

it's **BIGGER** than **ME**

IT'S BIGGER THAN ME Series Episode 4: Feeling Like a Failure: The Journey of Living with Obesity

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

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I'm Yvette Nicole Brown. Now, 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 I'm here today to get real with you about the impact of living with obesity, weight loss journeys, and how you know when it's time to assemble a team to help.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And I'm just thrilled to welcome the ray of sunshine that is Anna O'Brien to our show. Anna is a content creator who shares fashion and beauty to inspire others to live life to the fullest, no matter their body type. She's the founder of the uber popular YouTube channel *Glitter and Lasers*. You can also find her on Instagram and TikTok, serving major main character energy with her plus-size fashions.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Lucky for us, she takes us along with her adventures with her fun posts and commentary. Welcome, Anna.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Thank you so much for inviting me here, Yvette. I've actually never been in a conversation with a real Disney villain before, so I'm kind of obsessed.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: (laughs) There's a first for everything. And joining Anna and me is Dr Deborah Horn. Dr Deborah Horn serves as the medical director at the University of Texas Center for Obesity Medicine and Metabolic Performance. She also is the program director of the Allison Family Foundation Fellowship in Clinical Obesity Medicine and Metabolism. Thank you so much for being here, Dr Horn.

DR DEBORAH HORN: Thank you. Yvette, I'm delighted to meet you both and to have a chance to discuss these important topics today.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Now Dr Horn, you have such a wide scope of study. How is looking at obesity from so many different lenses changed how you think about it?

DR DEBORAH HORN: That is a great question, Yvette. From the clinical standpoint, it's important to start by accurately acknowledging that obesity is a disease. And from a psychological standpoint, it's crucial to recognize how societal bias and stigmas compound that diagnosis and complicate individuals receiving excellent care. This can lead to a cycle of shame that can be a factor in preventing friends and family members who live with obesity from seeking the help that they deserve.

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DR DEBORAH HORN: Overcoming these obstacles as health care providers and patients has proven to be exceptionally challenging.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Anna, have you experienced shame cycles that centered around weight loss over the years?

ANNA O'BRIEN: How much time do we have again? If we're going to go down that road, we're going to need like a couple of days at least.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Girl, me too. Me too. Let's be real here. There is honestly a lifetime of shame to unpack right?

ANNA O'BRIEN: There is, but in a lot of ways, my weight has helped protect me and helped me. Sometimes we can provide a barrier, a boundary, a safety that we don't really even realize we need. I finally feel now, after doing a lot of discovery and a lot of therapy, that I don't need to use my body as a shield anymore.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: You know, I've had to unpack a lot of this in therapy myself over the years and begin to acknowledge that how I made choices in the past may not be serving me in the now.

DR DEBORAH HORN: And unfortunately, if we don't look at our past choices from the lens of trying to cope and doing the best we could at the time, it becomes just another way of perpetuating shame in ourselves presently, doesn't it? And keeping us stuck.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: That's something I deal with.

DR DEBORAH HORN: I understand. As a health advocate for my patients, my message is that obesity is not something you have to deal with alone, and it never should have been in the first place. There are so many factors that contribute to the disease of obesity and we need to feel comfortable sharing them with our doctor and health care team.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Mm, amen.

DR DEBORAH HORN: Listen, it can still be hard to remember and accept that obesity is a disease, even when you know it's true, because we've been replaying an inaccurate talk track for so long. Obesity is not a moral failing. It's not a lack of responsibility or motivation or dedication or willpower. It's a complex, multisystem, biologically driven disease. There are genetic, emotional, and environmental factors that contribute to obesity.

DR DEBORAH HORN: It's not just motivation that can solve this. The options, just like any other disease, require the attention and care of a doctor working in conjunction with their patient to address that patient's specific situation. But no matter what, it should be tailored to each individual patient and include shared decision making.

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ANNA O'BRIEN: Exactly. One of the biggest misconceptions I think people have about me is that like I eat all the time or something. I actually often have to remind myself to eat. I work all the time. I have a very busy and active lifestyle and if motivation was all it took for me to lose weight, look, I'd be skinny. But that isn't it.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Is it? Luckily, I finally found a doctor I love and I'm on a health journey and that's tailored to me and my challenges and my body. Because I've finally begun to understand that there isn't this one size fits all solution for obesity. There just isn't.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: So tell me what your specific journey includes.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Well, it started with my doctor and we worked out a weight management plan that really worked for me. I work to get out of my comfort zone all the time, and I try new things physically. I've started meditating in order to create mindfulness in my life, and I try to make sure I'm drinking enough water and sleeping enough.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Those really do help. And I use my platforms to allow myself to be fully seen in this process. While any one of these things might seem like a small thing, it has felt, and it has been revolutionary in my life.

DR DEBORAH HORN: Yes!

