Introduction to the Menopause Summit

Hello and welcome back to mastering the Menopause Transition Summit 3.0. Our third year, my third year with you. I'm your host, Dr. Sharon Stills. It's truly an honor and a privilege to be here with you all, to be sharing these conversations that really have the power to change your life in such marvelous ways, and to really flip the conversation, to really embrace this paradigm in a puzzle menopausal hormonal journey, for it to be, you know, hormonal harmony rather than hormonal havoc, which so many of us are taught to think that's what's going to happen when we start going through this time.

So I'm really excited to have my guest today, Jessica Barac. she is a registered nutritionist. She's the personal trainer. She is the woman behind what the menopause, which is a platform, an Instagram that has, like close to a million followers.

so we're going to talk about community because I think community, especially for women, is so crucial at this time. We're going to talk about all the things that I know all of you are interested in.

You know, how do we get your metabolism to work? How do we lose weight? How do we decrease inflammation? And so Jessica is in the house to share all that lovely information with us.

So welcome to the summit. I'm really excited to meet you and have this conversation and share with all the listeners. Thank you. I'm so excited to be here too.

And so to meet all of your beautiful listeners and, just to share and share my knowledge and just, help as many people as possible. So I always like to ask, you know, how did you what the menopause.

Like what? How did why did you get into perimenopause? I know you're a nutritionist.

Jessica's Perimenopause Story and Community Building

You're a personal trainer. There's lots of things you could do with those credentials. Why women's health? Why perimenopause? Why menopause? Yeah. So I mean, like, so many women, perimenopause took me by complete surprise.

I actually thought I was having a nervous breakdown. It was, for me, crippling anxiety and panic attacks and, and after being so motivated and confident my whole life, it really just kind of flipped my world upside down without me even realizing what it was.

and so after finding out that it was perimenopause and, you know, kind of putting those pieces together, I decided to navigate that online, basically, through humor, through education.

And that's really how what the menopause, the, the community was born. It wasn't I didn't go out to build a community, but I it's just one of those things that, you know, just happened.

so as a registered nutritionist, I work with women. and I just started focusing on perimenopause and menopause and more specifically in that way. I love that. Yeah.

And I think the best things in life happen when you don't push, right? When you just start doing it from the heart or from service, it's like the universe just goes, yeah, we're going to we're going to support you on this. We're going to make this happen.

And you bring up such a good point, like your own personal story about feeling like you're having a nervous breakdown. I have so many patients who have the same experience.

And to really, like, understand this is your hormones. This doesn't mean you are deficient in a pharmaceutical drug is really important. I think just hearing that can really relax.

So many people, so many women listening to go, oh wow, you know, I'm not going crazy because that is such a common symptom. That's not you know, we talk about hot flashes, but yeah, feeling like you're losing it is not something that's talked about.

So I'm so glad you brought like that knowledge out there. Like just to be like it's it's not you. It's your hormones kind of thing. Absolutely. And to be honest, it was such a relief to me because my thought was, oh, this is my future.

I'm going to be feeling, you know, this apathetic and, you know, unmotivated and just, that disconnection that I had from people and my friends and my work and my husband, I was afraid that that was going to be forever.

And I guess what I see is that the importance of and speaking to women on a, on a day to day basis is that women feel so alone and isolated and they're feeling ignored and unseen and unimportant.

And that's why it's so important for us to stick together and create space, as you're doing here with this beautiful summit, for people to talk about what they're going through, how they're feeling, to share their experiences.

And, one thing I hear every day is, oh my goodness, I'm so glad I found your page, because I thought I was going crazy. And just reading the comments has made me feel so much better.

So from a mental health perspective, women in this age group are at the highest rate of suicide, as I'm sure you know, and it's really no joke. But we need to connect with each other to be there for each other, even if it's just online.

so what I always say is, you know, check in with your friends, check in with your colleagues, open the conversation. And around perimenopause, around menopause, just around aging in general.

And, and honestly, you don't know whose life you can be impacting by doing that.

Hormones, Isolation, and the Power of Connection

gosh, that is so, so true. And yes, just knowing it's not like we, you know, we it's not like we get happy because you're suffering too, but just knowing that like someone else is going through what you're going through just really takes it down a notch, right?

You're like, oh, it's not just me. This is like that thing. And then connecting and sharing it just makes you it settles the soul a little. And then connecting.

