Practical Strategies For Managing Stress And Hormones Transcript

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Introduction to the Urban Monk

Hello, ladies. Welcome back to Mastering the Menopause transition 3.0 or a third go around. I'm still your host. Dr. Sharon Stills. And as always, I am excited and happy to be here with you to let you eavesdrop in on another important conversation.

So as you all know, I am very hormone positive. I want you all in bioidentical hormones. But that's not what we're here to talk about today, because putting the right hormones into your body, yes, is super important.

But how is that body being in the world? What is your life like? How are you experiencing life? And that's what's really most meaningful to me. I want you to have balanced hormones, but I want you then to go out there and be present.

And just when you get to the end of your life, look back and be like, yeah, that was a good one, I rocked it, I was present, I had the experiences I wanted to have and so on and so forth and so I brought today a very special guest, Dr. Pedram Shojai who is a multiple New York Times bestseller.

He is the urban monk. And I want to talk about how we can all be urban monks, because it's really, really important that we know how to regulate our nervous systems, that we understand how to respond to stress, and not just knee jerk reaction, because newsflash, if you're alive, you're going to have stress.

So welcome, Dr. Pedram I am super excited to have you here. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us. Happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Thank you. So I don't know, I made up the word monkeys. Yeah. I think because the word nun has all sorts of bad connotations. There you go. So I mean, I'm just curious, like, because I know that saying, right.

Like, anyone can go to the mountaintop and meditate and it's easy, but then come home to your family and your work and it gets a lot more difficult. So tell me, like, how did you become the urban monk?

Yeah, I did both those things. Right. And, the reconciliation of the two is really where the rubber hits the road is.

Why Nervous System Safety Matters

Look, it's, you know, you're up in the Himalayas praying for world peace and breathing to your navel and feeling the wind on your face. to me, it was almost decadent.

It was a luxury, right? sit in Los Angeles traffic and be late for a meeting while, you know payroll is due. See if that stuff works there. Right. And so I when I transitioned from ascetic monk to a householder, I realized that a lot of stuff I'd learned up there was for ascetic lineages like, hey, you got time to do this all day.

You know, you could worry about the nuances of, you know, how your energy twirls here or there, when the bullets are flying, you need a different operating system.

And so it really informed the way I was working with my patients. And then eventually, you know, just the kind of getting after the mistranslation of all this stuff, trying to help regular people not feel guilty about missing a 90 minute yoga class, but feel good about getting five minutes to themselves in between calls.

Amen to that. So. So I guess why don't you talk about it? Because the women who are here right. They have a lot going on. Maybe they have aging parents, maybe they still have children at home, or maybe they have children in college.

Just because the children leave the nest doesn't mean you stop being a parent. They're working. They have spouses. They have community. So how do you, best think they could start employing some urban monk techniques to really slow down, regulate that nervous system, and, and have a better quality of life?

Yeah, I think a lot of it has to start kind of high level philosophically, with what I've kind of come to in the last maybe five years, of my career, kind of going monk and then super functional medicine and then realizing the monk stuff's probably more important and, you know, like just going back and forth on this pendulum and finding the balance there and realizing that we don't feel safe.

And I'm going to say this on multiple levels. You don't feel safe because of the news. You don't feel safe because time is so compressed and there's not enough time.

And resources are always limited. but you also don't feel safe because of the endocrine disrupting hormone, like disrupting crap in your face cream. You also don't feel safe when your gut lining is torn and the endotoxin mia is setting it off, setting off an alarm in your body that you perceive as something that's inflammation, but you perceive an attack. It is an attack.

And so all of these internal cues from a primitive nervous systems, you know, ringing alarm bells, ringing up our arousal, then keep us from sleeping, keep us from recovering, keep us from being able to lengthen our fuzes all day, or at least take breaks to lengthen our fuze.

So then, you know, when Janet says something at the water cooler, we don't go, you know, mental honor, right? Like we have no fuze lengthening practices in a world where the walls are always caving in.

And yeah, to your point, progesterone cream doesn't fix that. It fixes a lot of things, but it has to be part of an operating system saying I have to work on my mental resilience.

