# Trauma and Gut: How Trauma and Your Gut Keep You Stuck with Cynthia Thurlow Transcript

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## Introduction to Stress, Trauma, and Hormones

Welcome. If you're doing everything right, but your body is still stuck in stress mode, then this is the can't miss episode because we have my dear friend and amazing nurse practitioner, Cynthia Thurlow, and she's here to talk about the interplay between stress, trauma, our hormones and the gut.

So welcome, Cynthia, because you are a fan favorite. Yeah, thank you, my friend. I think this topic for middle-aged women is absolutely critical. And I say this because the kind of prevailing dogma around perimenopause and menopausus, you just slap on an estrogen patch and it fixes everything.

and I'm here to tell you it is a much more nuanced conversation and one that I Think most women can relate to. And we're going to dive into your own trauma history because this is, we have educators, We have moms, dads, and we've lots of different people listening.

And a lot of people listen because they care for a child and to talk about what was it like for you to be stuck in fight, flight or freeze. your journey, your lessons about all of that.

But we do have to have a conversation about our hormones because I am always super upfront about my hormones. I talk about it with my boys and they folderize, but it's good conversation for them to understand that our hormones do really affect us, and everything is interconnected, right, Cynthia?

It's a web. Our nervous system, our immune system or endocrine system and our gut, you have such an amazing book with the menopause gut. And people aren't talking about that connection between hormone shifting and the gut, but you are.

And I'm so glad that we're having this conversation because we are going to dive in and we really make this practical and useful. Hopefully some of the things that Cynthia will share from her personal history will make you understand your child a little better and maybe even understand.

Your own history and may be why you've been stuck because I don't you feel like Cynthia so many people get stuck in healing. Yes, well, I think people are are.

interested in healing, but maybe they're not ready to do all the work or they are ready do part of the at one point in their life and then they heal a little bit and they like, okay, I'm ready peel back another layer of onion and do a more work.

And then I think there are people who quite frankly just stay frozen. They get to a point where like I can't do more. It's too painful. it's to uncomfortable.

I Can't process even in the setting of having really good help and support. And so I acknowledge this is a very personalized end of one journey for each one of us.

and certainly not everyone listening has experienced significant childhood events or significant trauma as a child, teen or young adult. But I think the majority of women have to some extent or another.

And when I was in my training in inner city Baltimore, I Was kind of introduced to the concept of trauma from the lens of big T trauma. You can imagine inner-city Baltimore murder, rape, suicide, saw a lot of stuff.

We were never actually talked or taught about these kind of little T traumas, which I think can be equally impactful,

corrosive and problematic. And I.

Because you layer that in with. Parents that might have had their own experiences and then they're doing their best with their children. And so they are layer.

It's like layer upon layer, upon later multi-generational trauma issues, which can show up in such interesting and unique ways because on paper, lots of people look healthy, right?

They graduated from high school, they hold down a job, plus or minus, They go on to college or graduate school or they go into advanced trainings and on paper they're holding it all together.

But beneath the surface, there's a whole lot of work that's never been done, which can show up as a lack of resilience. It can Show up is being explosive.

They can shop his personality disorders. I can chop his mood disorders, it can shut his addiction. And addiction runs the gamut. It's not just substance abuse.

it can be shopping addiction or gambling addiction, or porn addiction. or sex addiction and so at the basis of so many of these things is not being able to process uncomfortable feelings.

And I think for so, many, of us high functioning individuals, it's, not until we get to middle age in this alterations of hormones and neurotransmitters that suddenly the wheels fall off the proverbial bus.

And we are forced with really looking retrospectively at like the trajectory of our whole lifetime to say, I didn't think I had trauma because what we grew up within is what consider to be normal for us.

## Childhood Trauma, Fawning, and High Achievement

And it wasn't probably until I was in my 40s that I started to look very differently at how I grew because I'm a professional individual and I am very successful and have a happy marriage and got two healthy kids.

What kind of trauma could I have had? And yet I understand that a lot of very high functioning women and probably high-functioning men have a significant amount of trauma.

It's how do we move through uncomfortable feelings or numb them or dissociate or fawn or do the fight, flight, flee or fawn? How do kind of move for those stages of when the sympathetic nervous system gets activated, each one of us might react a little differently.

And so I humbly sit back and say, after working with tens of thousands of women, that each one of us, our own stories are as unique as we are, as individuals.

And so if you were to ask 10 perimenopause or menopausal women, they might have very different answers, but I think we have a commonality around these childhood experiences which shape us as young adults, middle-aged adults and beyond.

And you know what's so interesting? This week I have my last intern, Kat. Love you. Shout out Kat, love her. And she has her own episode. She's dyslexic and she's becoming a therapist because of the work that we did.

and She is amazing. So we were talking this week about diagnosing. I said, I'm going to tell you the number one thing nobody's going talk to you about.

It's trauma. Oh no, we talked about it. No. people don't perceive in their history certain things as being trauma." And she was like, tell me more. And I said, what I did is I didn't say to people, do you have trauma?

I say, What was your home like? Did you Have parents that were always lifting you up and encouraging you? Or

did you You have parents at pointed out what you did wrong?

And she was like, my gosh, nobody's ever said that. And I said, that's how I ask people. That's why I uncover trauma, because there's so many people like you, Cynthia, who were in a sympathetic dominant state.

