all the voices and opinions. And look, change is hard. Sometimes we're not ready to change.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And you know, that is a hard truth. But that's why we're here, to talk about the hard stuff.

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DR SCOTT KAHAN: Yeah, absolutely. And I hear you, Lisa. I think everyone has to make some pretty big mind shifts when it comes to making a change around weight and obesity and health. Really working on reducing stigma and bias. It's a really good start. Doctors in particular have their work cut out for them by supporting patients to conquer the shame around weight and obesity.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: But the medical community has gotten better about the way we talk about these issues and especially the way we treat them. So much progress has been made in how we frame obesity now as a chronic condition, one that's not people's fault. And that progress has just been made in the past decade.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: You know, I think finding a physician that you really click with is key because that's made a big difference for me.

LISA SINGLETON: It really helped me too. Information calms my nerves. I'm a total fact finder. My doctor gave me a lot of medical information to read and even encouraged me to do my own research. I started moving throughout the day and ate healthier. I didn't expect things to change overnight because I know it didn't take me just a month to gain this weight.

LISA SINGLETON: And it's also highly genetic. Excess weight runs in my family. But those changes did come and they continue to.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: I love hearing that because finding the right doctor helps you feel like you have a partner in this and you're not all alone. And this can help get past the fear. It's okay to take your time and do your homework when you're searching for a doctor. I recommend starting by finding someone who specializes in weight issues like an obesity medicine specialist.

LISA SINGLETON: I didn't even know that was a thing until I found my new doctor. And that is why I love being able to help others do the same and really advocate for quality care.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: So what does an obesity medicine specialist do?

DR SCOTT KAHAN: We're specially trained and certified in treating people with excess weight and obesity. It's similar to seeing a specialist if you have any other health condition, like a

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cardiologist. Finding a doctor who specializes in obesity specifically can give you all the latest information and treatments available.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Knowing what you're facing is the absolute first step for me to turn my fear into action too.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: That's important because it's hard to analyze what's going on until you name it. The second step is analyzing your anxiety. Anxiety can get into our brain and whisper cruel things, exaggerating our perceptions and thoughts. But when you stare it down and test the reality of the anxious thoughts, you can reduce it to something more manageable so that you're left with more realistic and supportive thoughts to deal with.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: The third step is to create a clear plan. Fear can feel paralyzing. It can feel overwhelming. Once you've identified your specific worries and analyze them to reject the parts that aren't valid, you can be in a better position to move forward and get back to living the life you want to live.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Oh, I love how specific these steps are in addressing anxiety and fear. I'm going to use them the next time I have a doctor's visit.

LISA SINGLETON: They totally do work. I have made a ton of progress with these three steps. Now I actually enjoy going to the doctor. That is a big change.

DR SCOTT KAHAN: I think we can leave everyone with this thought and then that is taking action isn't just this switch that you flip. It's a process. And it starts with being kind to yourself and having positive self-talk and putting one foot in front of the other and just doing your best to take care of yourself.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Ah! There's our recurring theme. There's no magic fix, but there is a path forward and the journey can start anywhere like here, today. The good news is because you've tuned in and you've listened all the way to this part, whether you realize it or not, you've started your weight loss journey because talking about these issues, finding a support system, and thinking about how to work through this is where taking action really begins.

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YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And yes, even if you still aren't sure you're totally ready, you did that with us today. You took action. Go you! We are here for it. One last thing before you go. Are you both ready for one round of our It's Bigger than me questionnaire?

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LISA SINGLETON: Bring it on.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: All right. What do you do for self-care?

LISA SINGLETON: I have transformed my backyard into an oasis. It's where I go to relax. I put in a firepit. I just go out there and feel the wind and look at the flowers. It's so zen.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I love it. It sounds heavenly. What makes you laugh?

LISA SINGLETON: All episodes of community.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Hey!

LISA SINGLETON: You are hilarious.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Thank you. I don't even have to pay her money for that. She meant that, guys. Okay, Dr Kahan, what is your favorite healthy food?

DR SCOTT KAHAN: Well, I like all sorts of foods, but me and my kids, we love mangoes.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Yum, yum, yum. And what do you do to unwind after a long day?

DR SCOTT KAHAN: So I try to take long walks in the evening, especially because I tend to sit all day long. And so it feels so good to move my body and clear my mind before the end of the day.

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YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Oh, that is the best. Okay, there you have it. Thank you to Dr Scott Kahan, and thank you, Lisa Singleton, for being here today. And thank you for taking the time to join us and allowing us to have a more nuanced conversation around these important topics. We'll see you next time on the It's Bigger Than Me Series. And in the meantime, you can find us online at ItsBiggerThan.com and follow us on Instagram @ItsBiggerThan. And if you like what you saw today, share it with your friends or on your socials then tag us in the comments. We'll see you back here soon.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN End Credit: It's Bigger Than Me is presented by Novo Nordisk Inc. and has become a movement supported by Queen Latifah and thousands of people and companies such as the NFL alumni, the Media Empathy Foundation, and the Obesity Action Coalition – aiming to change the way the world understands, talks about, and treats obesity.