Dieting Sucks for Women Over 40? Menopause, Mindset & the 30 to Life Method Transcript

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Show Introduction and Guest Welcome

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr Amy Cooper-Smith, a doctorate prepared nurse practitioner, and this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy and balanced life.

And very excited to introduce today's guest, Debbie Harris, Integrative Nutrition Health Coach and Certified Hypnotist. She is the founder of the 32 Life Solution and the author of Dieting Sucks for Women Over 40. Welcome.

And thank you so much for being here today. Oh, and thank Amy. One thing to add to that, which literally just happened a couple of days ago, I'm now a certified menopause coach special.

Perfect. I think we all need that. Yeah, great. So we'll talk about that too. But first, dieting sucks. Why? Well, I did it for so many decades, starting at either 11 or 12. And it's frustrating.

It's restrictive. We play a lot of head games with ourselves. So there's a lots of blame. There's lot self-recrimination. When we're younger, we kind of, you know, will do a diet.

whatever happens to be, you know, going around at the moment. And we'll take weight off and inevitably it comes back, but then we will take it off again and it's when we get to midlife.

When we to perimenopause, all of a sudden what we did before may not work at all.

Why Dieting Fails in Midlife

frustrating. Yes, I hear that every day. Yeah, and change my diet. I haven't changed my exercise, but I'm gaining weight. What's happening? And it's complicated.

It is complicated, so you mentioned starting dieting at age 11. So what's Happening that we think at that age that We need to go on a diet? Well, i was overweight.

So and my relationship with food or my dysfunction with, if you will, started very early on for reasons that I go through in my book. But this is what happens.

Food, we build an emotional bond with. And Depending on what that is, whether it's, you know, we're eating because we are scared, or eating, because, want to feel comfortable, whatever it is.

We're nervous. Uh, We are angry. It carries with us. And what I'm working on with women, with midlife women. One of the things I work on is really finding peace with food.

and it a very complicated subject. Because food is not something, as you know, that we can just go cold turkey. I mean, we're not going to just stop eating.

We're talking about cigarettes. So we have to really look at our relationship with food. what is behind it and then work from there. And then on top of all the hormonal changes happening in midlife, you're getting this one to punch of, I don't know what, is going on with my body.

These is what I always did and now it's not working. So now I need a new plan. Let's take a look at my relationship with food. Yeah, I see that a lot and there's sometimes resistance.

Somebody will come in for a weight loss plan maybe because their doctor said they should or their husband said, they showed or something like that. And they can kind of become angry or even, okay, you said I can't have this ice cream and now I'm mad at you.

It's very interesting to kind go through that, yeah. Yeah. My philosophy is that no food is a never food, unless we're allergic to it. So I work and I teach an 80-20 lifestyle.

Of course, at the beginning, the first 30 days of my program, you are restricting certain foods because we really want to give the body a chance, settle to calm down.

So we're removing a lot of the foods that might cause sensitivity. But as you know, it's so much more than that. It's diet culture that we grow up with.

Even now, when we think things have changed, every commercial, all the ads, everything we are told is that, we need to fix something. And I call it the wrong map.

I've actually written a little booklet called The Wrong Map, Ending the War with Your Body, because it just makes me nuts that women actually think they're broken.

They get to midlife, they get two perimenopause or postmenopaus. And it's this feeling that it is all downhill.

Hormonal Changes and Perimenopause

I'm broken. What have I done wrong? Why am I failing? And it's none of that at all. Yeah. So what is going on when we get to that midlife point where things start changing?

Well, our hormones are shifting, and it is very complex. And to keep it very simple, the sex hormones in particular are decreasing estrogen and progesterone testosterone at a slower level.

And the thing with the sex hormones is they affect almost every part of the body. So we start to see cortisol going up and we started to that stress hormone that has a lot to do with weight around the middle.

Changes in the way our body deals with blood sugar and this is certainly stuff that you are probably much more in tune with than I am. And all of this perfect storm often does cause the weight, the excess weight.

You know, hot flashes, night sweats, brain fog. We've now identified over 30 symptoms related to perimenopause and more all the time. And the fact that perimentopaus might start five, 10 or more years before before menopause or post-menopaus.

So it's complicated. And women are not being given the information that they need to really maneuver. You know, I talk a lot about when I was young, when was probably nine or 10, my mother brought home this little pink booklet.

My brother had a blue one when he was three years younger. And the pink booklet went through the whole menstruation process with, you know, charts. I'll never forget it because the emphasis of the book was, now you're becoming a woman.

