

Done with Dieting Podcast #36: Managing Menopause



Full Episode Transcript

With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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You are listening to the Done with Dieting Podcast Episode number 36.

Hi, I'm Elizabeth Sherman, former corporate high tech executive turned life and weight loss coach. But it wasn't that long ago that I was searching for that perfect diet, the one that would finally be the golden ticket to lose the weight that I so desired.

Fast forward past tons of failed diet attempts, exercise fads and painful lessons learned, and although I still have not reached the state of Nirvana, body love, my relationship with food and exercise in my body is infinitely better than it was not only when I started this journey, but even as recently as three years ago.

The journey that has allowed me to ditch my scale, stop logging my food and exercise, eat food that I didn't prepare and easily maintain my weight - something that I never thought was possible for me.

I created the Done with Dieting podcast to give you simple, easy to do and sustainable strategies to help you do the same without all of the drama that I went through.

If you're a woman who's looking to create a better relationship with food and her body, get off the diet roller coaster and free up a bunch of headspace spent on calories, how you should look, what you should eat and beating yourself up for not doing what you think you should be doing. You are in the right place.

Let's get started.

Hey everyone, welcome to today's episode. We are going to talk about hormones and menopause which we don't talk about enough and it's so interesting how all of us have moved into this phase of life and it's almost like, "why didn't anyone tell us about what was going on?" Like all of us.

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Half of the population goes through this, and it's just crazy to me that we aren't talking about it more. The older generation just doesn't talk about it because I don't know, is it shameful? Do we think that there's something to be ashamed of, that our bodies are going through this? And then, we don't really talk about it because it's not really exciting. Once you're in it, "yeah, well this is what's happening."

But before I get into today's topic, I want to tell you that next Wednesday, September 29th, if you're listening to this in real time, I am going to be doing a webinar. I'm going to be hosting a webinar all about how to lose weight forever for women in midlife.

This is just an amazing webinar where you are going to learn three easy to apply tips that are definitely going to help you towards your goal of weight loss. If that's something that you're interested in. So, for example, we often hear about how we need to cut out bad foods, right? Like we need to cut out fat or carbs are bad.

And in this webinar, I'm going to talk a little bit about; why that's a huge mistake and what you want to do instead? And then, how to stay motivated even when you're not really seeing results, because that happens to us sometimes. And then, how to lose weight without having to do those tedious things like logging your food, or weighing yourself every day, or logging every morsel, or weighing stuff. I mean, "Ugh, it's so boring." You don't have to do that.

And then, the one thing that will definitely ruin your success and how to avoid it. So, if this is something that you want to attend, I'm going to invite you to go to elizabethsherman.com/loseweightforever, that's all one word and put in your details and I will let you know the link to join the webinar. All right?

Now moving on, so I work with women in midlife. I generally say in between like 45 and 60 but some women go through menopause at a much earlier age. And so, if that's you, this is totally right for you as well. And so, first of all, let's talk a little bit about our

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hormones, why they go out of whack? And then, the two different kind of stages that we go through as women in order to move into the later years of our life and why we're doing that.

So, first of all, let's just be clear that the reason that our hormones are fluctuating is to bring our bodies out of those childbearing years. And so, what's happening in our body is our estrogen levels are decreasing because our bodies just don't need that type of estrogen. And because they're decreasing, the relationship, the ratio of estrogen to progesterone and testosterone is a little bit different.

And so, what's happening is the body's trying to figure out what are the natural levels that it's supposed to be at during this time, it's trying to figure itself out. And so, because of that our bodies are lots of weird things are happening. It's like puberty in reverse, right?

Now, generally we have about two steps when we're going from childbearing years to the non-childbearing years. And the first stage is what we call "peri-menopause" and then the second stage is what we call "menopause," right?

And so, when we are in peri-menopause, what tends to happen is we see symptoms like having irregular periods. So, irregular cycles, either the timing of the cycles is longer, or shorter, or sometimes they can be unpredictable. The flow can be a little bit heavier or lighter, it's just that what we're used to really changes there.

Now, something that a lot of folks complain about are hot flashes and sleep problems. And I know that when I started experiencing hot flashes and sleep problems, that's when I started really investigating; what are some of the things that I can do that aren't related to prescriptions or that I don't need to get a prescription for from my doctor. So, how can I manage these symptoms on my own?

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And so, I'm going to share some of that with you today. The third thing that we see in peri-menopause are some mood changes. Maybe you find that you're a little bit more irritable, maybe you're crying at TV commercials, or maybe you have a little bit of depression as well. And so, really being able to understand that that's not you, it's just your hormones.