I want to really hear about some of your early history. And you were the fawn, right? We fight, flight, freeze, or faun. And that means you are the perfect good little kid doing your work, high achieving.

That isn't uncommon. that is pretty common, especially for girls. So talk a little bit. You've been really open about your history. What did it feel like for you?

Like as a child, what did it feel like for your body? Because when we are living in homes that maybe the stress cup is always full or passing on generational behaviors of anxiety and these things, that's not trauma, but we're passing stress.

But you may have been traumatized and you're not realizing how those behaviors, those worries, fears, the way of responding to things being startled, et cetera, actually showing up at home.

So I would love for you to tell us a little bit about what it was like for your as a kid being in a very, very high stress environment. Yeah, I mean, to give everyone some context, so my father was a long-standing alcoholic and had a very explosive temper, was very physically abusive, and was probably on the spectrum.

Like, we didn't acknowledge it then, but I suspect my dad was, probably, on The Asperger's autism spectrum and didn' t read social cues very well, So he didn t have great interpersonal communication skills.

and was physically and emotionally abused growing up, and also served in Vietnam. So it was kind of like all these things come together. And I think it's important to give everyone context that my mother, a narcissist, although at the time I didn't realize that's what her behavior was centered around, very physically, verbally abusive too.

What I learned at a very young age was to be quiet and not draw a lot of attention to myself. And so when I think about how I felt as a kid, my parents got divorced when was seven.

And, so I was kind of trained to be small, like small as person, but like, small in terms of not being very loud because that wasn't acceptable. Not being opinionated because it was not acceptable, I expected to look a certain way.

My physical appearance was very important to my parents. My weight was something that my parent's talked about a lot. I think that when I reflect on probably my elementary school years, cause I remember my father and I was seven and in the seventies, there weren't a lotta parents who were divorced.

That's like really the uptick of when we started seeing this generation of divorce. Absolutely, Cynthia. Like it wasn't common. No, I felt very alone.

I can remember feeling very socially uncomfortable because when I went to school, people were like loud and boisterous, like little kids are, right? But that was the opposite of what was acceptable behavior at home.

So I learned at a very young age that achievement was everything, looking pretty and like being this little person was how I coexisted in the world. Like if I got good grades, And and I looked like put together like I had the right outfit and it was just like these kind of expectations that were very clear like it.

Discussed like, these are expectations and then I internalized all that. So when I talk about dissociation. I didn't have the language for it at that age, but I knew that when my parents were fighting or they were yelling at me, I had to go internal to my body and just kind of tune things out.

And I don't even think I realized until I was probably a teenager that clearly there were patterns of behavior that I

did when I became uncomfortable.

I'm not talking about getting teased at school because we all got teases, I learned very early on to not draw attention to myself and just be perfect, because if I was perfect and I didn't draw my attention myself, that was a better place for me existing because then I could just draw inwardly and be this quiet kid.

I remember when I Shout out to Mr. Thompson, my fifth grade teacher. He was really like very attuned to the fact that I was this like, very painfully shy kid.

I had girlfriends. People always gravitated towards me that were good women. Like throughout my lifetime, some of my friends from first grade I still have to this day.

Oh, I love that. Longtime girlfriends, And he said to me he's that I'm really concerned about you that if you don't come out of the shell. That that's going to impact you socially as you get older and so when I got to middle school I remember I did student government.

which for me was this like big scary thing to do to get up in front of my peers and talk, but do so in a way where I was like persuasive and comfortable.

And so from that point on, thank you, Mr. Thompson, because I remember it was maybe the first time a teacher really showed an interest in me as an individual from like middle school through high school, that achievement thing, like the more I achieved, the my parents left me alone.

So it like being student government president, student of the year, all these things like achievement, achievement achievement And then they kind of left me alone.

But the feelings that I had as a child in my home was that. I felt very alone, I didn't feel very connected. My brother's four and a half years younger than me, which is like a whole, like, it feels like 1,000,00 years.

Younger than may, but I always had close girlfriends. Thank God, because I think that filled in the gap for me and support. Do you think, Cynthia, looking back, like, Mr.

Thompson clearly recognized this is more than just shyness? Yep. Like, that was his way to say, wow, one of my kids is shy. Only initially, but he doesn't let it hold it back.

And it's not a bad thing, shy-ness. I often, when Cynthia and I go out, where I am the extrovert, she's like… And she'll be like, look at this. And I'll like over here yapping.

So there's so many gifts in being introverted, but this is different. You were introvert because your system was in a rev state and you, you didn't want attention.

Didn't know attention could be good. Yep. You know, I got through middle school and everyone's awkward in middle-school and I was too, and my mom got remarried, my dad got remarry, we changed schools, And where I went, it was not cool to be smart.

I remember seventh grade, grew up at the Jersey Shore, We moved to a different county, different town, not as affluent, It was cool not to smart And so all of a sudden i was like well wait a minute like socially now i'm like this isn't good to be smart like what kind of.

I was smart enough to know that that wasn't the way things should be and i'll never forget in seventh grade there was this kid who picked on me for a variety of reasons and I turned around and said to him.

One of these days, I'm gonna be more successful and make more money than you. I said, so go ahead and tease me. And you know, to this day, that guy and I, he and our friends on Facebook, and he told me probably 10 years ago, He said you devastated me when you said that to me, And I was like, i don't even know where that came from.