Little did we know. Yeah. Was involved with all that. But there's no, I got no booklet. about perimenopause. You know, I knew my mother had hot flashes because she was taking the train to work, the subway.

But we haven't been teaching each other, we have been discussing it. And in many cases, even still with a lot of the subjects, were not discussing them with our health care providers, or were discussing with each Yeah, I think I've found that a lot of traditional providers are under trained on perimenopause, especially.

And especially there's no particular blood test where you can say, oh, you're in peri-menopausal, like, because it doesn't work that way. So I like though now we're talking about it more and people are educating themselves so

that they say oh I, think this is permenapause.

What can I do? Yes, agree with you. You're absolutely right. And this is something that, in fact, I'll be doing a TEDx at the end of May, and this something I'm speaking about, because we say, well, my doctor's not helping me, but your doctor is likely not trained.

And then as you pointed out, women will say well I just want to check my estrogen levels. But a lot of doctors don't want do that. The answer is well it's probably just menopause.

It's just menopause you'll get through it. Okay. So you're right. We are talking about it now more, but not enough. Women are still feeling a lot of shame related to intimacy issues with midlife, pelvic floor issues, with things that are just starting to come out of the shadows.

Absolutely. In terms of how we can eat, what do we need to do differently as we enter this phase? Well, first of all, I think this face or any face is probably a good idea.

Every woman is unique, so there is no single formula for everybody. But we know enough now about making sure that we're eating actual food, not science experiments.

So fruit, vegetables, lean proteins.

Eating Real Food and Hydration

One of the things that I talk about all the time is, and I'm gonna grab it right here, Water. Making sure that we're hydrating, that it's not just coffee all day.

So whole fruits and vegetables, your fiber, you grains, water, making sure you're hydrated. And as I say, read the label on everything. Because if you can't pronounce it, if it makes no sense to you, nothing looks like a real food then maybe make a better choice.

It's not about restriction. it's about saying, well, I can't have the foods that I like. You can learn to have foods you like and learn them occasionally so they don't affect the balance you're trying to achieve with your body.

But some of the food that have been convenience-oriented foods, Yeah, I think that's a big barrier for people when they have to rely on convenience foods because they're busy.

They don't have time to maybe prepare something healthy. So that's something we have to kind of help them navigate. Yeah, it's I often have and my husband is the cook in the house.

I don't cook. That's nice. But yeah, but we'll almost every day have leftover steamed vegetables, whether it is carrots or cauliflower or broccoli or whatever, something you can instantly grab when you feel like, oh, you know, your opening the refrigerator and you don t even know why.

I'm just going to be opening the refrigerator. That happens a lot in the afternoons. And if you're working at home, that goes back to the snack after school.

Because your subconscious remembers that habit. So have something you can grab, berries. Or you are right, because you don't even want to take the time to wash something.

If you do it right they are. So yeah, there are ways. And you're right, the convenience is an issue. The other thing is availability. Availability and affordability.

I mean, people ask, and I'm sure you get the same question, do I have to eat organic? My answer is there's certain things you should try to do organic if you can.

berries, things where you're eating the whole fruit or the hole vegetable. But you know, you are making choices about budget, too. So no, the banana and the orange and avocado, better it should be the broccoli and cauliflower and tomatoes and strawberries.

I think it's the education processes, people understanding, oh, I don't have to just overhaul everything that I'm doing. I need to make these little changes gradually over time.

Yeah, I think there's a perception too. I've shared on previous shows I used to work with a lower income population, but healthy eating was my thing. And they'd say, well, the healthy food is more expensive.

The packaged healthy, healthy foods quotes is what's more fruit, seasonal vegetables. And I know the price of groceries is going up right now. So I try to pay more attention when I'm in the store of, okay, I just bought some sweet potatoes.

Okay, that was a dollar. You know, and I look, we can afford this. It's just, in addition to the affordability, a lot of people find that maybe those fresh ingredients would go bad or things like that.

There definitely are barriers, for sure, but maybe not what we think. You're right about, well, if I buy this and we don't eat it right away, then I might have to throw some of it out.

And it's also availability. So when you start putting everything together, maybe do I have go a little bit further out of my way to get what I want? Those are challenges and those are struggles.

Women, you know, we want to do it all. We want do do what we think is right for ourselves, for our families, our kids, grandkids, whatever the case may be.

But you have to just start working towards it. And you meet yourself where you are and you do the best that you can. My program in my book is a full program and the first 30 days, But you can just as simply start changing one or two habits and progress that way.

So, yeah, the other issue is movement. I talk to a lot of midlife women who are exercising counterproductively. releasing weight. And that is my second favorite topic, which is movement.