But then also we can have bladder problems, right? Our pelvic floor doesn't have the strength in order to keep our bladder up and sometimes we'll find leaking, in addition to having decreased fertility and changes in sexual desire and function. But then also, loss of bone and we need to replace that. And then, some changes in cholesterol levels which as I go through that list, it sounds terrible, doesn't it? But it's all part of the process. And so, some people may experience many of these symptoms, some women may not experience many of the symptoms at all. And I know that I had some of the symptoms, but they really weren't very severe. And I attributed a lot of that to genetics.

So, one of the things that you can do is talk to your sisters, talk to your mother, talk to your aunts to find out like, what were their symptoms? And chances are yours are going to be pretty similar.

Now, the measure for when you've moved from perimenopause into menopause is that you haven't had a cycle for one calendar year. And some of the menopausal symptoms will be very similar to that of the perimenopause, so things like hot flashes.

However, instead of just having them at night, you might also have them during the day. But you also might have night sweats as well; difficulty sleeping, reduced sex drive, problems with memory, and feeling foggy. Definitely vaginal dryness, you might have headaches, or again, your mood changes might be even more severe than they were in perimenopause. Again, reduced muscle mass and oftentimes women will have increased urinary tract infections.

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But the other thing to note is that menopause; because of the drop in estrogen, we will have weaker bones. So that is related to osteopenia and osteoporosis. And so, we need to make sure that we're taking care of our bones and we can do that through doing weight bearing exercise, just things like walking or strength training.

And the reason that actually works is because when we do weight bearing exercise, we get tiny little tears in our bones. And bone is one of those materials in your body that repairs itself with itself. And so, when we get these tiny little fractures in our bones, what happens is the body then goes and it starts patching those tears with additional bone material.

So, if you've ever had a broken bone, you'll notice that the body will actually repair that bone with additional bone and that break is actually much stronger than the rest of the bone that broke. And so, the same thing is true with osteoporosis that when you're doing weight bearing exercises, you're strengthening your bones because of these tiny little tears.

Now, what's super interesting about this long list of symptoms that we have when we enter into perimenopause and menopausal years is that there are some of these things that we can actually change through lifestyle habits and it's so interesting.

I'm pretty active in some Facebook groups and it's always frustrating to me when I see women who are of menopausal and perimenopausal years, who just basically throw in the towel and say, "well, this is how it's supposed to be." And so, therefore we don't really have any choice other than to take prescription medication. And I'm not doubting that prescription medication can be super useful for so many women.

But I also know that there's a lot of power in approaching the symptoms that we have through, not just diet, not just exercise, but also just self-care. And so, let's talk a little bit

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about what that looks like the things that we need to change as we move into this period of life and how they're going to help us?

Now, there are four different areas or pillars of health. We have our eating, we have our physical activity, we have sleep, and then we have stress. And what I want to do is I want to take a little bit of time and talk about, how each of those different areas influences one another?

And what's so interesting about this is that, when you see how these different areas influence one another, you'll also be able to connect the dots on how they affect your body and how focusing on one area, or another will help you pull your health up basically by the bootstraps.

So, let's talk about how your eating will affect these different areas and then we'll move on to the others as well. So, your eating is going to affect your exercise. And so many times people will ask me, how much should I eat before I work out? Or how much time should I let lapse between when I'm eating and when I work out?

And you're going to hear this a lot but unfortunately, everyone is completely different. And what I find for many of my clients is that if you can exercise on an empty stomach, then go ahead and do that. For many folks, working out on an empty stomach is actually really effective.

Now, the experts will tell you that we should never work out on an empty stomach because we want to have energy or food in order to fuel the workout.

But for most of my clients, I find that they are more interested in weight loss and weight maintenance. And so, if you're working out on an empty stomach, chances are your body is going to start using the fat that's on your body as fuel for that workout versus the food that's in your stomach which is ultimately what we want.

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Now again, it's completely individual as to how much you should eat before you work out. If you find that you're bonking in the middle of your workouts, you probably want to eat something or if you feel nauseous. However, if you feel like you have good energy and you can go through your workout without eating, go ahead and do it.

Now, eating is going to affect your sleep because if you eat too close to when you're sleeping, you might wake up in the middle of the night, you might have trouble sleeping. Now, I can't remember when it was, but at some point, Oprah said that no one should eat after six o'clock. And I think that that's the wrong advice to give.

What we want to say instead is that you want to give yourself at least two hours from the time that you eat until the time that you go to bed so that the food that's in your stomach has time to digest. Now, I also find that eating will influence your sleep on many other levels. So, for example, we talked about night sweats before and I know that when I eat an excess of starches in my diet, then I get hot flashes and I get night sweats.

And so, one of the things that you can do if this is something that's bothering you is limit the amount of starch that you're having in your evening meal to see if that's one of the reasons that you might be waking up, or that you're having night sweats.

