Welcome to Hotness, the podcast that brings you practical tools to balance your hormones and rekindle connection, confidence, and desire in midlife and beyond.

I'm your host, Dr. Liz Lister. Hotiness is a safe space for honest conversations about menopause, sex, identity, love, loss, reinvention, and desire, because you can embrace your hotness at every age.

Hi and welcome to Hotness, the podcast that brings your hormones confidence and desire back online. I'm your host, Dr. Liz Lister, and this is another episode of Spicy Science.

And Hot Ones, today we need to talk about something that your doctor probably has never brought up in an appointment. Orgasms, yes, not as a fun bonus, no as relationship perk, as actual medicine, documented, physiologically necessary, beneficial to you medicine.

Because here's what I know as woman's midlife health expert and as women in mid-life, pleasure, it's not optional, is not selfish. It's not a luxury, it is a health metric.

It is vital sign. And most women walk around completely unaware of that. So today we are going all the way, we're going there. Science first and then practical tips because that's how we do things around here.

So let's start with what I'm going to call today the arousal gap. This hopefully will make you exhale with relief. Desire and arouse are two completely different systems.

They don't always happen at the same time or for the the reasons. In fact, research shows that women's arousal compared to men is way more context dependent.

Your female brain has to feel safe, has feel present and undistracted before your body will follow. That's why I always ask the question of how is sex on vacation versus at home where you are surrounded by distractions.

So if you've ever thought I want to want this, but my body is just not cooperating, you're not broken, your not off, Your nervous system is actually doing what it is designed to do and it needs the right conditions.

This is why stress is one of the biggest libido killers that exists. Cortisol, your stress hormone, directly competes with the sex hormones. So when cortisol is running the show, estrogen, testosterone, also progesterone, they do not get a seat at the table.

Your body's in survival mode, and survival mood is not sexy. And in midlife, hormones are already shifting. The gap between desire and arousal can widen.

So that's why many women think there's something wrong with them. Nothing is wrong you. Your system just needs the right support. Let's talk about what's actually happening in your body.

We'll talk physiology, as always, in plain English, I promise. So when you become aroused, blood flow increases to the genital area of our bodies. Nerve endings activate, lubrication responds and increases.

The clitoris, which by the way is way larger than most people realize, most of it internal, becomes engorged and your heart rate goes up. Your whole nervous system shifts into a completely different gear.

And when you orgasm, your brain lights up multiple regions of the brain all at once. Dopamine floods in, the reward circuitry and the pleasure chemicals, oxytocin surges.

And we're going to talk a lot more about that wonderful hormone in just a minute. Endorphins release, and guess what else? Cortisol drops. Your body just did a full biochemical reset from the inside.

Orgasms are literally medicine. This is actual documented science that I'm now going to share with you, and I really want you to hear this. Orgasms reduce pain.

The endorphin release during orgasm, it's been shown to raise your pain threshold significantly. That means you have a higher tolerance. You do not experience as much pain, women have reported relief from menstrual cramps, headaches, even sometimes chronic pain through consistent regular orgasms.

Orgasms improve sleep. That post-orgasm oxytocin and prolactin release, it's very sedating and calming to the brain in a good way. Better than most sleep supplements that I've tried, orgasms also support immune function.

This is from scientific data. Regular sexual activity has been linked to higher levels of immunoglobulin A, which is one of the immune responses through our secretions from our bodies, and it's one our body's first lines of defense.

Orgasms reduce cortisol, we just talked about that. We talked how cortisol tanks your hormones, orgasms do the opposite. They bring the cortisol down and they bring your whole hormone endocrine system a chance to rebalance.

Orgazms support cardiovascular health. That increased heart rate, the improved circulation, lower blood pressure. Your cardiologist might not prescribe this, but maybe they should.

Orgasms also support pelvic floor health. The muscular contractions during orgasm are basically a workout for your pelvic floors, which makes a big difference.

And it's very important in midlife for bladder control, pelvic stability, and yes, continued sexual function. So when I say orgasms or medicine, I mean it clinically.

This is not a pep talk, this is your human physiology benefiting you. Okay, oxytocin is a hormone that I've talked about many times before, but I'm going to say quite a bit more now because this hormone does not get nearly enough credit.

We refer to oxytocin as the bonding hormone, the love hormone. But that really undersells it. It's a lot more than that. Oxytosin is released through touch, through eye contact, to deep conversation, though orgasm, even through petting your dog or your kitty, which explains a lots about why we love our fur babies so much.