But I am going to have everyone pause for a moment and don't go anywhere because we're going talk about healthy movement when we come back from our break.

You're listening to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. We'll be right back. Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr Amy Coopersmith, and my guest today is Debbie Harris.

We were talking before the break about healthy eating, eating real food, in some of your program, which we're gonna talk about some more. But right before that break, we were taking about Healthy Movement and what you're seeing go wrong.

Yeah, I worked with many women and I've had those that are committed to high-intensity exercising. And in midlife, this is not necessarily helping you.

Healthy Movement and Cortisol Balance

So to talk about it, in my 30 to Life Solution program, the first phase, The Balanched Warrior phase where I said you are restricting certain foods, sugars, for example, you also want to tone down the exercising walking, Pilates, bar class, yoga, any of this is great.

But what's happening is we really are working to balance the cortisol to really bring down the stress, to calm the central nervous system, if you will.

And this high intensity exercise is going to spike your cortisol. Now, inherently, that isn't bad. But we're trying to balance. So what often happens, and what I've seen happen over and over again, is women say, I don't get it, Deb.

I'm following your program. We're doing everything by the book. And I working out six days a week, And then when I explain the movement part and they change it the weight just starts to release.

So give your central nervous system a break for at least 30 days, if that is your goal, is to release weight. And just tone it down on the exercise. If you're lifting, do moderate lifting and don't add weight during that time.

Go out for a walk or take a Pilates class. Just tone down for little bit. Yeah, it seems so counterintuitive because we've always been taught eat less, move more.

And if my one hour aerobics class isn't doing it anymore, I'm going to add a second one. I see that so much. Then you're absolutely right about what that does to your cortisol.

It's very frustrating because you are like, what do I need to do? I am working out two hours a day. And that's exactly, you need to work out less. It just, I still, even though this is what I do for a living, somewhere in my mind, okay, work up more, no.

And the other part of the saying is also, it isn't eat less, because that is the thing. You know, while I ate this, this and this. I'm like, well, there's more food on the program than that.

Yeah. So again, I've had that conversation with women. We are so conditioned to eat less. If we eat, less than the way it's going to come off. Hey, listen, guys, i've done the lean cuisine diet, diet.

But I was in my 20s and 30s. First of all, not healthy to begin with. Second of, all it is not going work now. And what we really, really want to do is learn how to come to our, what I call our ideal healthy weight and stay there and still be able to enjoy life.

That is the key. Yeah. So maintenance is a really important part of the weight loss journey. Um, so what are some tips you give to people for maintaining?

Keep up the hydration. That's very important. And it's a tricky one. I found working with men and women, but we're focusing on women right now, the idea of getting in half your body weight in ounces every day up to about 100 ounces is a challenge.

It's still a challenging for me. Set an alarm if you need to on your phone, on you watch to remind you maybe once an hour, once a half an hours to have a glass of water.

And I'm not talking about the other cup of coffee or the cup tea. Water. It does not have to be pH balanced. Your body doesn't really know what to do with that so you don't need spend the money on that.

A good filtered water is fine. I keep refilling bottles. from the tap. That's number one. Number two, keep up some form of movement. I walk every day with a weighted vest.

Um, I do eight to nine minutes of Tai Chi in the, in evening, but that, that's, and that what I, do whatever works for you. But be consistent with the movement that that the main thing and then pay attention to your trigger foods.

What are those foods that you know that once you start eating them, there's no chance you're going to stop? For me, one of the examples is cashews. I mean, you put a bowl of cashew in front of me and they're gone.

In fact, the only time we ever buy nuts is if we're having company over. We get the big can, and the mixed nuts. And then my husband will nudge me Stop picking out the cat shoes.

Maintenance, Trigger Foods, and Muscle Support

And then when our guests leave, I give it to them, because I simply can't have it in the house. So understand what your trigger foods are. First of all, what is going to inspire you to eat them?

And then what are they, those foods that, you know, the Lay's potato chips, if you can't just eat one. So those are a few things in the maintenance side of it.

Yeah, I like that you use the weighted vest. So a lot of my clients don't like to lift weights. It's not, they just don t enjoy it. And so it's, you know, or it s hard to find time for that.

nd there's so much of an issue with muscle loss, with aging. o that's something really easy to do. Yeah. To help with weight bearing. O what are you seeing with mu ssel loss or more than that with your clients?

Well, again, once they're past the first phase, I'm encouraging them, you know, if they are working with a trainer, they were working bands, working weights, a weighted vest, then I am encouraging to work on that.

