3 AM Perimenopause Anxiety: Why It Happens & How to Stop It Transcript

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Why Perimenopause Anxiety Hits at 3 AM

Three o'clock in the morning. You Three o'clock in the morning. You opened your opened your eyes wide. Your heart is eyes wide. Your heart is pounding. And all the all the worries of the past day worries of the past day and the next six and the next six months rush through my head for no reason. If this months rush through my head for no reason. If this happens to you, happens to you, I want you to hear this I want you to hear this first. You are not first. You are not going crazy. There is a going crazy. There is a real physical real physical reason why perimenopausal anxiety perimenopausal anxiety occurs in the middle of the night.

occurs in the middle of the night. And once you And once you understand that, you can understand that, you can do something about it. do something about it.

How Hormones Trigger Anxiety

So in this video, I'll So in this video, I'll explain why this explain why this happens, why it's happens, why it's at 3 a.m., at 3 a.m., and how to and how to stop it. I am Dr.

stop it. I am Dr. Jen, an obstetrician- gynecologist and gynecologist and integrative integrative integrative medicine physician. And I want medicine physician. And I want you to know something. You're you to know something. You're not crazy and you're not not crazy and you're not being dramatic.

being dramatic. Anxiety is one Anxiety is one of the most common of the most common symptoms symptoms symptoms of perimenopause, of perimenopause, often ignored or often ignored or underestimated by doctors.

underestimated by doctors. It appears It appears even in women even in women who have never who have never experienced anxiety before. Not even a experienced anxiety before. Not even a single day in single day in my life. It's not a my life.

Why it happens?

It's not a character flaw, it's not a character flaw, it's not a stress problem, and stress problem, and you don't have to you don't have to just put up with it. This is a just put up with it. This is a matter of chemistry, and matter of chemistry, and chemistry can be chemistry can be fixed. So, fixed. So, let's start with why let's start with why this is this is happening in the first place. Your happening in the first place. Your brain has a built-in brain has a built-in calming system calming system that runs on a that runs on a chemical chemical chemical called GABA. This is a called GABA. This is a brake on your brake on your nervous system. And nervous system. And one of the main things that fuels this that fuels this brake is progesterone, or more precisely, a, or more precisely, a calming compound that your that your body produces. That's the body produces. That's the problem. In problem. In perimenopause, perimenopause, perimenopause, progesterone is usually progesterone is usually the first to drop, the first to drop, often years before often years before estrogen declines.

Why You Wake Up at 3 AM

So, as So, as progesterone levels drop, progesterone levels drop, you gradually you gradually lose this lose this ability ability ability to calm down, and it to calm down, and it becomes harder for your brain becomes harder for your brain to fall asleep, stay asleep, to fall asleep, stay asleep, and relax. In and relax. In addition, your estrogen is addition, your estrogen is constantly fluctuating. And estrogen. And estrogen helps regulate helps regulate " " feel-good" neurotransmitters, or feel-good" neurotransmitters, or chemicals, chemicals, chemicals, called called called serotonin and dopamine.

serotonin and dopamine. And these sharp jumps And these sharp jumps directly directly directly affect mood affect mood and anxiety. These are not and anxiety. These are not figments of your figments of your mind. These are real mind. These are real changes in your changes in your brain chemistry. So why 3:00 brain chemistry. So why 3:00 am? Almost like am? Almost like clockwork. Two clockwork. Two important things important things collide at collide at dawn. First, dawn. First, your stress hormone, your stress hormone, cortisol, cortisol, cortisol, is naturally at its is naturally at its lowest lowest lowest around midnight and around midnight and then begins to then begins to rise towards morning rise towards morning to perk you up and to perk you up and wake you up. This wake you up. This growth should be growth should be gentle. But with gentle.

Hidden Triggers Making Anxiety Worse

But with low low low progesterone levels, there is no progesterone levels, there is no calming calming calming effect. There is no effect. There is no softness. Cortisol softness. Cortisol simply says, "Get up.

" You are fully " You are fully awake, awake, awake, feeling alert and feeling alert and ready to start the day. ready to start the day. Second, Second, Second, blood sugar levels blood sugar levels matter. If your matter. If your blood sugar drops blood sugar drops too low at night, your too low at night, your body releases a dose of body releases a dose of adrenaline and adrenaline and cortisol to cortisol to raise it. This raise it. This jump can cause jump can cause you you you to wake up abruptly with a to wake up abruptly with a feeling of nervous feeling of nervous excitement and panic.

excitement and panic. But together, But together, unbalanced unbalanced unbalanced cortisol and a drop cortisol and a drop in blood sugar give in blood sugar give you those classic you those classic 3 a.m. wake-ups 3 a.m. wake-ups. There are three more. There are three more things that only things that only add fuel to the add fuel to the fire. A glass of wine fire.