And here's why it matters so in midlife in particular. estrogen drops, testosterone drops. The hormonal landscape really shifts and changes. Your body and your brain's ability to feel connected, bonded, and emotionally regulated can drop along with those hormone levels.

Oxytocin is like a bridge back. Oxytoxin lowers anxiety, it reduces cortisol, It builds trust in relationships and also with yourself. It supports emotional resilience.

It literally makes you feel less alone. And here's something else about oxytocin that I find very fascinating. We're not talking only about partnered sex.

Self-pleasure counts, self-cultivation, as Dr. Kelly Kaspersen refers to it. Touch counts. A long hug counts connection in any form can trigger this amazing system.

which means access to oxytocin does not depend on having a partner. It depends on you allowing yourself connection and pleasure in whatever form that takes for you.

In midlife, when so many women are navigating loss, transitions, kids leaving, relationships changing, I don't think oxytocin is a bonus. I think it's a necessity.

So what gets in the way? If orgasms are medicine and oxytocin is essential, why are we all having lots of orgasm and thriving? Because a lot gets the in way.

Low estrogen, for example, that we've referred to. This decreases blood flow to the genital area, it can lead to vaginal dryness, It can to decreased sensitivity, can leads to bladder problems.

Things that used to feel good just do not feel the same. That's not just aging, that J-word just that we want to get rid of. That is a hormone deficiency and it can be addressed for the vast majority of women.

Regardless of what else you do hormonally, you can treat these tissues locally where there's an estrogen deficiency, and go a huge, huge long way to restoring function, sensation and pleasure.

Low testosterone can be associated with low desire, so can low estrogen. It can we associated low motivation, low sex drive. I've talked about this many times, it's not only about sex.

Libido is about life energy and motivation to do just about anything, get off the couch and go hang out with friends, which will lead to oxytocin release.

Cortisol, we talked about, it shuts the whole system down. So stress, poor sleep, being chronically stressed or overwhelmed, all of this directly competes with your physiologic sexual function.

How about body image? This is huge and under addressed, for sure, at least in the medical world. It's very hard to be present for pleasure in your body when you are at war with how you think you look.

And midlife brings its own version of that war. I see it constantly in my patients and sometimes I still fight that battle myself. And then there's the simple fact that nobody taught us any of this.

We were not educated about our own arousal systems, our pleasure, or our physiology. Were taught to make sure everyone else was taken care of first, right?

Don't put the oxygen mask on first. That's not what the pilot ever says. Self-care is not selfish. And that applies here especially. So what actually helps?

Hormone replenishment, I'm always gonna say that straight up. If your estrogen, testosterone levels, those are low, progesterone that can calm the brain and also help with sleep.

if those were low no amount of mindset work can fully compensate for that. As I like to say, the older the building the more maintenance it needs. It needs those materials and getting your hormones optimized is the foundation.

Reduce cortisol, get good sleep, set boundaries, keep your body moving, don't run on empty. Your nervous system needs to feel safe before your can open up to pleasure.

Presence over performance. I wrote that line in my dating profile and it applies in and out of the bedroom. Getting out your head and into your body is a skill that you can practice and you cultivate and get good at.

Touch as a daily practice. Not just sexual touch, any kind of touch. Massage, self-massage. Dance. physical connection, any of those can keep that oxytocin system activated.

And also, permission to consider your own pleasure a health priority. Because guess what? It is. So here's the bottom line. Your body was designed for pleasure.

That design does not expire at age 50, age 60. It doesn't ever expire. Question for you, do you have an age at which you plan to stop enjoying ice cream?

I sure don't. And shout out to Ashton Applewhite for this analogy in her book, This Chair Rocks, a Manifesto Against Aging. I will put a link to it because that book rocks.

So what changes in midlife is the support that your body needs to keep the system running well. The hormones,

the nervous system, The permission that you give yourself.

Because when you feel good in your Body, everything's better. Your mood, your relationships, Your energy, you resilience. That is not a coincidence. that is biology.

Feel your best so that You can do your Best. And yes, orgasms count. Take care, Hot One, and see you again soon. Thanks for listening to Hotness. Help more women find these practical tools by liking, sharing and following the show, as well as leaving a review.

As a gift for listing, go to drlizmd.com forward slash hotness for your free midlife guide filled with powerful support for you mind, body and soul, because you can embrace your hotnes at every age.