Like I am the shy little kid and i somehow pulled that out from my bootstraps. like I gonna defend myself. But going on to high school was, was the time that I recall the physicality piece became very important to my parents.

like all of a sudden the physical side came up and it was like I was being rewarded because I got attention from men.

## Therapy, Medicine, and Nervous System Regulation

Now imagine I have an alcoholic on the spectrum father who's verbally and physically abusive so I never learned what was a healthy way attention for men So it's not all surprising that I had a couple bumpy relationships as a teen and young adult, because I honestly didn't know how men were supposed to interact with women.

But that dissociation… continued and persisted throughout my teenage years, young adult years even in my middle age years anytime I was in a situation where I incredibly uncomfortable.

And I'm sure I can give you some examples, but like having an abusive boyfriend I would dissociate. Like I almost didn't process, it was almost an out of body experience.

I I listening to what was being said to me but I wasn't registering, it was almost like I'm Teflon. I don't say this is a good thing, I can recognize it as such now, but that dissociation was probably protecting me in many ways from processing what was actually happening.

So in my mind, my nickname in college was the Ice Queen. To get what's behind this, because we've talked about this as friends so many times, that we're sharing this because what you do And what you say matters.

And no matter how big your story is, you can turn this around because this did not repeat in her marriage. This didn't repeat for her kids because Cynthia made a very conscious choice that it wasn't going to repeat.

Many people deal with their stress cup being overloaded and having a trauma background. and sometimes people just don't know where to start and we'll get into that but then it starts spreading into other areas your immune system breaking down many many people who listen to the show have very serious immune systems issues for themselves for their child they might have pans pandas certainly a lot of people with Neurodivergence and mental health issues and we believe Cynthia's dad became an alcoholic because of his own trauma background But also because he was he definitely was on the spectrum.

I'm just telling you right now He was intellectually gifted off the charts. He has every red flag in there and And it's just part of his story and part what happened.

But for you, as you were getting older, because your parents didn't have it within them. And again, I believe all parents can turn this around and it started just one little thing.

When did you start to put the pieces together? Was it when you are in school and dealing with all these trauma people and you're making connections to what you we're seeing in them and yourself, even though you on the outside look very different in the inside, you weren't that different.

No, I mean, there's like several key players. So when I was getting out of college, my college roommate, and these are real friends, right? Like real friend say to you, you need help.

And I in a very unhealthy verbally and physically abusive relationship. One of my story sisters was like, "I'm just so concerned about you. Would you think about going to therapy?" And to my surprise, And so there was this first therapist I ever had, her name was Jane Ashley in Northern Virginia.

She really had me work on my stuff and in a way that was incredibly uncomfortable. I used to drive going to therapy. At first it was fun and then it wasn't.

And I was able to talk to my dad in therapy, he actually came to the therapy if you can imagine, but I think it devastated him. He had no idea how much I felt abandoned because my father, when my parents got divorced, moved to another state and how it impacted me as a young woman.

That was probably like the first big thing I applaud through your 20s. And probably the next big things was when I went back to school, got another bachelor's degree and went the medical route.

Being in Baltimore was one of the greatest gifts I've ever given myself. I'd been in the suburbs my entire life. You see so much as a healthcare provider.

It is very overwhelming. I'm an empath, so for me, when I went to school, I was like, women's health route, that's what I am going to do. Couldn't do it, couldn't manage it.

I was like, I can't see young women that are dealing with crises, i'm gonna deal with sick adults. And so I gravitated towards the ER, which is fast paced.

i have the autonomic nervous system kind of revved up to be able to manage internalized stress and be to perform and like stay focused. and that is a gift.

That is one of the gifts that my parents gave me was that I have an ability to focus like no one's business. when things are stressful, I can like think, you know, that whole fight, flight, flee or fawn, in some instances in an occupational environment.

I can tune everything out and just focus on what I need to do. What are the five things I needed to save this patient's life? And so I think that my choice in medicine made a great deal of sense, like retrospectively, because as I was understanding trauma at a different level, it was like, oh, these are people who've grown up literally with nothing.

They've grew up with abject poverty, addiction. It was the HIV crisis in the 1990s. it just a really incredible place to train And, you know, throughout my 20s, my mother would say things like, if you don't hurry up and get married, we're never going to pay for a wedding.

And in the back of my mind, I was like I'm never Going to get Married, because I don t want to grow. I Don't want anyone to repeat it, Cynthia, refute I knew that at a very young age, i'm not going To recreate this, which is why I also left New Jersey as soon as I graduated high school.

when I was 30 years old, I met my husband and that changed everything. And it was almost like, as someone who had grown up very type A, very detail oriented, revved up all the time, this was someone that made such an enormous imprint on me.

It was like my nervous system just kind of went, ah, like I can relax around this person. I don't feel like have to be like running and doing all time.

So my system, definitely recalibrated at that point. He became your co-regulation. Yeah. No, I mean, he I tell everyone all the time, like, how do I know he's the right person for me?

I'm just relaxed when I am in his presence. Like he de-stresses me, which is huge. And it was maybe the first time I acknowledged that I have met my person and my personal allows me to feel safe and maybe for the 1st time in my life I feel like my nervous system feels safe.