What to Do When You Wake Up

A glass of wine you drank to you drank to fall asleep wears off within a few fall asleep wears off within a few hours, hours, hours, causing the opposite causing the opposite effect: a surge of effect: a surge of adrenaline and an even adrenaline and an even greater drop greater drop in blood sugar. And this in blood sugar. And this can actually can actually make the situation much worse make the situation much worse. Sometimes night. Sometimes night sweats or sweats or hot flashes also hot flashes also add to this, add to this, causing you causing you to wake up, to wake up, accompanied by accompanied by accompanied by anxiety, because you are anxiety, because you are sweating profusely. And sweating profusely. And since low since low progesterone levels progesterone levels make your sleep make your sleep shallow and shallow and fragmented, you simply fragmented, you simply wake up and can't fall wake up and can't fall back asleep, back asleep, causing your brain causing your brain to start working at to start working at full speed. So if you've been full speed. So if you've been blaming yourself for blaming yourself for this, please this, please stop. Your body stop. Your body is doing something completely is doing something completely predictable. And predictable. And predictable predictable predictable means it can be means it can be fixed. Now fixed. Now let's get to what let's get to what you're here for. I'll you're here for. I'll give you advice on what to give you advice on what to do the next do the next time you time you wake up at 3 wake up at 3 a.m. to a.m.

Breathing Technique to Calm Your Nervous System

to stop this process in stop this process in real time, and I'll real time, and I'll also talk about also talk about some preventative some preventative measures. Stay measures. Stay with me, because all of this with me, because all of this together will finally give together will finally give you relief you relief in the middle of the night. So, in the middle of the night. So, first, first, first, rescue measures. When you rescue measures. When you wake up at 3 wake up at 3 a.m. with a a.m. with a racing racing racing heart, the heart, the worst thing to do is pick up your worst thing to do is pick up your phone or start phone or start doing things on doing things on it, because that's your it, because that's your brain's signal that it's time brain's signal that it's time to wake up. Time to wake up. Time to start work.

to start work. Instead, work Instead, work with your body. Slow down your breathing Slow down your breathing and make your exhalations and make your exhalations longer than your inhalations. This longer than your inhalations. This is called is called is called breathing practice.

breathing practice.

Fix Your Blood Sugar & Hormones

Because a long, Because a long, slow exhalation is the slow exhalation is the fastest physical fastest physical signal you signal you can send to can send to your nervous system: "I'm your nervous system: "I'm safe." Time safe." Time to calm down.

to calm down. Try inhaling Try inhaling for a count of four, for a count of four, holding for a count of six, and holding for a count of six, and exhaling for a count of eight.

exhaling for a count of eight. Do this over and Do this over and over again. Keep over again. Keep the room cool the room cool and the lights off. A and the lights off. A simple reminder: simple reminder: you don't need to you don't need to fix anything fix anything right now. You right now. You are not trying to force are not trying to force yourself to sleep. You're yourself to sleep. You're just trying to just trying to turn off that turn off that alarm. Now about alarm. Now about preventive measures preventive measures to prevent this.

to prevent this. First, First, First, stabilize your stabilize your blood sugar levels at night blood sugar levels at night by consuming fewer by consuming fewer sweets and sweets and alcohol before bed.

alcohol before bed. For some women, a For some women, a balanced, balanced, balanced, high- high- high-protein snack before protein snack before bed will help bed will help prevent a sharp prevent a sharp drop in blood sugar levels.

drop in blood sugar levels. Number two: eliminate the Number two: eliminate the hormonal hormonal hormonal root cause, because root cause, because it is often associated with it is often associated with low low low progesterone levels.

progesterone levels.

Daily Habits That Prevent 3 AM Anxiety

Talk to your Talk to your doctor about whether doctor about whether progesterone is right for you. progesterone is right for you. Taking it at night, Taking it at night, usually an hour or usually an hour or two before bedtime, will help two before bedtime, will help reduce reduce reduce anxiety, help you anxiety, help you fall asleep faster, and prevent fall asleep faster, and prevent waking up during the night. You waking up during the night. You will actually will actually sleep more soundly.

sleep more soundly. You may You may also need also need estrogen, but this estrogen, but this should be discussed should be discussed specifically with your doctor.

specifically with your doctor. Number three: your Number three: your baseline baseline baseline stress level. Limit stress level. Limit caffeine, especially in the caffeine, especially in the afternoon: afternoon: afternoon: nothing after 11:00.

nothing after 11:00. Get morning Get morning sunlight, sunlight, sunlight, move during the day, and move during the day, and stick to a stick to a stick to a consistent consistent consistent sleep schedule. Magnesium glycinate also sleep schedule. Magnesium glycinate also helps a lot for some helps a lot for some. But. But none of this is none of this is just gimmickry.

just gimmickry. Each of these methods Each of these methods reduces the load reduces the load on the system

that on the system that keeps you keeps you awake at 3 awake at 3 a.m. Since a.m.

Final Takeaways & Next Steps

Since waking up at 3am is waking up at 3am is essentially a essentially a sleep problem, I've put together sleep problem, I've put together five five five doctor-approved solutions for doctor-approved solutions for those who wake up those who wake up in the middle of the night. They in the middle of the night. They perfectly complement perfectly complement everything we just everything we just discussed. I will add discussed. I will add this video here. So this video here. So watch it watch it