Now, one of the reasons that we might have insomnia in the middle of the night is because we might have low blood sugar. And so, what happens is that our body just wakes us up because our blood sugar is plummeting. And when that happens, we wake up because our body's like, "hey, you need to eat something, you need to stabilize your blood sugar."

And so, if this is happening to you, one of the great fixes for that is just again, making sure that your starch levels are low in the evening and also that you're eating enough protein. Now, eating will influence your stress because eating bad food, eating poor nutrient food will definitely impact our ability to manage our stress.

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So, if you're finding it difficult to manage your stress, you might want to look at your eating habits and see if cleaning up your eating habits, adding some more vegetables to it or drinking more water could possibly improve the way that you're managing your stress.

Now, moving on to exercise, exercise affects your eating because if you're over-exercising, then you are probably going to be a lot hungrier. I know that when I've had injuries and I haven't been able to exercise, that paying attention to my hunger levels, my eating naturally went down. And so, of course, exercise is going to impact your eating. Exercise will also impact your sleep, but in a positive way.

So, if you're not giving your body enough exercise, if you're not giving your body enough physical activity, what will happen is at the end of the day, you're going to be wired but tired. You've been spending a lot of time and mental energy focusing on problems, but your body still has all of this energy from the food that you've been eating, right? And so, you may find that you have all of this pent up energy but you're still exhausted. And so, in that case, you might find that adding some physical activity to your day can alleviate that symptom.

Physical activity will also positively impact your stress management because exercise is a stressor but it's also a stress reducer. And so, what we need to do as women in midlife is figure out, how much is the right amount for us?

Now, when I was entering into perimenopause, I was exercising for upwards of one and a half to two hours a day. And I was noticing that I was super hungry, and I was also getting these crazy cravings. And I was probably a little neurotic too. Once I was able to back off of the exercise, everything else fell in line.

And so, we want to have this just sweet spot of physical activity. And as we get older, that sweet spot is really going to change. As we're younger, we can put more pressure

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and stress on our bodies. But as we get older, exercise becomes more of a stressor, if we do it for longer periods of time. So, we have to hit it hard for a short amount of time or we want to do really relaxing exercise like yoga, or Tai Chi, or something like that.

Now, the third aspect, the third pillar of health is sleep. And we all love sleep, right? But we also know that sleep helps us, but many of us don't really realize the importance of sleep and what it's going to do for us.

So, sleep impacts our stress because the better sleep we get, the better we can manage our stress of course. Sleep impacts our eating, because if we're not getting good enough sleep, it's a fact that the cells in our body will not process energy correctly.

And so, this is actually a really interesting point because oftentimes when we don't get proper sleep, again ourselves don't process energy correctly and what we'll find is a symptom of that is right around three o'clock in the afternoon, we'll start to get tired. And so, immediately our brain is like, "oh, I know what we need, we need energy." And what's the easiest form of energy, starches?

So of course, we're going to go looking for chocolate, or we're going to go looking for chips, or something that is going to give our body that shot of energy that it's really craving.

Now, what's really interesting about this is that when it comes to habit, we may start a habit for one reason but then continue it for another. So just be aware, start to notice that when you have those mid-afternoon craving think back to; how was my sleep last night? And if it wasn't really good, then just check in with yourself and say, "Am I really hungry or do I just need something to wake me up? Do I need to just go for a walk around the block, or do I need to get up from my desk? So, trying to figure out, what are some other things that I can do in order to create more energy for myself?

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Now, sleep is also going to impact our physical activity because of course the better we sleep, the more energy we're going to have to move. So, if you want to have more energy to walk, or run, or strength train, then I would suggest that you focus on your sleep. And in fact, for many of my clients, if we can start focusing on sleep as one of the first habits, all of the other things fall in line.

Now, let's talk about stress. Stress impacts sleep because if we're sleeping and we're stressed out about something, poor stress management is going to have us waking up in the middle of the night. And as we get older, as we move into with these symptoms of perimenopause and menopause, what will happen is oftentimes we'll feel more anxious, or we'll feel more depressed. And so, stress will definitely increase the feelings of anxiety and depression in women in mid-life.

So, prioritizing sleep, it's kind of a chicken and an egg thing, right? Prioritizing sleep can definitely help our stress but then managing our stress will also impact our sleep in a positive way. So, stress impacts our eating because again, if we have poor management of stress, then we tend to run to emotional eating, stress eating, doing things to distract ourselves from whatever it is that we're trying to avoid, right?

And so, making sure that your stress management is in line, is definitely going to help you with that. And then finally, stress will impact your exercise and it may impact your exercise one of two different ways. I find that if I'm feeling anxious, that if I go exercise, I actually get a really good workout because the anxiety can fuel that, and it also minimizes the feelings of anxiety.

But the other side to it is that if you are someone who has stress, you might also feel lethargic. So, it could go either way, but stress definitely impacts your exercise. So, that's it for those four different aspects and how eating, exercise, sleep, and stress, all impact one another.