Now, women who have chosen to go the GLP-1 route, And I get asked about that all the time. I'm sure you do as well One of the things that I point out is if you're doing that you doing it with a doctor I Mean, okay.

What are you gonna do next? I mean, are gonna take that forever What about muscle loss? What? Are you going to do? next If that's what's going on Absolutely.

And, you know, we always talk about the importance of keeping your muscle on your weight loss journey, because if you're just losing muscle, then that's no good for your health, for many reasons.

But absolutely, We have to adjust our eating style so that that we're not going to just regain everything we work so hard to lose. Right? Right. Well, and that s why I talked about and I do write about, talk abou the 80 20 lifestyle, becaus 80% of the time, if your following whatever you consider healthy eating.

And then 20% of the time, you really are going to allow yourself the flexibility to have those things that you want. but you're gonna find that even if you weigh yourself and you are up a few pounds, once you back eating the 80%, your body will just simply, because it's usually excess water.

You went out, you had more salt, more sugar, or more alcohol, whatever it might be. Yeah, and that's a good point about the water weight, you know, to not have to spare if you notice that little, little bump, but just to get back on track and then they can take care of themselves.

Yeah. So you mentioned earlier about, starting where you are and maybe taking the smaller steps. What would a small step be other than the drinking water and moving?

Well, other then drinking, water, moving, as I said, Excuse me, as I said before, maybe adding a fruit. Maybe adding another serving of vegetable. Think about what your day looks like, what you week looks, like as far as food.

Is there someplace we can crowd out one thing, may be the French fries, and add a salad or add vegetable? I mean, that simple step Also, what you find is when you start doing that, you don't crave the other stuff as much.

People would say, oh, I never realized how sweet a strawberry was or how good fresh broccoli was because our taste buds get so used to all the sugar and salt and preservatives that we have.

And I think after those 30 days of not having that sort of thing, your taste buds do have time to adjust and really enjoy real food. Yes, absolutely. That's what you start to crave.

So at the beginning of our show, you said you've been recently certified as a menopause coach.

Menopause Coaching, Sleep, and Closing Remarks

What's involved with that? It's a certification process that I went through and I did it primarily for the education. I wanted to really dive into more of what was happening specifically in menopause.

And interestingly enough, this course is actually written for personal trainers, of which I am not. But it was fascinating because in being written from personal trainer, it looked at it from the perspective of working out of exercise, and one of the big areas was the pelvic floor challenges.

So it was wonderful. And as I said, I just finished it, so I'm excited about it. Congratulations. That's really exciting. Thanks. We need more people to talk about menopause and kind of help us through, because even in my field, when I am going through my own personal menoppause journey, it's terrible.

It is challenging. I mean, I say, you know, women, You guys, mean you're not broken. You're becoming. And the other side is awesome. and I still occasionally get a hot flash, or the brain fog, forget.

But, what did I come in here for? But it is frustrating. That feeling of rage, that feeling a mood swings, not sleeping and not sleep is really the biggie.

And because we're not getting enough sleep and proper sleep, That impacts everything. So that now is becoming one of the biggest issues is helping on sleep.

for women in midlife. Yep. And that affects everything from mental well-being to our weight as well. Yup. Imagine that. Absolutely. If you're waking up every couple of hours and you are doing one of these, staring at the ceiling, and I remember, it's maddening.

Then you ARE fatigued. Everything else just follows from that Well, we're just about out of time. But how can our listeners learn more about you and get your book?

They can get the book anywhere they buy books online. Dieting Sucks for Women Over 40, 30 to Life, The Ultimate Weight Loss and Formal Balancing Solution.

Follow me on Instagram. I'm all over social media. If you follow me Instagram, you'll see a way to get The Wrong Map. And you can always reach out to me, too.

I'm happy. My email is Debbie, D-E-B-V-I- E, at 32life.org. That is 3-O-T-0-L-A-F-e dot org. Love to hear from people and your comments, your suggestions.

And the only other thing I'd say is talk to each other. And as I said, reach out to me, I am doing a TEDx at the end of May. I'm deeply concerned that we need to get more training into our residency programs.

And we have wonderful medical schools, but this needs to be a real subject. Absolutely. Well, thank you for your work in spreading the word on all of it.

Thank you, Dr. Amy. And thanks to our listeners for tuning in to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. Do you have insights about today's show? Send me an email at radiantpodcast2025 at gmail.com.

Check out past episodes on YouTube, and we're also featured on Apple podcasts and all your favorite platforms. I'll be back next Saturday morning at 730 with more expert insights and practical strategies to help you live a radiant and healthy life.

Until then, here's to your best life!