Up until that point, I had just one autoimmune condition. And now I've had four, but thankfully they're all in remission. But like my nervous system was regulated.

My immune system is regulated and we made a very concerted effort because he knew how I'd grown up. Maybe not the full extent. how our home was gonna be different.

Our home is gonna different and making a very concerted effort throughout my 30s and 40s to ensure that that type of different home, was created. Now at that point, I still wasn't fully aware of the extent of my childhood because I was still going around with blinders on.

And in my mind, had an alcoholic parent and I had a mother that was very explosive, but that's not trauma. Yeah. Oh, I mean, and you meet so many people that go through that because you even just in the seven years we've been friends, you have evolved and learned and made connections over time.

It is like the inside job. doesn't get finished and you, you learn over time. And now you are the biggest craver of nervous system calm. Oh my God. I'm always like, let's go here.

You know, Let's come on the rollercoaster. Let go out till, till one AM. I'm not saying that I don't know what I need, but I am willing to push myself for fun because I m an extrovert.

But it is a very powerful lesson that you have found. Once your nervous system reset with your husband and then you continue that journey because your kids became such an evolutionary process, where so many people, so the level of stress they grew up with, the levels of micro traumas or big T's or little T, whatever you want to call them until they have kids, until that becomes their mirror for their own upbringing, which I think is very, very true for you.

And I also think you said the wheels come off the bus when you go into perimenopause and menopaus, I think that's another huge time for people to really understand their nervous system and what's why this menopsis and peri-menopas is just knocking them off their chair.

Yeah. Well, remember when my oldest son turned seven? Remember I mentioned earlier, like my parents got divorced when I was seven and Jack is an empath.

And I looked at him And something in my brain, like a little switch got tipped off and I was like, mother effer, I cannot believe how much I understood at seven.

And I understand this kid understands as much as I did at 7 and my parents still did some pretty despicable things. I got mad. Like up until that point, kind of been going along and going with the show and something a flip switched.

and I started to kind of question a lot. And I remember like now Jack is 20. So this is 13 years ago. At that time I was 41. so we're talking perimenopause, a flip switch to my brain and i started holding my mother accountable and she didn't like that.

I Started holding, my dad accountable. He didn' like, that either.

## Marriage, Motherhood, and Breaking the Cycle

and, I acknowledge it's very, very hard when you confront your parents as an adult yourself because number one, my parents weren't capable of processing what I was saying.

That's number one. And they did the best they can. I'm knocking on parents discussion. It's more like the evolution of self was, at that point, there was a break in my relationship with my parent.

Because I know that my kids are so important to me that the number-one reason why I am not letting them grow up the way I did is because I want more for them.

And when I say I want more for them, I wanna more from them emotionally, spiritually, physically than I ever had. And we are creating that. I will give you an example.

If I grew up in so much yelling and screaming, even my mother's second marriage, they were both screamers and yellers. At the top of their lungs, you could hear them outside.

Like I remember growing up and you would just hear people screaming all the time. There was, of course, this physical abuse. Last time I was hit by my mom, she was 16 years old, like across the face.

And I was like, I don't want that for my kids. So we have an incredibly, relatively, we even have three dogs. I have all boys and three dog and my house has always been pretty quiet.

Not in a bad way, like in joyful, happy voices, but like no yelling and screaming because That was never what I wanted. I was like, I don't want to have to resort to screaming and yelling to communicate when I Don't need to do that.

There's no need for that I'm not suggesting there's anything wrong with raising your voice. Well, you know how unsettling it was for you and how it affected you spiritually, emotionally, health-wise, and made that conscious choice to not have that repeat for your kids.

Your kids really appreciate it. And what the cool part is that I know your kid recognize these, these dysregulated behaviors in their grandparents. Without you saying anything, they see it and they don't want it for themselves.

No, no, and I can tell you it's interesting. So I have my older son is an empath and Jack is incredibly kind. You know, he's just got the biggest heart.

Liam is my second son and Liam not a real follower. Doesn't do what people want him to do. He's very much his own person. And the irony is, my mother who's not very narcissistic and very self-absorbed.

My older sun will kind of dance around her just to make her happy. Example, she just had her 80th birthday and my older son called or my younger son sent a text.

Still acknowledging, and my mother in her typical way tried to make him feel guilty for not calling her. And he said, he came home and he goes, yeah, grandma tried make me feel and you know, I'm incapable of feeling guilty.

So I just ignored her texts. Both my kids in their own ways acknowledged her birthday, but did so with boundaries intact. I think that that is just a beautiful acknowledgement that we have allowed them to develop into their home, like healthy human beings without Using strategies that my parents would have used.

Learning how to set boundaries. I think you would agree is one of the hardest things for anybody typical or trauma background or whatever you got in your background.

It's something I talk about all the time. And I think it's exceptionally hard for women who are always asked to do and take care of things. I also think that it is really important.

These are hard conversations. You can set boundaries and you can have your feelings. At the same time, you said something so important that your parents did the best they could at the times with the tools they had.

That is unconditional acceptance. You can have your feelings and your emotions around what happened to you, and you can set boundaries and all things can live in coherence.

You don't have to have one or the other. And when you set the boundaries, people will not be happy with you. There may be outcomes that people try to avoid in conflict.

But I do work with so many people. I'm working with somebody now that has some trauma, unhealed trauma from their parents, relationship issues and neglect and different things.