I have to work on my spiritual fuze length so that I have space for when the world comes at me hot. And that's just not part of our culture. But then you see everyone going to therapists and you see everyone going on antidepressants and all the downstream effects that are just pummeling us because we are not holding up the boundary on the front.

And so it becomes a lifestyle hygiene conversation with boundaries, with better decisions and a lot of it. And we could get down this rabbit hole if you'd like, is the attention economy is a disaster.

Oh, yes. Let's go down that rabbit hole. Oh, that. So I have a couple. I have a couple books. and literally it's this. I just got off this call, so we're reading this stolen focus.

Attention Economy and Digital Overload

But Johann Hari with my urban monks group right now, and then with a group of my conscious parenting people, we're reading The Anxious Generation, which is a book that just came out that's talking about why all these kids are killing themselves.

It turns out the timing is exactly lined up with the advent of social media and telephones and all this crap. So if you're sitting here like, like me in this sandwich generation where I got kids I'm taking care of and parents I'm taking care of, right?

And I'm sitting here trying to find how to balance enough time to water those plants and have this guy not get fat and have this guy not fall apart. you really have to understand that the currency of that is your attention.

So if Instagram has it, if TikTok has it, if you're TV binge watching habits have it, you're not going to have enough attention to water the important plants in your life.

You say the right time for this. Of course you don't. Because the Toyota commercial took your time, right? The

highest bidder took your time. That's the attention economy.

It's a disaster. And so bringing bringing us out of our devices and bringing us into our bodies becomes part and parcel of, to me, life support, like you have to come back to yourself or you don't stand a chance in this economy.

I'm just I built on these exchange servers trying to understand and predict what you're going to click on next. You understand chance. Look away, look away.

So do you recommend I mean, I always say like when you wake up, please plug into yourself before you plug into social media or your phone or whatever.

But what do you recommend? Because it is. I mean, I even find myself sometimes going, whoa, wait a second, this is not okay because it's so easy. You can just get down and talk about rabbit holes, right?

You know, on Facebook or Instagram or emails or whatever it is. So what do you recommend? What are there any tips you have for like this is good hygiene.

Like throw your phone against the wall and walk away. Yeah, I mean I, I think that unless you're some sort of E. R. physician and you gotta, you know, be on call, there's absolutely nothing that's on fire enough until you need to maybe check the weather, right, and say, how do I dress today?

Right. And I live in a town where it snows. So, you know, we do check the weather, but I will get up. My routine is I will set my alarm half an hour before anyone else in the house.

Dogs love it. I get up, feed them, you know, take them out. And then I do my qigong. I do the coordination of eyes, mind, body and breath. I do my practice and I like to say I like to make sure I establish my relationship with the still water.

Because when those kids wake up, it's whitewater, right? And and it's and it's whitewater all day and, you know, the tumultuous lives that we, you know, get them to soccer, get him over here, the tutor and, you know, all the crap.

And that's not even counting like the obligations you have to take care of your parents or, you know, anyone else. It's fast. So if you can't tether back to slow, if you can't learn to stop time, and you go into social media and you just stay at high velocity fast, speed your cortisol levels, screw up your hormones, your coffee intake makes you crave sugar.

Then your insulin levels get screwed up. Then you're screwing up your hormones, right? And you start messing with your insulin and your adrenal hormones and your cortisol.

Then your sleep get screwed up. And if you're not sleeping well, you screw up your hormones. And so, you know, it's one thing to say, okay, we're going to fix the hormones, but the hormones are a result of the symphony of a lot of mis tuned, you know, violins.

You have to fix the elements and lifestyle and the Western medical approach is a very good business model, which is, oh, we have a pill for that, right?

Like, we'll just master medicine symptoms and don't worry about it. Go back to work. I think the wellness business is also saying, oh, we're going to heal that.

I think there's two steps before healing anything is detoxifying and healing the gut, because if those things aren't working, healing can't happen, right?

Because the body doesn't feel safe. And so I feel like there's a lot of room for improvement in the wellness industry. And I feel like the most inconvenient conversation to have is the one we're having right now, which is it's ultimately your responsibility.