And I love what you do because you're doing it through education. You're doing it through humor. I mean, there's so many funny things and and it's like we have to be able to to laugh and all these things raise oxytocin. Yes.

And oxytocin. Maybe you can talk a little bit about oxytocin for anyone who is not sure what oxytocin is. Yeah. Well it's that, you know, it's that love chemical, isn't it?

That's that feel good. chemical in our bodies that that we get when we you know, we have a newborn baby and, and so how can we do that through play and through laughter and, and, you know, through through finding light and life and things, and, you know, it is so important at this time to try and think about ways we can raise oxytocin and even hugging somebody.

And, what do they say that kissing your kissing your partner for? I think it's like 20s or something or a 16 second hug actually raises oxytocin in your body.

Yeah. And I, you know I it's something I measure on all my patients and it's typically really low, especially once we

get into our 50s, 60s, 70s beyond.

It's something that we, we need to really consciously work on. And sometimes just balancing the hormones, the estrogen and so forth will raise it. But certainly I'm always like, go do what you love, right?

Hug your hug your loved one, hug yourself, play with your animals, dance naked, get a massage like whatever is going to bring you joy. Like, do more of that doctor's orders.

Like we have to bring the joy and laughter is such a great way to do that. And if we can't laugh at ourselves, then, you know, we're we're missing out.

So it is humor really is medicine. So let's talk about weight gain, because I know as an nutritionist and a personal trainer, like you've got both aspects and, you know, women in perimenopause, menopause, it's probably, you know, when patients come to my office and chief complaints weight gain is always in the top five.

Right. And you know it I'm doing the same things I've always did. Weight was never an issue. And now I walk by the cake counter and I gain an extra 5 pounds just by walking by.

So speak to that please. As to why that's happening and what advice you have for the women. Yeah, absolutely. So I mean, I see perimenopause as really the ultimate kind of metabolic turning point.

And the decline in estrogen and progesterone really trigger this melting pot of changes in the body because of the role that estrogen and progesterone play in the body, as you know.

Oxytocin, Humor, and Emotional Support

Well, and what I like to think about estrogen, like, is it's like the ultimate mother molecule where it's nurturing and protecting pretty much every aspect of our body and our systems and nervous system, metabolic health, blood sugar balance, controlling cholesterol and blood pressure, protecting our heart and bones and muscles.

playing a role in protecting our gut, lubricating our skin and our hair and our eyes, all of this stuff. and what happens is that as we lose estrogen, we, we lose also skeletal muscle, which is really our metabolic organ and really the key to aging.

Well, so you can think about what I like to think about. Muscle is like kind of a glucose sink where it's burning glucose and clearing it from the body.

So clearing those carbohydrates from the body without the need for insulin, which is, you know, the, the hormone required to balance blood sugar levels in the body.

So if you are a woman in midlife, you feel like you put on weight just by looking at carbs. Or if you've changed nothing about your diet, and you know, you've, you've put on weight probably usually around the belly.

then part of it is that as our muscle declines and as our estrogen isn't supporting glucose metabolism in the same way, we do become more insulin resistant and the glucose and get, get started as fat in the body.

And because your body hasn't been able to utilize the energy in the same way that it once did. So metabolism really is the body's ability to access and use energy.

So when women feel really fatigued and tired and exhausted in perimenopause and menopause, not only is the body having to learn how to function without estrogen, but it's.

Which is exhausting, obviously. But on top of that, metabolically we're not able to access fat for fuel as efficiently as we did before. And so this is making us exhausted, craving for carbs, craving for more sugar.

And all of this contributes to weight gain. we see a big change in our appetite, hormones and estrogen actually also plays a role in dampening our appetite.

At the same time, leptin, our satiety hormone, decreases so we don't feel as full well. Ghrelin, our hunger hormone, it increases so we feel more hungry all the time.

We get more cravings and hunger, and we're more stressed in perimenopause and menopause. And across this transition, which can lead to comfort eating and stress eating and all of this kind of melting pot just accumulates as weight gain.

And at the same time, one of the most important things is sleep. And, you know, estrogen and progesterone play a role in our circadian rhythm. And helping us sleep.

And when this is disrupted, which further impacts our energy, our insulin resistance increases inflammation and lack of sleep just makes everything a thousand times worse.

