

Rebellious Wellness^{over 50}

Aging and Metabolism — Does it Slow Down, or Do We?



Episode 48: Aging and Metabolism – Does it Slow Down, or Do We? with Gregory Anne Cox

This Shortie was borne of getting any answer to “does our metabolism slow down after 40 and if so why?”

The answer is yes.

#Bummer but also, you might be saying, I knew it wasn't my fault. I'll dig into the whys and what to do about things in a sec but I have a fun fact to share first.

Did you know that just like female killer whales and f pilot whales we are the only other species where females live significantly beyond their reproductive age, female killer whales generally breed between the ages of 12 up to 40.

But they can survive into their nineties, just like us.

Why? And is it the same for us and Orsinus Orca?

Well, researchers for both orcas and humans have discovered the presence of grandmothers in a population enhances maternal survival during childhood.

We also carry information that's important for the survival of the tribe when food is scarce and other potentially life-threatening situations come our way.

And whale elders just like human grandmas and aunties give parents of young children time off by offering to take the kids for a bit. I wonder if whales also spoil their grandkids or nieces and nephews.

So living past childbearing years has an evolutionary tribal benefit, but it comes with a whole lot of changes that can put a damper on our day to day

both mentally and physically. Can relate girls?

Slowed metabolism = weight gain unless we know it's coming and what to do to counter it.

Weight gain isn't just about bigger jeans. At any age it usually comes accompanied by self-loathing, frustration, it can even lead to depression. At midlife, add to the creeping numbers on the scale, feeling of loss of control and not knowing what to do to make it stop and we invite blame into the mix.

We think, "I'm smart. I should be able to figure this out." It's not that you're not smart, it's that you aren't prepared because most of the recommendations and research that gets passed around is based on shallow science. And it is incredibly hard to figure out on your own. That's why I'm here and I hope this shorty will help so you can regain control and know where to look for solutions and start a plan to reverse the trend.

I pride myself on getting to the facts when it comes to the science of healthy aging, some subjects are harder to crack than others. Like the question I posed here. Does it get slower or do we?

Are we programmed to hold onto more fat after menopause, or do we eat more and move less, which is what the conventional Western medical model would have you believe. Guess what? Although that is a possibility it is certainly not true for all women.

And it ignores the big role played by our hormones.

We'll get there in a minute but first, genetics. So let me just start with genetics. Genetic factors might play a role in menopausal weight gain. If your parents or other close relatives carried weight around the middle, you're likely to do the same.

Let's start with how sleep affects our metabolism and our easier than ever weight gaining ability.

All of you know that sleep gets wonky during hormonal changes, especially as we age. When we don't get enough sleep, we tend to snack more and consume more calories. Why? The brain is looking for quick fuel to combat sleepiness or fatigue, and where does it find that energy is in carbs and sugar. Does the word cravings sound familiar?

Stress calls the hormone cortisol into service—def produced when we don't sleep well over time, which can also produce cravings and as you'll see in a moment, hunger and satiety hormones when out of balance join the party.

Let's talk about estrogen. Though menopause doesn't automatically add pounds. It does lead to changes that may make it more difficult to maintain your pre menopausal weight. Some research suggests that estrogen may help control weight and that less estrogen may lower the metabolic rate here. Metabolic rate = how quickly the body burns calories.

Bottom line: As estrogen levels decline during menopause, you may gain weight more easily than you did in the past.

Anyway, low estrogen is messing with our brains and specifically the brain signals to burn carbs and regulate where our fat gets stored. Hence, we have muffin tops and jelly bellies. So why? Does it make any sense?

Dr. Mosconi is a female brain expert. Her research answers the "does it make sense" question. Yes, she would say "because adipose tissue-- that's fat tissue--produces estrone, and it is the backup form of estrogen for post-menopausal women." The body knows that estrogen is important so it finds an alternate source once the ovaries stop producing like they used to.