And I always say, like, you're going to have to find a place where you are not active. because you live in activation. And let's talk about activation, like, what is trauma?

I wrote this beautiful book, The Menopause Gut, and there are so many facets of it, but a big part, yes, we're talking

about pauses, which is hormone disruption, A child.

It can happen to anybody in terms of hormone disruption. We often blame things on hormone changes that kids are going through puberty. But when we have kids with very activated nervous systems, whether trauma or chronic stress, the stress cup is full, it really can break down hormones.

I would love for you to talk a little bit about the brain-gut hormone connection because you did such a good book. I really want everybody to go out and get it.

MenopauseGut.com. It's a really different take on the hormone gut connection that you have not heard before. And I'm doing all these episodes on The Gut and they are actually some of the most popular episodes because it makes sense.

and you can take action on it. Sometimes things make sense and can't take actions, but talk a little bit about what stress and trauma is doing to the gut.

Yeah, and when we're talking about stress, acute stress is one thing. We're taking about chronic unrelenting stress. And whether that's what you experienced as a child, teen, young adult, or middle-aged person, chronic stress what we are speaking to.

I'll differentiate that from trauma. Number one, it's understanding that cortisol is a very important hormone in the hormone hierarchy. It's at the tippity top.

Without cortisol, we don't live. You know, I think about President Kennedy, if they had not figured out that he had Addison's and he needed cortisol. He would have died.

I mean, he ended up dying because he was assassinated. But the point is he have long standing Addisons disease. Cortisol, when we are engaged, like Dr.

Roseanne and I are having this conversation, we're alert, were engaged. Cortisol is helping facilitate that focus. It's what allows us to flee from danger.

Its so, so important, but chronically over time. Cortisol can be corrosive and when I see corrosives, it can drive inflammation. It can break down our muscles so it it could be a catabolic hormone.

one cell layer thick of the small intestine can be disrupted. So it can lead to leaky gut. Leaky Gut can leave to driving an inflammatory response, an immune response and lead autoimmune conditions like celiac, Hashimoto's, lupus, rheumatide.

There's over a hundred auto immune conditions now. It can also disrupt the microbiome. And so cortisol being this kind of caustic corrosive hormone, this is where it becomes interesting is that over time, elevated cortisol or trauma, which is defined as a wound.

Dr. Gabor Mate kind of beautifully talks about how trauma really is this wound that does not heal. Over time, it will recalibrate the nervous system. And when I say recaliberate the nerve system, It makes us a little more reactive.

I always use the analogy of the duck gliding across a pond. It looks calm from the outside, right? It's just kind moving along, but underneath the surface is paddling furiously.

And so when you've had a lot of significant chronic stress, someone loses a job, you go through a divorce, there's a death, something impactful, and or plus or minus you had significant underlying stress or trauma as a child, that is going to imprint your nervous system differently than someone who grew up without all of those stressors.

So you are going to have a much more reactive immune system. You are much likely to develop poor metabolic health. By that I mean more likely develop insulin resistance, cardiovascular disease, fatty liver.

More likely have distorted relationship with food. And you're probably more like likely repeat patterns that you grew up in without even realizing it.

So when I'm talking about this complex and a relationship between the gut and the body, it goes without saying that the got in the brain, there's this dynamic connection through the vagus nerve.

This is Dr. Rowe talks a lot about vagal nerve training, why it's so important. But if the guy is inflamed, if you're experiencing a lotta stress, It's gonna relay that information to the brains.

A lot of times when we talk about inflammation, people are like, oh, I have an achy joint. Oh, I have digestive upset. But we're also speaking to brain inflammation, which can impact the way we perceive the world.

It can affect our ability to have executive function. That wonderful amygdala, that's our primitive brain, can override our prefrontal cortex and makes it a lot harder to make good decisions.

it also impacts our abilities to mount healthy neurotransmitters. So as we see declining hormones in middle-aged women, progesterone and GABA, which is our main inhibitory neurotransmitter, can decline.

As estrogen is going up and down throughout perimenopause, we can see alterations in serotonin synthesis. So these key neurotrasmitters impact the way that we view the world.

They impact mood disorders. It can make things worse. I usually say that perimentopaus is a litmus test of how well we are taking care of ourselves. I use myself as an example to make it relevant because now everyone's heard my kind of preamble story of my childhood, young adulthood.

I get to my middle age years, I'm working for a very prestigious, very large cardiology group. The nurse practitioners in my practice worked like residents.

We were very autonomous. we had a Very, Very stressful job. Very intellectually stimulating until I didn't. I was doing too much exercise, not enough nutrition.

My kids were little, my husband traveled a ton. And I just got to a point where I literally could not continue doing what I doing. The way I living was so out of alignment for my physiology, hormones, neurotransmitters.

I suddenly anxious and depressed. I remember saying to my husband, I've never been anxious and depressed, and I feel like I can't even get out of bed.

I was weight loss resistant, was achy, felt bad, couldn't think straight at work. These were all things that were not my norm. And so it was a manifestation of a perfect example of when your physiology no longer fits your lifestyle.

So I made a very dramatic shift 10 years ago. Not suggesting everyone needs to do this. This is what I had to for myself. But I think for a lot of people, they probably don't put together that the impact of your childhood imprints your body, not just your gut, Not just Your brain, also your ovaries.