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Okay then. You know, you are hard at work building your beautiful life with the care and help you deserve.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Seriously, I didn't just wake up like this. And part of this journey was attending the It's Bigger Than Me event in Houston. I really started to understand after listening to Queen Latifah and other influencers, and doctors – like you, Dr Horn – that I needed to take all the internal work I had done to love myself to the next level. And really have the courage to address some of the health repercussions of this disease.

ANNA O'BRIEN: And I've since worked my tail off and I continue to, in order to make my life as big and bold as I know it's capable of being. Listen, I'm proud of myself. I'm proud of my body and I'm proud of where I've gotten and what it's taken to do it. I have a sense of peace within myself, and I just hope I can inspire others to do the same.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Oh, this is exactly why I wanted to do this series. We all desperately need to see more examples of people not just living with obesity but thriving while at the same time addressing their health concerns. Because it's a process and you are a great example of the rewards of being on that journey.

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DR DEBORAH HORN: And there's so much to be hopeful about now. From a clinical standpoint, doctors, together with their patients, have so many more tools at their disposal and so much more knowledge about the factors at play. This is exactly why talking to your doctor is so important as a first step in managing this disease.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Oh, thank God for that. Because just the idea of jumping from fad diet to fad diet, and exercise class forever and ever makes me want to roll over.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Been there. Done that. Never again. And it's bigger than just eating less and moving more. And the lies and the promises followed by the cycles of shame. It's all in the rear-view for me.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: It all seems insane now, right? You know that there is no other disease I can think of where people just expect you to fix it yourself. Just like bootstrap your way out of being 400 pounds.

DR DEBORAH HORN: You can't. And you shouldn't. Until we can change how our culture and our society views obesity, we're going to continue to struggle to give people the real help they desperately need and deserve. And that's why conversations like this with people like both of you and Queen Latifah are flipping the script in real time, which matters more than you can know.

DR DEBORAH HORN: It'll help those of us who live with obesity reach out for help. Those of us who love someone with obesity, support them in their journey. And help my fellow health care providers better understand their real responsibility to provide care.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Thank you so much, Dr Horn, that means so much to me now. Okay, ladies, are you ready for the It's Bigger Than Me questionnaire? Because it's time.

ANNA O'BRIEN: Okay, let's do it.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Dr Horn, what do you do for self-care at the end of a long day?

DR DEBORAH HORN: I'm someone that needs to move to turn my work brain off. It can be as simple as a walk with my teenagers. A little strength training or 10 minutes of pilates, but moving helps me reset and get a restful night's sleep.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Anna, what is your comfort food?

ANNA O'BRIEN: Soup. I actually do my meal prepping on Sundays, and my favorite part about it is I get to make a new soup for the week. It's just something I love. It's delicious and cozy. I just love soup.

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YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I love it. And how about this? What is your response to online trolls?

ANNA O'BRIEN: Rule number one, baby, don't read the Internet comments. Don't read them. Don't do it.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Ah, you're so much wiser than me. Okay, doctor, how do you get back on your feet when you feel you failed at your health maintenance goals?

DR DEBORAH HORN: First, I push the pause button and recognize life is not perfect. Then I reboot my internal talk track to be more self-supportive and productive. I recognize this is my physiology and not my fault, and I reengage my treatment tools so that I can look forward and move forward.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Mm. Anna?

ANNA O'BRIEN: So I believe that there is no such thing as a failure unless you give up and that roadblocks are part of success. So they're a struggle, they're part of the process, but whether I fail or not is up to me.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Ah, two sides of the same coin. I love that. And there you have it. Thank you so much, Dr Deborah Horn. And thank you so much, Anna O'Brien for sharing your story.

ANNA O'BRIEN: This was fun.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And thank you for coming along with me on this journey. This was our final episode of our It's Bigger Than Me series. You know, I really had to think long and hard about how we produce this show because I wanted to be honest and real about the health concerns we're facing and to be able to talk about next steps in addressing them.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: It isn't enough to just accept our bodies. We have to embrace that loving ourselves means safeguarding our health. Give yourself the gift of talking to your doctor about what that means for you if you are struggling with obesity. I hope you enjoyed hearing everyone's stories and learn something while doing it. I want to give a big thank you to all of our guests Katie Sturino, Lisa Singleton, Ashlee Marie Preston, and Anna O'Brien.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I also want to thank all of our health care providers and doctors for help to educate us along the way. Dr Scott Kahan, Dr Tiffany Lowe Clayton, and Dr Deborah Horn. And thank you, our listeners, for being so open with your hearts and minds. Now, please visit us online at ItsBiggerThan.com and follow us on Instagram @ItsBiggerThan.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And if you like what you saw today, share it with your friends or on your socials, then tag us in the comments. We hope to see you back here soon. It's Bigger Than Me is presented by Novo Nordisk Inc. and has become a movement supported by Queen Latifah

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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.