Here's more on why we want to eat more or get more cravings.

During the menopause transition, the levels of leptin, the hormone that helps us to recognize fullness, declines.

Low levels signal the brain to increase feelings of hunger, which unless you have discipline on top of willpower leads to eating more at a time when you're likely burning less energy. So the increased appetite and weight gain that postmenopausal women experience is caused mostly by these big shifts in our hormones and our biochemistry.

You might know that muscle burns calories even at rest. The more muscle we have the more bonus burn we get when we aren't doing anything. Studies suggest that women

suffer a one point 17% muscle mass decrease and about a half a percent of muscle strength per year after menopause. As I said, lower muscle mass is associated with decreased resting metabolism, making it easier to gain weight.

Remember muscle burns calories just by being there. So it would be in our best interest to maintain as much muscle as we can, and that will likely take a conscious effort, a plan, finding a weight training exercise that you enjoy and will stick to.

But wait, there's more. Lower estrogen levels also lead to insulin resistance, which increases fat mass and makes losing weight more difficult.

So, what do you do?

Let's start with food. Take a good look at what's on your plates, aka, distribution of macronutrients. That's carbohydrates, fat, and protein. It's not just for maintaining healthy weight but for overall health.

When I use the word glycemic think blood sugar. I'm doing a quick sciency bit on glycemic load and glycemic index.

The glycemic index is a measurement of how much a food will raise your blood sugar. Glycemic load measures how quickly a food delivers glucose into the bloodstream. For instance, Watermelon, for example, has a high glycemic index (80). But a serving of watermelon has so little carbohydrate that its glycemic load is only 5.

If you're concerned with weight loss or pre-diabetic getting a handle on what food spike blood sugar more than others can help you make safe choices.

If you are wondering which of the myriad popular food prescriptions, aka diets, has been proven over and over again to work, look no further than the paleo diet. It consists of lean meat, fruits, nuts, vegetables, eggs, berries, and fish. It leaves out grains, legumes, sugar, dairy, potatoes or added salt.

This might seem harsh and certainly there should be an 80/20 approach to any restrictive diet plan but listen to this. A research lab in the UK followed 1800 menopausal women over 24 months. They were told to eat as they normally would, a standard diet of 5-6 servings of whole grains per day, low fat, and low protein or Paleo. Those on a paleo diet lost more fat, more waist circumference, and lowered their triglycerides more than on a standard American, not so healthy diet.

Thanks to Mark Sisson for that bit of information.

As it turns out many women report not being able to tolerate as many carbs per day as they did before the hormonal changes kicked in. Lower carb tolerance then, sad though it is to have to eat smaller portions of our beloved pasta and bread, could lead overall to

a healthier you. You just have to listen to your body and see how you feel after eating your usual portions or types of carbohydrates. If you get bloated, sleepy, or have gas, lower your carbs to one serving per day and see if you feel better.

There is one word of caution when it comes to weight loss at any age, it can definitely be good, but it can have an unwanted side effect, which is bone mineral loss. Cutting out whole grain carbs, beans etc can mean eliminating some nutrients and minerals important for healthy bones.

So bone mineral loss is something we have to take into account. And again, that loss of muscle. How to find the balance?

Add weight bearing exercises with your weight loss program and ensure that you're getting the minerals and vitamins that your bones and body need, and don't skimp on proteins. If you want to learn what that would look like for you, book a call or send me an email and we'll schedule a time.

All of this talk about the effects of diminishing estrogen leads me to an intro on hormone replacement. Hormone replacement using bio-identical hormones—like estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone can help with all of the estrogen related problems I mentioned.

It will be an upcoming topic for a Shortie. By the way, if you're not signed up to get my newsletter yet, why don't you head up head on over to my website, rebellious wellness, over fifty.com and do the thing, sign up if you want to get the deeper dives on all things aging so it doesn't ruin your life.