And we eat model following day and mood and anxiety and, negatively impacted, you know, has all of these kind of knock on effects. At the same time, women are also becoming less active.

And this can be, you know, because our bodies eggs, you know, women's bodies are aching, the joints are hurting, they're feeling tired, they're feeling apathetic.

And so this can result in being less active and more sedentary. so this all really works together to equal the weight gain that we see in perimenopause and menopause.

Why Menopause Causes Weight Gain

Well, you describe that. Very lovely. But it's also very like, oh, it's like, a tornado of all these things. So you set the stage beautifully for women to understand what can they do.

Right. Because that's like, I'd like to opt out of that. So what are the things you recommend? And, to start, you know, turning that around and to not have the men, old belly and things of.

Yes, you know. Yeah, absolutely. It does. It all sounds like doom and gloom, doesn't it? but what I'd love to get across is to to these beautiful women attending the summit.

Is that there is so much that you can do to support yourself. And really, the key to reversing menopause weight gain is restoring our metabolic function, reclaiming our amino metabolism.

and so how do you do this? So I've kind of broken it down into three steps. So the way that I look at it is three steps. So the first step is nourishing the body.

So we're looking to balance our blood sugar. And we're looking to de flame. So eating to reduce the inflammation in our body and we can do this by really concentrating on what we're adding to our diet.

And I like to think of the powerful three, which is protein, colorful plants and healthy fats. and protein is so important in midlife, it helps us to build muscle.

It helps us to stay full. If we have more muscle, we burn more calories at rest. it increases our satiety, prevents hunger and cravings. So protein is really important.

We can get this from animal sources such as chicken, beef, fish, lamb, eggs, dairy. We can get it from plant sources, legumes, tofu, etc.. and then to focus on colorful plants which are very fiber rich and phytonutrient rich, and, you know, these beautiful polyphenols and antioxidants.

And this all works together to reduce inflammation in the body, which it inflammation is making our symptoms worse and it's making our weight gain worse.

So anything we can do to to tame that inflammation in the body is really, really helpful. And at the same time it's supporting our gut microbiome. So that's also crucial at this time.

we need anti-inflammatory fats at every meal. And that really supports with, creating hormones. So encouraging the hormones that we do have, especially in perimenopause that, you know, supporting that hormone.

creation and production. and also it helps to keep us full. We do need to eat also some starchy carbs on a daily basis. So I am not a personal believer in a low carb, diet.

At this point in time. I think you have to be careful and moderate in your carbohydrate consumption, but we want to, we do want to eat some. And that's because the research around, preventing Alzheimer's disease and, and, and cognitive function, you know, that shows that whole grains and, you know, good starchy carbs a very important for that.

So that's what I focus on with nourishing the body and nutrition at the same time. We need to look at movement. And so as I said, you know, women do tend to move less.

And we want to really start to try and live life in motion and move more daily. And walking is a great fat burn. I say, even if you just go for a walk every day, especially after a meal, to help to flush out the breakers from the body, it can be really helpful.

You also don't have to walk all in one go. There's good research around doing smaller walks throughout the day, which is also highly beneficial for burning fats.

on top of just moving more every day, we really want to focus on building muscle. And for me, strength training is a non-negotiable in midlife. And this is because we need to build that muscle, but also build the bone.

And because by losing muscle and we're losing bone each year from our 30s, you know, from 40, we lose it by 1%. We lose muscle 1% each year. And we're also losing strength and power.

So it's key that we're compensating for this by lifting weights. And we want to work on lifting heavier weight. So getting stronger not just staying the same.

And we do this by using progressive overload strength training. On top of that my my secret sauce to fat loss. And what really helps my clients is sprint interval training.

And this is very short sharp intervals. So this isn't kind of long. Half an hour 40 minutes, one hour hit sessions. This is very it's like eight minutes long, with rests all throughout.

And this has been shown to increase brain derived neutrophils factor helping with brain fog. it blasts visceral fat and it also reduces inflammation. So that is that in itself is a really really powerful tool for losing weight and impairing menopause and menopause.

at the same time, we need to focus on getting good sleep.

Three Steps to Reverse Menopause Weight Gain

As I mentioned earlier, sleep is is really key and really crucial to all parts of health. So if we can get 7 to 9 hours, which can feel impossible for, for many women in perimenopause and menopause, but it is possible, so if you can get some good sleep and just work on combating stress, that's really the key to, you know, improving metabolic health, improving mood, improving satiety, keeping full insulin sensitivity, longevity.