It's how you live your life. And there is no miracle cream or pill. Despite what all the marketers keep trying to tell you, it's going to fix all your problems.

You have to be a better steward of your life garden, which means stop watering the weeds and water the plants that are important. truer words cannot be spoken.

It really is. It's and it is. It's like patients come in and they want the magic pill and the magic hormone. And I'm like, well, we got to talk about your life and your lifestyle.

And we're just trained even in, you know, as a natural empathic physician, patients are trained to look for the pill.

Morning Routines and Screen Boundaries

So they come to me or you because they don't want the pharmaceutical pile, they want the green pill or the herbal pill, but it's still a pill is not going to fix all the other things going on in your life.

And that's why I say menopause is really about pausing. I put parentheses around the word pause because the power of pausing in our in our daily lives globally and just even, you know, hour to hour and in the morning when we wake up or at night before we that we have all these beautiful, rich moments we can take advantage of, and we miss them if we're scrolling or staring at the screen or shoving sugar or, you know, all these things that you were saying.

And so it is it is a more difficult conversation because we have to like it's easy to say, stop eating sugar. It's easy to say, it's harder to do because addictions get a real good stronghold on us.

So what? We're you know what we're talking about here, ladies. It's like, you know, you just gotta take a deep breath, right? Like, you know, we're all human.

We all can improve. We don't have to beat ourselves up, but we have to start taking inventory of what is doctor show saying. And, you know, where could you improve?

And I'll be like the first to admit I can I can be a scroller, right. If I've like, had a long day and I just need to zone out, I can get on Instagram.

And the next thing I know, it's like 25 minutes have gone by and so, you know, we all can do. And it's just a matter of waking up, realizing it and making different choices and not beating yourself up when you do it once in a while.

Because that's what we do most of the time. Yeah. And they're designed to keep you there. Your eyeballs are valuable to them because they sell your eyeballs to advertisers.

So if you don't set boundaries around your screen time, I mean, I said it with my kids. My kids don't get iPads on weekends or for traveling. I'll give them some iPad time.

They'll get it during the week. It's it's a disaster. And so why wouldn't we set the same boundaries with ourselves? And I'll tell you why. Because I also work through this thing.

So it's like, oh, it's work. It's work, it's work, right? And work crowds out all the other plants in most of our lives. And so my kids are more important to me than work.

Work needs to happen to feed them, right? But you have to look at your priorities and say, look, if I'm on my screen, my kid's going to be on their screen.

If I'm on my screen, my spouse is going to be, you know, you know, he's not connecting with me and then he's going to get on a screen or he's going to go tinker in the garage and everything has a price.

And so in Chinese medicine, the fundamental premise is the shin or the mind. The spirit is governed by the eyes. And where your attention goes, the energy flows, and that over time will get reinforced and materialized as the reality you see around you.

So if you focus on I need a shed in my backyard, you keep focusing on it, you go build the shed, you move things, you go buy lumber, you cut stuff, you build the shed.

Right? You want a PhD, you got to focus on it. But if your focus is on TikTok, it's just being sold to the highest bidder. You are selling your soul to an alt economy, a reality that is a digitized parasite.

I couldn't be more harsh, yet I should. It's a disaster. Get off the stupid device. So I have to ask, do you do social media at all? You know, I've been, I've enjoyed being the guy behind the guys for a long time.

Right? Like, I've made several films and, you know, just produced a lot of stuff because I never want to be like, look at me, right? I don't I don't care, I don't want it.

And I've always hated social media because I know how disastrous it is now. Have I been convinced a few times in the last dozen years to do videos? Because guys like Jay Shetty, who plagiarized me and everyone else, stole and did it and grew these, I'm like, oh man, I guess you got to be there, right?

And every time I do it, I'm like, oh, I hate this. Let me take time out of this moment to capture this moment, to tell you about this moment instead of being in the moment.

It's just very contrived, right? I totally understand. I have like a I, I go on because. Right, I want to be there for all of you. And I know people like it, but then it's like, I don't want to take away from my moment.

Like I was just sitting in the sun in my yard before I came in to do your interview, because that's like my little happy place. I go to refuel in between appointments or whatever.