Natural hormone replacement replaces what your body originally had in its ideal state when your hormone levels were optimal and your body was less susceptible to disease And you were feeling youthful. BHRT is cardio, brain, and bone protective.

They are safe as long as you are tested before starting them to see whether you need them and might take some time to get perfect dose wise but I can attest to the magic they bring.

Of course we have to talk about exercise. Studies I've found suggested that non-impact types of exercise such as spinning or cycling, swimming, rowing even yoga, can help perimenopausal and postmenopausal women reduce fat mass, waist circumference, and waist to hip ratio, while lowering lowering blood cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Since they're lower impact, these types of exercises are also less likely to cause injury.

If you add an element of HIIT, or high intensity interval training to whatever your exercise program, you'll increase your results.

You may not be familiar with the waist to hip ratio. It's a quick measure of fat distribution that may help indicate a person's overall health. People who carry more weight around their middle than their hips may be at a higher risk of developing certain health conditions.

And as we age, many former pears, people that carry their weight in their lower body, may find that they're turning into apples, where it moves up into the midsection. That's where things can go wrong with our health.

So here's how to do the hip to hip waist, to hip ratio. If you haven't done it before for your weight, you need a cloth tape measure. You want to measure your waist just above the belly button. This should be where the waste is smallest. If you don't have a waist anymore, like I do, just look for your belly button and shoot.

Uh, don't pull the tape measure too tight. You're not fooling anybody but yourself, if you do. And write that down. Then measure the circumference of your hips. Stand up straight and have that same tape measure around the widest part of your hips. Then you're going to calculate your waist to hip ratio by dividing the waste measurement by the hip measurement. If your number is greater than 0.80, you are at a moderate risk 0.81 to 0.8, five is high and anything over 0.8, six is higher. If you're not good with numbers. And that really does sound like an annoying calculation to have to make. Just think about this. If your belly sticks out beyond your frame, like an apple, you're due for an assessment of your lifestyle habits.

So here's the recap. Is it easier to put on weight at and after peri-menopause? Yes

Why is weight loss so hard after menopause? Energy expenditure. It's possible that we do move less and basic metabolic rate, both drop with menopause.

Lower levels of estrogen increase appetite and reduce the feelings of satiety.

If you're experiencing another common side effect of menopause, insomnia, your sleep deprived brain's reward system will be more susceptible to the allure of sweet salty, crunchy, smooth, junk food.

And by the way, we're getting older. Okay? Weight becomes easier to put on and harder to take off for both men and women. And some of that has to do with less moving around. But you know, if you have less energy, you're not going to be able to do as much as you did before or you won't feel like it. Finding your rhythm of energy throughout the day will point to the best time to get in some exercise.

Anyway, there is hope, everybody who goes through menopause doesn't blossom into a bigger version of themselves.

And those few pounds might even be a bonus for healthy aging. I'm in research mode on that right now.

Bottom line is don't let it get you down. Weight gain is normal. Vigilance so it doesn't get out of hand is advised.

Whatever your new normal body is after 50, can lead to feelings of being unattractive and some will give up on changing habits or will limit social engagement because of it.

Regardless of whether you take on weight and take on getting it off or living with it, connection and self-love are important ingredients and staying healthy as we age.

I'm not kidding. Connection has come up over and over and over again in my podcast interviews as one of the most important factors of healthy aging, especially for your heart. And people that become isolated, or experience loneliness, have higher levels of risk of heart disease.

Love yourself at any size, and keep an eye on what your body wants as fuel, how it feels when you move or don't, and if you have a pre-disposition to a lifestyle disease find out what to do to keep that at bay.

If you're experiencing unexplained weight gain or any other symptoms of the menopause transition and you are ready to have someone to guide you through all the ups and downs and help you create a plan to age better, let's talk. Send me an email. Gregory@rebelliouswellnessover50.com or go to the website and check out these services page and see how I work with people.

It might be just what you need to help you take back control of that ever-changing body.