I just want to speak briefly about how there's this gut ovarian access, chronic stress, ages are ovary ladies.

## Perimenopause, Gut Health, and Hormone Shifts

This is the thing when I was writing this book. that I sat back and I was like, oh my God, how many people have experienced significant adverse childhood events and trauma and actually are going to go into menopause earlier than many of their conventional counterparts?

I Was 48 years old. Average age here in the United States is 51. I feel strongly strongly that one of the contributing factors to why I went into menopause earlier was because of what I grew up within.

Now, again, there's no blaming here. I'm just observationally like as a clinician, I like to share interesting research and the research is very clear about there are things that can age our ovaries faster.

One of them is stress. Absolutely without question. When I think about so many of the moms who wind up coming to me, a lot of times they're coming. Their kids may have been struggling all along or was at a low level and it comes to a head, but always within that is at least a burnt out mother.

often too burnt out parents, but it is in this time where all of them are in perimenopause or menopaus in that component and it becomes the tipping point for them because they just can't do it anymore.

They're, they're sleep deprived. They can't sleep well. they wake up at 1 a.m. All these things start happening and then just causes their stress bucket to just get overloaded for sure.

And people feel so stuck at times. and when we are talking about All these, you know, fight, flight, freeze, fawn, and I've seen every variation as when parents come to me, adults come me about their history, for parents themselves who were that faun and they're looking at their own child and realizing, wait, is some of this showing up again in the sense that my kid's perfectionistic?

or is worried, asks fearful questions a lot, are they picking up on your stress, right? We are so conditioned that every mental health problem is direct inheritance.

And I always challenge people, it's inheritance of the behaviors. Yeah. I can tell you that my greatest fear As a parent was that I would unknowingly burden my kids with how I was.

Parented myself that, I will somehow miss opportunities to parent them as the individuals that they are as opposed to. parenting them where my parents' expectations were so evident, like they almost couldn't help themselves.

Like when I say that parents, it's normal for parents to share, they have goals for you or dreams for, but it was like my parent couldn t stop sharing their opinions about things.

And that has continued into my adult years. But I think on a lot of different levels, I've tried to let my kids become the individuals that they're meant to be.

Like I'll use an example. So my older son I mentioned, he's incredibly empathetic, super bright. Right now he is in college studying engineering, which is what my husband studied.

He has a tremendous math aptitude, for which I'm like, thank God you inherited that from your dad. But I have always said to him, I think you'd be an incredible doctor.

You have the intellectual capability and then you're just incredibly caring and compassionate. And the other day he actually called me and said, He was having a day where he had a hard, he has a really hard sophomore year in electrical engineering and is taking a class and one of the classes is kicking his butt.

And he's like, everyone in the class is in same boat, but I'm actually like doing better than most people, like we're all failing effectively. So he said, would you and dad be upset if I changed my major?

And I said no, tell me why you're thinking about that. He said well, I think maybe your suggestion about going to med school might be a good idea. Are you saying that because you're struggling for maybe the first time in college with a subject and exams, and you think you need an exit strategy because it's going to be easier if you pick another major?" And he said, yeah, exactly.

I said okay, well, it is normal to feel this way. We all go through this. There's no one listening who hasn't been in a training of some kind where you're like questioning your sanity or like, what am I doing?

Maybe I'm not meant to do this. And I said, Jack, you have such tremendous math aptitude. This is what you've

been telling me. You're passionate about this class.

It's just hard. They're going to have to scale the grades because everyone can't fail. That can happen. And so it was interesting parenting him and not like saying to him, Oh yes, I think you absolutely should change your major because I really see you being a doctor.

And that would, inflated sense of self rescue him either. Cause I'm always talking about not rescuing your kid. I didn't. You're going to have hard semesters.

That's part of what you're doing. You are not doing underwater basket weaving in college. Like you are taking something that is challenging. And we've been telling you, you going have semestries like this, buddy.

God, the first chemistry exam I took as a pre-med student was I failed that. I thought I was the dumbest human being on the planet. It was just I wasn't studying correctly.

So I said, could we look at this differently? There's so much opportunity here to look differently. What a powerful lesson to talk about what was behind it and and what showed up and I think one of the best things that you've done knowing you as a friend is that You are willing to have hard conversations with your kids and that sometimes is really hard when you haven't done your own work, right?

And that doesn't mean we're perfect because we are always evolving and growing. And I think when people have a trauma background, because your nervous system can't find safety, it feels like all or nothing.

That's not the way life works. We have to do little things to add back into our stress cop, our regulation bank. we don't have unlimited withdrawals from the bank, okay people you have to put something back in there and when your stress cup is getting full and just knowing that in this time of perimenopause and menopaus and for our kids when they're going through puberty these hormone changes add to our stress cop it's natural to feel very overwhelmed when people People are really suspecting and this is resonating with people that, wait, maybe my perimenopause, my menopaus is actually a factor in my cup and there's something I can do about it.

Of course, you're going to go out and buy the menopus gut because I told you to. And so many of you, I know you love her intermittent fasting book. I love it.

Am a big intermittent faster. Cynthia does a little bit. She's trying to get more protein in, focusing on weight loss. Intermittent fasting makes me feel good.