And I thought about it. Oh, I, you know, I should I get on Instagram and I was like, no offense, but like, I just want to enjoy this little moment. I'm really feeling the sun.

I've got this sunflower that popped up in my yard. And and if I get out of that moment to share it, then I get out of that moment and I lose the joy that it's bringing me.

So it really is a paradoxical, problems. Yeah. But I mean, just think about the very simple if then clause that you just shared. Right? So I'm either going to go fall into some Instagram feed and get pissed off about Russia or Palestine or the election or whatever, you know, pick your, you know, topic to your there's plenty to be pissed off about.

No matter who you think you are on social media.

Sleep Hygiene and Creating Safety

It'll find you, or I'm going to sit here and consciously take photons from that star and feed my vitamin D and feed my serotonergic pathways and oxygenate my body and recover it so that I can be a better hostess for my audience who's coming to me seeking advice and help in a world where hungry ghosts are stumbling around giving bad advice.

So you did the absolute right thing and the downstream consequences. Everyone is listening to this gets a better version of you, right? And they deserve that. Right?

Thank you. Well yeah I am I, I think boundary is and you know to me it's like being mindful and being able to make a choice. So I think social media is such an in part like you said, a parasitic part of our society.

So I've been working on this personally, like I do want to have a presence from my listeners, but I'm really going to

have boundaries like I'm going to go on, I'm going to post something when it's convenient for me, and then I'm going to leave it, and I'm not going to be there all day watching it and guarding it and all of that.

Because, you know, our lives are precious and and we only get 24 hours in a day. So. We should be sleeping at least eight of those. Let's say. Well, and also preparing to sleep for several of those hours before you're sleeping, which means you have a time to make hay and you got a time to decelerate.

And I think part of our culture, especially when you talk about this kind of meta concepts around hormones, is part of what you were talking about with the pause.

Right is sleep doesn't just happen. You decelerate into sleep, rest and recovery, become part of your cadence and your hygiene. But if you don't, if you've never found second gear in your old stick shift car, you're missing a vital part of how the car would operate.

Right? and so we are missing 2 or 3 gears. We either have like crash or top speed. Right. And there's many other like. And you could just go from Delta all the way up to high beta.

There's many other brainwave frequencies that we need to understand how to navigate, so that we can kind of go from one state to another. And unless you have that intrinsically trained, you will suffer because you don't know how to self-regulate.

And so again, it's just from learning how to breathe. It's from learning how to live better. Right. Exactly. I always tell it right. If you're if your bedtime is at ten, it doesn't mean you go, go go go go.

And then at ten you jump in bed. You have to have that. It's like that runway, the ramp where you're rolling down. And so, you know, by 730 you are you are done.

You have triaged what needed to get done. And the dirty dishes can soak with some water. They can wait till tomorrow if they didn't get done. And then you're unwinding and letting your nervous system so that when when it is time to actually sleep, you've arrived there.

Yeah, it's sleep isn't something you do, so you have to allow for sleep to happen, which is the opposite of effort. So if you're putting effort into trying to sleep good luck to you.

Right. So it's about letting go. And so letting go means understanding that your level of arousal needs to be looked at and adjusted for. And you are in this continuum of stimulating new stimulating events.

And things that decelerate. And right now, the the things that would stimulate your nervous system, overwhelm the things that would calm your nervous system just in the world that we live in.

So what do you need to do to bring those into balance so that you can fall asleep. Right. Falling asleep is very different than trying to sleep. What are some of your favorite things to recommend to help.

Yeah I mean I always start with basic sleep hygiene, which is you know, it's trite because every podcast says it. Right, which is turn off the blue lights, no stimulants after noon, no alcohol in the evening.

It's a disaster. no bills in bed, no TV in bed. Keep it cool. Keep it dark. Like just the basic stuff. Right. but then from there, you know, if you're going to bed with a bunch of food in your belly, it's going to be tough.

So eat a couple hours before bedtime, make sure you get enough fat and protein so that your blood sugar can stay stable. Right. All of that. Assuming that happens, we like to light candles in our house.

My kids love it. We like to calm them down. Right? We like Epsom salt baths. We don't do any screen time in the evenings. they read and then they have meditation practices.

