Podcast Introduction

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. Hotners 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.

Hello, hot ones. Welcome to the first installment of Things No One Told You About Menopause. Today, we're going to talk about why you are waking up at 3 a.m.

Why Midlife Sleep Gets Disrupted

What is your body trying to tell you? Maybe you're waking at the 3 am, something like that, wee hours in the morning. It's not gentle. it's Not peaceful.

Its wide awake. staring at the ceiling, questioning your life choices, maybe questioning the person sleeping next to you who annoyingly is sleeping very soundly, may be even snoring.

If that's happening to, you are not alone and you're definitely not broken. You just have hormonal changes happening. This is one of the most common things that I hear from women in midlife.

I fall asleep okay, but then I wake up in the middle of night and that's it. Cannot go back to sleep. You've got that frustration going on. And I've had this thought myself.

Meaning, I used to be able to sleep when I was tired. Go to asleep, stay asleep. And then, of course, the next day, maybe you're tired and wired. Maybe you are having cravings, sugar craving maybe.

May be you a little irritable and you wondering if this is just your lot in life from now on. It's not. But we do need to talk about what is actually going on?

As we approach midlife, hormones start to change. Sleep is one of the first ways that it can show up. The first hormone to decline, I have always said as early as our 30s, but I'm seeing it younger and younger, is progesterone.

Progesteron is the body's natural calming hormone, calms the brain, soothes anxiety, helps with sleep. helps your brain settle, it helps you fall asleep, and helps to stay asleep.

It's your internal, everything's fine, we can go back to sleep, signal.

Hormones Behind 3 A.M. Wake-Ups

And then perimenopause, that starts to go. Your brain might become a little more alert, a bit more sensitive. They can wake up a lot more easily. Then we start to have estrogen changes.

Astrogen helps to, among many other functions, regulate body temperature. So when it's fluctuating, it doesn't actually have to be low. It could be high, and it could fluctuate between high and low, up, down, or up down.

I call that the stock market phase. Astrogens are fluctuating and your body might be more likely to overheat. Usually what's happening is the sleep center is disrupted first, even before that you feel the hot flash.

So now we have a brain that's easier to wake up and a body that is less comfortable while it's staying asleep. Kind of a perfect storm, if you will. Another hormone cause of that 3 a.m.

wake up is cortisol. Cortisol is your hormone that says, let's go. In fact, maybe you're making your body push and you are telling your buddy, lets go, even when it's tired.

cortisol is supposed to naturally rise in the morning and then to fall off during the day and be nice and low when you go to sleep so you can fall of to then it's supposed to rise again when you wake up, not in the middle of the night.

So in midlife, the cortisol rhythm gets a little creative. And then your body says, hey, all right, it 3 a.m. Let's think about everything we've ever done, our life choices, and all the things on our to-do list that we haven't done yet.

Now you're awake. It's not a good awake, It just awake awake So why didn't anybody warn you about this? Now, for a long time, women are just told, oh yeah, you just get less sleep as you get older and your sleep gets worse as get you older.

This is not only unhelpful, it's not a complete explanation. It isn't just aging. You know, we always want to get rid of that word, that J-word, the word just.

It's not just aging. it's a specific effect of the hormonal and nervous system changes that are happening in midlife. And once you understand that, you can actually do something about it.

I'm not talking about band-aid medications. Unfortunately, when many women go to their doctors and talk about these types of sleep disruptions, they're given a band aid medication, which would be a sleeping pill.

I have nothing against band aids. Sometimes you need them, but you still want to also look underneath and heal what's going on underneath.

Lifestyle Triggers That Affect Sleep

So what are some things that help? Number one, you've heard this one. Calm your nervous system before you go to bed. We also refer to this as sleep hygiene.

And as I always say, this is the part that I cannot help you with. These are the things you heard. Lower the lights, get off of your screens. You need to signal to your body that it's safe and that its time to power down.

literally, as well as in your body. Another is with what you eat and the timing of when you Eat because blood sugar normally drops while we sleep. That can also be associated with that middle of the night cortisol spike.

Your body detects the low blood Sugar and releases the cortisol. So you don't want to go to bed starving. And you also don' t want t eat too close to when yo go A lot of people say three hours from your last meal to when you go to sleep.

I have had good experience with that timing interval, but I'm not always able to do it. So it's very individual and I encourage you to test it out. And again, don't go bed starving and don' t go t bed just having eaten your las big meal of the day.

Another is Alcohol. We have to be honest about alcohol. I know. It seems like it would help you fall asleep. But here's what's actually happening. As the alcohol level rises in your blood, it has that sedating effect and you feel sleepy and maybe you do fall asleep.

However, while you're sleeping, your body is processing the alchohol and as the alkohole level drops, It is a stimulating effect. This is why one of the basics of sleep hygiene is not drinking alcohol, at least not anywhere near bedtime, and definitely not to quote unquote help with sleep, because it doesn't.

So if you're having that middle of night waking, alcohol could be part of this story. Another area, of course, is to look at your hormones. progesterone might be low, estrogen might fluctuating, sleep will be affected.

Average age that women go into menopause is 51 years young. However, perimenopausal, where these hormonal changes happen, can be 10 or more years before she goes into Menopose.

Hormone Support and Melatonin Tips

So this is where individualizing the hormone support can make an absolutely huge and essential difference. So if you're starting to realize that you may have hormones related to your sleep issues, that's what I created the midlife guide that can find in the link in The Show Notes.

You can download it anytime, our free mid-life Guide. Okay, what's the bottom line? Waking up at three o'clock in the morning is not you failing at sleep, it's your body trying to get your attention.

It's true that as we get older, another hormone we make less of is melatonin, and that sometimes can be helpful. My tip and trick with melotonin is that if you've tried it and it didn't work, try less.

Try an actual smaller dose. might not make logical sense, but I've seen it work many, many times. I also feel that supplementing melatonin is very safe and is perfectly fine to do.

It is another hormone that declines as we get older. So your body's trying to get your attention here. When you understand what your bodies asking for and you actually give it what it needs, Yes, you can achieve what I call the holy grail, sleeping through the night again.

Key Takeaways and Listener Resources

I'll look forward to another segment coming soon of things no one told you about menopause. 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 listening, 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.