And I was intermittent in the early nineties when it wasn't called intermittent. she was way ahead of the curve well always but i i just know i do what feels good in my body i can't believe people do things all the time where they don't feel good like i went out with somebody the other day and they ordered like a soda and i was like and then they were like I'm so tired i'm like do you think this soda has something to do that i knew one well enough to to And I was like, okay, all right.

I Was like we're not going to get into this why this is doing but when if people are really feeling like wait a second This is really part of my problem.

Where do you feel like if somebody stopped? Where? Do you? Feel like they should start? I think that's a loaded question because not everyone's Not everyone stuck at the same point and not.

Everyone is ready for the Same work So that's an important distinction. I think some people are ready to acknowledge there's a problem. Like I got really, really triggered and I don't know why, or I'm in perimenopause or menopausal and don t feel like myself.

So what's the first thing to do? So I always say we want to major in the majors. When it comes to being in middle age, The most important thing we can do is sleep.

And if you're not sleeping, that has to be the first thing that you are working on. Because not only will that help your cortisol and glucose and metabolic health, but that's going to help you gut.

I say all the time, show me a woman who doesn't sleep and show a man who does not manage her stress. Stress and sleep are so intertwined. When I'm not managing my stress, it shows up in my sleep, and that is a given.

Sleep is foundational and must be addressed first proactively and sometimes aggressively. Women will say, I just need to take progesterone and estrogen and that's going to fix my sleep.

If it were that easy, ladies, gosh, we would all be sleeping. Dr. Rowe would be sleepin' if that were easy. Yeah, but it really is a foundational element.

When you get up in the morning I want you thinking about your sleep quality and doing the things that we know move the needle, getting light exposure in morning, grounding work, exercise, etc.

I think that supplements and hormone replacement therapy and peptides, all those things can be helpful, but you must do the stress management and sleep piece.

I would say next is nutrition and for Rowe appropriately. Intermittent fasting works for Roe because Rows like I feel good, it lights up my brain, and I'm working on changing body composition.

So that's a win win. Intermittent fasting might be the right strategy for some and not for all. And I also openly a lot of women are just not eating enough food.

So the reason why they're not sleeping well and aren't managing their stress is because their body is stressed. They're waking up in the middle of night because they have blood sugar drops.

12 to 13 hours of digestive rest is something that everyone listening can do, including my teenagers or my young adults. It's like I'm still getting used to the fact that they are not both teens anymore.

So 12 to 13 hours of digestive rest still confers a lot of health benefits, but for some people that is easier on the body and more gentle. Then we get exercise, as exercise can help with sleep, it can helps with stress management, can also be important for managing metabolic health.

Another layer to that, is considering as you're kind of working through the majors, those are the four majors. Gut health, so if you are working with a practitioner that does integrative medicine testing, stool testing is very valuable.

Very valuable for a variety of reasons. It can be valuable, for looking at keystone bacteria, inflammation in the gut, which we know is at the basis for nearly every chronic disease state.

Looking at, do you have enough digestive fire? Do you make enough, digestive enzymes, enough hydrochloric acid? As estrogen is declining, you also get changes in bile.

So you might not break down and emulsify fats quite as well. And so the domino effect goes on and on, but a very important aspect of this Not everyone is ready to ask for help for their childhood experiences, for the trauma, or their stress.

And yet, I think that the women that are managing middle age the best, the women that are thriving and not just surviving at this stage of their lives are getting coached or getting supported, whether they're seeing a therapist or Reiki practitioner, a licensed psychologist, or psychiatrist, there is zero shame in acknowledging that you need mental health help.

## Sleep, Nutrition, and Practical Healing Strategies

And I think that half the battle of middle age is being able to articulate and explain how you are struggling. For me,

I'm not even sure. In 2019, when I had a lengthy hospitalization, talk about dissociation and trauma.

I re-traumatized and re dissociated that entire 13 days. And then the after fact of that was it was like that literally broke me wide open. Like I say this because It doesn't have to be as dramatic as a hospitalization.

But for me, that was the sign that I had a lot more work to do. And so I think sometimes we have sentinel events. That's usually what we call them in medicine.

We have these defining moments in our lives that really demonstrate to us, we've got more stuff we to have do, you know? We've have more to work that we need to to.

So when I'm talking to women and helping them understand, even other practitioners, it's these fundamental elements must be addressed. And then we have these other aspects like whether it's like really diving into gut health because gut, health and trauma go hand in hand.

Anyone that suggests otherwise is lying to you. There is no one that is dealing with chronic stress and or trauma that does not have gut health issues.

And this is hundred percent. Yes. I mean, I got my first autoimmune condition when I was in my 20s. My second in 30s I picked up another one of my early perimenopause years.

So once you have one auto immune condition, You're more likely to have others. The autoimmune conditions stemmed from the stress, the trauma, and the insult to the gut.

And I think a lot of practitioners are not speaking that plainly to their patients to help them understand they're not blaming you. They're bringing to light the fact that there is a behavioral component that is contributing to the autoimmunity, the gut health issues.

In fact, I wrote a sub stack in February and I shared it with all my close girlfriends, including you. And one of my best friends from childhood said, oh my God, you were always the kid that complained about your gut.

You were always, you always had an upset stomach and she's like, I think we just kind of said that's just sin's thing. That's what makes her unique. And I was like thank you for saying that because I didn't remember that.