My kids are little Jedi and they're awesome at sports and they're incredible ski racers and, you know, so they're not like, just like kind of weird, isolated, you know, they're popular kids, right?

Like they're we we make sure that we give them the best possible outcome for their nervous system by allowing them to get deep into sleep. Then the other thing that's kind of the I just finished a series on this, called Home Sick Home, which is you'd be surprised how many enemies have scaled the castle wall in the bedroom has wafting outgassing chemicals if you're not careful.

From your sheets, from your pajamas, from your candles, it's just you should do a good sweep of your hygiene in your bedroom to make sure you don't feel unsafe.

When we talk about feeling safe, if your body is saying, oh man, what is that? What is that chemical? I'm under attack, which could come from your mattress, could come from your carpet. It could come from mold.

It could come from you. There's a lot of places that your body can get triggered and feel unsafe. But if you're supposed to be, think about what sleep is, right?

Like in the old days, it'd be like, all right, Tim, you're on guard. We're going to sleep. So one guy sits there in the cave with a stick, and you're trusting that Tim's not going to fall asleep, because if he does, the saber tooth tiger comes in and eats you, right?

So you have to, like, trust that you're safe and allow your lump of flesh to turn out the lights in a completely vulnerable state and do this thing called sleep.

So there's no saber tooth, tiger. But do you live in a bad neighborhood? Do you need to, you know, put an extra lock on your door?

Top Tips for Embracing Your Inner Monk

Do you need what do you need to do to feel safe in terms of your environment, physically, but also chemically, emotionally? All of it, because these are all things that heighten your arousal, that make you freak out.

And if you're not sleeping, you're not conjugating your hormones at night. You're not synthesizing the right hormones when you get into the hormone, because that's your shtick.

But but think about what it does downstream, just not feeling safe. But I'm laughing because I used to live in Tucson in this big house in the mountains, and I was alone at the time and I didn't feel safe.

And sleep is sacred to me. So I had my handyman come over and I had him like, put I had, like these French doors to my bedroom. I had him put a deadbolt on it, and I had him make me a safe room in my closet.

And he thought I was loony tune, but I was like, I just it's going to relax my nervous system because I don't feel safe and I want to feel safe. And so it is really true.

Like we just do, you know, I never use the safe room, but it just made me feel secure. I was a woman alone in the middle of nowhere, you know, and I wanted to feel safe.

And once that happened, my nervous system relaxed. I was no longer worried. Someone was going to come in and get me or anything like that. And so it is we have to really ask ourselves these questions before we ask, do I need five HTP or do I need Gaba?

That's it. That is a down stream resolution to a symptomatic problem. That is short term. I don't care how much Gaba you take, if you don't feel safe, you're just supporting the supplement industry that's happy to sell it to you.

And safety and it can be very overwhelming if you're listening and you're you're new to this journey. And I always

tell patients like you know kitchen bathroom, bedroom, you know those are three key areas that you have to go through.

And you got to kind of go through it systematically. Like what am I wearing. What is my pillow made of? What a nice sheets made of. Well, and you know, you have to like, knock it through one at a time, get a healthy mattress.

I remember my my eldest son is also natural physician, and before he went to school, I said, I'm going to take you to an environmental medicine conference just so you can get an idea.

And the first case study he was ever shown or, you know, made aware of, was someone who was very sick and it was because their mattress was toxic and like, so I'm like that implanted in him and we, we have to shift our focus to what we're thinking about.

Not all medicine comes in a pill bottle. I say that all the time. It's, you know, the thoughts we think and the actions we're taking. Those are those are so important.

And so if you had to give like your top three tips to embrace your inner monk, what what would you say? Oh, let's start with saying start your morning for you.

Get into the still water and establish your connection with your, dare I say, eternal self, right? The deepest, most sacred part of you and just kind of connect back in with why you do all of it and and find your why.