They that's those are my three steps. So nutrition and nourishing the body movement and restoring and restoring is sleep and stress. I love that I want to just go back and ask a few questions.

And I love that you like, give a shout out for complex carbs, because a lot of women just, you know, we've been taught like they're so evil, stay away.

But then these women are destroying their thyroid and their adrenal. You know, it's compounding. So yes, I love what you said. It's like, you know, not a carb fest, but, you know, a little bit and good sources and so forth.

So important. So the training you talked about, I was trying to write down, you said progressive overload. And you can you just talk a little bit like what is that look like.

Yeah, absolutely. So progressive overload strength training is basically training to with the intention of getting stronger as we go. And that might sound super basic, but it's not actually because a lot of people will pick up, say, a 10 pounds pair of dumbbells, and the next day they'll still be using the same set of dumbbells.

What progressive overload strength training does it? It intentionally works to build up your strength over time, so you're looking at increasing the load as time goes on and getting stronger, building those muscles.

which you would imagine would be, you know, a given, but it's actually not. So we want to intentionally go about doing that. And so are you doing more reps or is it's still the same amount of reps and just heavier weights?

Yeah. So there's a number of different ways you can do it. I, I personally prefer to keep the reps down. So around eight reps, 8 to 10. and the way that you can tell if your weights are heavy enough is that by the final two reps.

So if you're doing eight when you get to six it should be like, oh, can I do this? So you should be really challenging yourself so that like you shouldn't just be doing like one, two, three, four, five, seven, nine, ten.

You should it should be a struggle for the last two. And you keep doing that until you know it gets easy and then you move up. So you're just. Yeah. So that's the that's kind of the that's an easy way to do it.

And do you recommend doing this twice a week. Three times a week. Yeah. So I so I recommend three times a week of resistance training. And you don't have to go and spend an hour at a gym.

You really don't. You can do a workout in 30 minutes and it can be at home. And it doesn't have to feel like this huge life undertaking. You know, you can do a very efficient, good workout in 30 minutes or less.

So, you know, don't be scared off by having to join a gym or any of those things. Awesome. And then the sprinting. What did you say that was called? Yeah.

So sprint interval training is it's amazing. So you can either do it say 30s on 20s rest. I generally do it. 22nd is on ten seconds rest and you do it for eight sets.

Okay. So it's like 20s on 10s rest. 20s on 10s rest for for eight. then you have a 2 to 3 minute rest, and then you do it again and you do that three times.

And this could look like sprinting as in actual sprinting, like running as fast as you can. It could look like punching a punching bag as fast as you can.

It could look like kettlebell swings. It could look like, rowing on a rower. It could be on a bike, any, anywhere where you can just go all out and really sprint as hard as you can.

An all out effort for 20s counts. I love that, and then you get to rest. Yeah, exactly.

Strength Training and Sprint Intervals

And the thing is, though, that, it sounds like, an all out effort, but I do it a lot, and it it will shift your mood, your anxiety, you know, it will shift things like this and also, okay, sorry.

Do you do it every day? I don't do it. No, you don't need to do it every day. I'll probably do it three times a week. You can do it. I think the science is twice a week is actually enough to get to to get visceral fat, reduction benefits.

So, the way that I program it for my, my actual program is we do strength training three times a week. And then on the in between days, it's CIT training.

So it's like three 30 minute workouts of weights. And then like a two, then a third day is an eight minute workout. It's just eight minutes and then, you know, set it off and then the rest.

And then every day walking though. Yes, every day walking. Yeah. Okay. What do you think about the ten. Like are you walking to get to ten K steps or is that not necessary?

I'm curious. Do what you think. Yeah. And so there's such there is great research around getting to ten steps and 10,000 steps. and you know, the benefits have, brain health and weight loss and all of those things.

But I don't want that to be a reason to not walk my in the way that I look at it is if you only have ten minutes, just go and use the ten minutes. Don't worry about you know how much it is.

Go and do what you can because it all adds up, even if you only do ten minutes. But you do that every day of the week of the month. You know, that's a lot more minutes than just not doing anything.

So move when you can, don't and and try to make it fun. But don't put pressure on it. You know, just just do it and make it because it makes you feel good.

but my biggest message really is that this time of a woman's life, it's it's such an invitation for. A real. Reawakening of what we want for ourselves and our hopes and our passions and our dreams and desires.