Yeah, because you were disassociating. You are focusing on getting your stuff done. I always say it's never too late to work on these things. who read The Body Keeps Score and had some of the most horrific trauma I've ever heard.

But like, you have to start, even if it's tiny, tiny tiny. Maybe it is getting up in the morning and praying and having some light on you. You know me, Cynthia, now I'm talking about my Tai Chi that I'm doing four to seven times a day completely changed my exercise because I overproduce cortisol because they over produce insulin.

We all know I am a high energy spaz. I got to balance that out. and I'm, you know, using PEMF and there's not one thing that I am doing. It's multiple things graded in.

That's an important distinction, Ro, because I will say to patients, do something you like and do it often. Yeah. So for me, I have specific things that i do.

I do PMF. Connection, like that nature walk with my husband and our three dogs every morning, i crave it. Knowing that, that have vagal maneuvers I need to do throughout the day.

i have gadgets, we all have the gadgets. Fundamental stuff I can do without a gadget is sometimes even more important, because I could do that from anywhere.

Like, I hove to myself without disrupting anyone. I do my box breathing. Now I'm a great meditator. It took me a

long time to get to that point. But I rev high.

And I put my blinders on and I focus better than just about anyone I know. Actually, my cousin is a medical doctor and is like the sister I never had, kind of like Dr.

Rowe. said to me one day, do you think maybe you're on the spectrum? And I said, Oh, I absolutely think I am. That's why I can focus. It's like I Can focus like, like unlike most people I know, and I think that is part of what is makes me unique.

it's allowed me to be incredibly successful. I mean, listen, there's so many parts of you like and you have such a deep emotional side and your very aware of things like in but you definitely are also keenly aware fill up your cup too much.

Like, you are like, I gotta get out now, like no. And you're so good at boundaries, right, around that. Where I have this huge cup and I'm like oh I don't know, think I've some more room for that, definitely know when I can't stand people with no integrity and if you were rude, your gonna get me.

You don't want me mad. Other than direct rudeness and lack of integrity, most things I'm like, eh, whatever. And I just move on and I certainly set boundaries.

But we have to know ourselves. This conversation for me is so impactful because we are always focused on our kids as parents. What we often might not be thinking about is what we're bringing to the table.

What are we repeating? What do we want to repeat? what do We want leave outside and what are things that maybe we should really be addressing and work as we're evolving into our 30s, 40s 50s and beyond.

What Do we wanna do for ourselves because we deserve that our kids deserve the best out of us whether sometimes I say some of my parents are unwilling to do things themselves and I'm like, well, but I know you'll do it for your kids.

Okay, so whatever your motivation is you do have to start and the easiest way to. Is to say that there isn't a magic wand. There's not a thing. I'm going to make little chips at this because the magic is in the micro.

And it is much more powerful than the thing. Like people always say, am I going to do neurofeedback and that's going be the only thing? Well, you can certainly do that.

But what are you going do in your daily life? That's gonna really keep your capacity going in. Your stress cop so that you could just deal with everyday life because when your hormones start going down, Cynthia is right.

It makes a difference. And I also like Cynthia's been my sleep coach forever because I can pretend like I could sleep four or five hours and be fine." And my mom did that.

Not because she was a trauma person. She just didn't need the same level of sleep. It's kind of crazy. And she died relatively young, at 77, with a stroke and different conditions.

So it did catch up to her, absolutely. We really do have to take care of ourselves, Cynthia. You've been so generous to share your story, to inspire others, because you really did have it not so easy.

And whether you have a little T or a big T, your nervous system doesn't know the difference. It's going to be in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, and you owe it to yourself.

You owe to your child and those generations that come beyond it, who tend to you internal garden. I think it's important. It's interesting. I was talking to a Reiki practitioner who had just met me and she said, what you are doing right now has offset the intergenerational trauma of your predecessors.

And she says, your kids are starting with a clean slate. You don't understand. That's the greatest compliment you could have ever given me. I don't think I realized when I became a parent how much I was going to value having the opportunity to raise these two incredible human beings and to be able to witness them developing into the individuals that they are, very fiercely protective of them, fiercely protective them.

But also allowing them to grow up in a much healthier, calmer, happier environment. And so they get a different imprinting on their nervous system than I had, which I mean, I say all the time, like, what am I most proud of?

Without a doubt, you know, the fact that I've been happily married for 23 years and have a wonderful spouse and then my boys like everything else comes secondary to those two things.

Yeah, because really, What do we want for our kids? We want them to be happy. And they have found achievement through being regulated and confident and that's pretty priceless.

You can't put a price on that. I think that is something we should end with because you and I could chat forever and you know I just absolutely love you.

And I feel so fortunate to have you in my life. This is a beautiful book, The Menopause Gut. And don't just buy it for yourself, buy for a couple of your girlfriends, maybe five year girlfriends.

I bought a hundred copies and I'm going to be sharing it with graduate students who are in a cat's peers. book club book to talk about what's happening, tend to your emotions, your emotional health, Your spiritual health and your body, and they can all work together cohesively.

And thank you for guiding us about menopause, the gut and trauma and stress, because this is a conversation that I don't want people, particularly moms to ignore.

So thank You so much, Cynthia. Thank you for your friendship and for the opportunity to connect with your community row. Want more insights and solutions?

Well, subscribe to our dysregulation insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.