Right? That's that's really important. And then throughout the day, I like to say every half hour takes five minutes. Stretch, drink some water, go to the bathroom, do some squats, do some stretches.

at your desk, get outside in the sun if you can, and just break up the cadence of the like stuckness of the desk job or the you know, I'm in the car all the time, move your body because the bioelectric field that gets kicked up by the fascia, moving these electrical gradients in your body will actually power up your energy.

and then what do you need to do to feel safe? I mean, it's, you know, aside from, like, you know, I have a whole course on healing emotional trauma because it's a thing, but it could be the cheese burrito you ate.

It could be the perfume you put on. So think about what exogenous things might be insulting your body and then what negative belief systems like a guy is going to break down the door are rational.

And what can you do about them and what are irrational? And how can you reconcile all that? But just understand that all the other stuff out there is there to support your journey.

When you are sitting in the driver's seat, don't give your power to a doctor or a priest. Don't give your power to anybody. You are the healer. And once you understand that, and then you start to become the driver of this car, you will start to become incredibly effective at making better decisions that are health begetting.

You will start stacking positive habits like not picking up the phone and taking in the sunshine, versus checking your feed in. Each of those will start to stack you in the right direction and eventually that momentum will make your life look so different that people will say what happened?

And you'll say it was a million micro decisions that turned into a tsunami. I love that. I think also, I just like to tack on to that, like in your morning routines, you know, if you have something like you do qigong and that's your thing, that's fabulous.

But you can also have a potpourri. And because I've noticed sometimes like patients will then be like, okay, I get up and I do my yoga and then I meditate and then I journal and it starts becoming a like check, like a to do list.

And it starts becoming very, almost agitating to the nervous system. So if you want to have things to choose from and then when you wake up, you take a deep breath, you greet the day and you're like, what am I being drawn to

today?

How do I want to connect in today so it doesn't become a checklist list?

Closing Thoughts and Where to Find Dr. Shojai

We want it to become a joy, something you look forward to. And I was thinking as you were talking, I'm not sure how old you are, but I'm in my mid 50s and it wasn't that long ago.

I mean, it was well into my adult life that none of this existed. Like we, we, you know, we survived before and so we just have to go back to some of our roots, you know, and, and technology, obviously there's benefits like, I get to do this summit and touch a lot of lives and connect with amazing people.

And so there's benefits. But it's really looking at like, how is this going to benefit me? And where can I set it aside? I think we have to make those choices and we have to make them mindfully.

So I am I so appreciate this conversation. I think it's something we all need to hear over and over, because we are definitely sliding into more and more.

It's not like it's getting we're getting away from it. It's just coming at us even further. And the new technology and developments. So we really have to take a stand in ourselves and say, you know, this is where I'm going to be for me.

And I think as a doctor, it's one of the major reasons why I'm opening up a big clinic, like an in-person clinic, because there's so much more I can do.

And we're in a meditation room and, light therapy and all these things. There's so much more I can do for patients that doesn't come out of a bottle. And I really want to impress that upon everyone.

So I'm not saying, don't take your vitamins. I take my vitamins, too, but don't make your vitamins your God, like you said. You're you're that's it's idolatry.

It's idolatry. If you take the power of healing and give it to a bottle of pills, you have taken away your God given agency to heal yourself. The pills are there to help you. They're crutch.

Love it. All right, well, so make your homes your monastery. Right. You two can be urban monks. I love that name. That's just so fantastic. I went and I did a monk for a month experience in India like seven years ago.

And I went and studied for a month, way up north in India on the steps of that. And it was it was so powerful. And it's so much easier when you're out, you know, there was no cell reception up there.

And it is really easy. So give yourself grace. But just, you know, listen to this again and just listen to it again and again and just start to embrace what what you can and as you do it.

What did you say? The little micro choices become a tsunami I love that. Well, thank you so much for being here and sharing your wisdom with us, and I'm sure everyone wants to hang out and learn more from you.

So is there a website or where can they find you? Sure. Thank you. And I enjoyed this. theurbanmonk.com It'll signpost to my books my films. Of all the stuff that I've done.

Perfect. Go check out his books, go check out his films. And thank you all for being here. Now put down the computer or the phone and go get outside or go say take take some deep breaths. Go integrate something we just talked about.

Go actually do it so you can set that neural pathway up in your body. And it's not just something you're thinking

about, but something you're actually doing.

Do it now. Do it now. Thank you.