And so many women come to me wanting to lose weight, but I find that as we work together, a real shift happens where they go from just wanting to lose weight to wanting to build a body to grow old in, you know, wanting to age well and to be going on holidays when they're 70 and hiking mountains and, you know, lifting their being able to lift up their luggage into their overhead compartments and, and, you know, having, having a shift to having goals for themselves going forward.

Because so many times we're told you know, you're past your prime, etc., but we're not. This is such a beautiful opportunity to really prioritize ourselves because women in midlife, they've spent the whole time putting other people before themselves.

And now it's a really good opportunity to just to take a look inwards and think about, okay, what do I want my life to look like for the next 30 years?

How do I want to be, and what do I need to do to get there? So, you know, eating more protein, feeling vibrant by eating more fruits and vegetables. doing a strength training workout so that you can take a trip when you're 70 with your friends and go hiking up a mountain, you know, maybe go skiing with your grandkids if you're really adventurous.

then it's just I think this really important message to get across is, is that we can age really well and it starts now. So it starts in midlife where we can we can pave the way to a to a beautiful, fulfilling old age.

And if we put the if we put the steps in now. Absolutely. I, I always say menopause with the parentheses around the pores because for just that reason, it's this time to pause and, you know, if I was like, oh, I'm like listening to myself what you were saying, like, exactly.

It's, you know, this time to really pause and recalibrate and, you know, see where what we've done and where we want to go.

Walking, Longevity, and Reframing Midlife

And yes, we, we're a force to be reckoned with. And I plan on hiking and, you know, climbing mountains is actually my thing. And I plan to be doing it well into my 80s and 90s and the mindset.

And I love what you said about diet because you didn't, you know, you said nourished. And when you think about it, right, when we think about our food is this is this is our way of that that gets a love note to ourselves what we're eating and taking the time and caring about it and all these shifts.

And yeah, at this point, you know, typically if you had kids, your kids are older and you can put, you know, me first, right? Like it's not selfish to be self-centered at this time and really thinking about ourselves.

And so all of that is so, so beautiful. I just, so good. Any other last words? I mean, that was such a beautiful bow on all this great stuff you were talking about, but any other last words of wisdom you want to share?

No, no, that's I mean, that's really my that's my desire is to just women know that they are powerful beyond measure. You know, we're we're so powerful and, and what I love about becoming physically strong is that often we find that as I become physically strong, I become more resilient as well, you know, in my life.

And so the benefits of nourishing ourselves, building our muscles, becoming fitter, becoming stronger, it actually overflows into every area of our lives.

So there's just so many benefits. So that's the our message to go and get started. Do what you can feel good, be vibrant, be powerful and just go and live an amazing life.

I love that. Well, it's it's no question to me now why you have such a huge community because you're beautiful spirit. You have such beautiful things to say.

So where do the ladies go find you to hang out with you? Where can they learn more and be with you? They. Yeah. So you can find me @whatthemenopause on Instagram.

That's my main platform. yeah. Love it. Well, thank you so much for, I mean, I, I'm not a statistics girl, but I know by 2030 it's like there's going to be the number is like so large of how many women are going to be in menopause.

And yeah, like a billion or something like yeah, it's only. By like a billion women. Like we are going to be this huge section of the population. And, and like I always say, it's our time.

Like when I thought of my elders growing up, when they were in their 50s and 60s, they were old, right? They they were they didn't have this and they didn't have summits, they didn't have Instagram, they didn't have knowledge of protein and exercise and diet and all these things.

And so we have this really unique opportunity to change the definition of aging for our, our younger generations, to change what they view about aging.

So that of course, it's like, oh yeah, of course, when I'm 80, I'm going hiking with my girlfriends because that's that's what you do when you're 80. But yeah, let's give them something to aspire to.

Yeah. So we get to be a part of that, which is just such a sacred place to be. So thank you so much for coming and sharing your views and for all you do in the world.

And this was just a pure joy. So thank you everyone for being here. And if you didn't take notes, listen again. Take notes. Jessica really broke it down.

These three sections, which we cannot overlook. We have to like lay the foundation, lay the house of which we're going to live in, and go check her out on what the menopause on Instagram will see you there.

Beautiful. Thank you.