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And what's so interesting about those four things is that; the more we pay attention to one, the more it will fuel the next one, which also creates like this upward spiral of being able to do better, and feel better, and function better. And so, I just wanted to point those out because many of the symptoms that we have within perimenopause and menopause can be fixed just through improving our eating habits, doing a little bit of physical activity, paying attention to our sleep, and then managing our stress a little bit better.

Now, within my practice of coaching women in weight loss and better health, I use five different biomarkers. I call them biomarkers but they're really just symptoms, that tell me whether my client's hormones are balanced. And what those five different biomarkers are first of all, cravings. So, are you having cravings for salty fatty, like nuts, or chips, or pretzels, or things like that? Or are you having cravings for sweet?

Some people have both, but cravings are definitely going to signal that something's not right. As I said before, sometimes cravings can be because we're just in the habit of having cravings and so our body's like, "Hey, it's three o'clock let's have some sugar," or it could be because we have lack of sleep, or it could be because of the food quality that we had earlier in the day.

So, when our hormones are balanced, we really should not have really intense cravings. Going along with cravings is hunger. When our hormones are balanced, our hunger should be normal, if not low. And so, be aware that when you have like ravenous hunger, it could be because your body is not fat adapted. It could be because you are overexercising, or it could be that your body just isn't processing energy correctly.

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The third biomarker is sleep. If your hormones are in balance, your sleep should be good. You should not be waking up in the middle of the night, waking up for hours on end and not able to go to sleep.

Now again, remember that one of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause is having bladder problems. So, I find that for myself and many of my clients that we wake up in the middle of the night, especially if we're trying to get enough water in, but if you are waking up in the middle of the night, even though that is a disturbance, getting right back to sleep is really super important.

So, when our hormones are balanced and we don't have lots of anxiety, we're managing our stress well, we should not be waking up for long periods of time.

Number four is energy levels. So, if our hormones are balanced, our energy levels should be stable across the day. You shouldn't have wild dips or feel really lethargic at any point of the day. So, if you are experiencing any of those symptoms you really do want to look at, maybe how you're sleeping, or If you're exercising too hard, or potentially also whether your diet is proper for your body.

And I just want to say that just because you're eating healthy food doesn't necessarily mean that you're eating the right food for your body. And so, for many of my clients, they are already eating really healthy food but what we need to do is we need to tweak some things and maybe reduce a little bit of the starch or fruit that's in their diet, increase their protein a little bit and potentially add some more vegetables in. And what that does for them is it just gives them enough so that their energy levels are then all of a sudden stable and they're sleeping great and then number five, their mood is stable as well.

And so, again, all of those symptoms that I talked about at the very beginning in terms of perimenopausal symptoms and menopausal symptoms. I can't change all of those

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with diet and exercise related health behaviors. However, there are a number of them that we can for sure influence.

So, I want to give you a couple takeaways for today's episode. So first, as we get older, we can no longer eat like 12 year old boys anymore and not expect that it's not going to impact our health. So, be mindful of how your body responds to certain foods and be aware that certain foods can add stress to your body, okay?

Number two, make sure that you move and we're not doing this for weight loss. We're doing it for stress management, we're doing this for better mood, we're doing it so that you can take care of yourself. Start thinking about movement and physical activity as a way of taking care of yourself instead of a chore.

Number three, prioritize sleep. And I can't state this enough, whatever it is that you need to do, I have a number of different visualization techniques that I use with my clients and having a bedtime routine actually really helps a lot in terms of being able to have good sleep and then finally prioritizing self-care.

And so, when I was in my forties, I was trying to do the same stuff that the younger "ME" used to do. And I just couldn't get away with it, I was over exercising, I was eating a poor diet thinking that I could out exercise it. I wasn't getting good quality sleep and I wasn't really paying attention to my self-care.

And so, as we get older, I think that we lose a little bit of that, "I care what other people think," right? And so, we need to put our own needs first. And if there's one thing that I want you to take away from this episode, it's that you deserve it and that this is all so important for you to take care of yourself.

So, in closing, I want to invite you to my webinar of how to lose weight forever. Again, it's Wednesday, September 29th, it's at 8:00 PM Eastern, 7:00 PM central, 5:00 PM

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Pacific time and we are going to go through all of this information in detail as well as even better information. And walk through some case studies with you, all right?

Go to elizabethsherman.com/loseweightforever and I hope I see you there.

Talk to you next time, bye-bye.

Hey, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, you have to come check out the Feel Good Sisterhood. It's my small group coaching program where we take all this material, and we apply it. We figure out what works for us, and we don't ever look at another diet ever again.

Join me over at elizabethsherman.com/groupcoaching.

I'd love to have you join me in the Feel Good Sisterhood. See you there.