# Episode 8 – Ants under my skin

**Announcer:** This conversation has been made possible by the New South Wales Government's Menopause Awareness Campaign.

**Sarah White:** Hello and welcome. I'm your host Sarah White from Jean Hailes for Women's Health. When people think of menopause, they think of hot flushes, but there are so many other symptoms. In this series, we hear from you the things that are bothering you, the things that are confusing, and things you didn't know were symptoms at all.

Join us as we work through the Menopause Symptom Checklist.

With me today is GP Dr. Sara Whitburn, who specialises in women's health, and this first question will make your skin crawl.

**Listener Question 1:** Sometimes I feel like my skin is crawling with ants. I lather my arms with moisturiser, but it's still so irritating. And then I went to a dermatologist who said it was a symptom of perimenopause, but I'd never heard of that.

**Sarah White:** Now, I've never heard of this feeling of ants crawling on your skin as being a symptom of perimenopause. What's going on there?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** Yes, it is a strange one, isn't it? It's because of the change in hormones. We're starting to feel an altered sensation in the skin, so it's actually the way the skin is picking up sensation and movement, and so it does feel like ants are crawling up and down your skin, and it can be a very off-putting, very irritating symptom.

And it's got the name of ‘formication’. I'm being very careful there ‘for-mi-cation’, which just describes that altered sensation. It can pass with time, but if it's very severe, come and talk to your GP about menopausal management.

**Sarah White:** So the idea of lathering with moisturiser, does that actually help?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** It's gonna help the skin, because we do get skin changes as we go through the menopause, but this is more around altered sensation.

**Sarah White:** Under the skin really, it's not something on top?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** It's the way the nerves are picking up the information.

**Sarah White:** And this formication, it does pass for most people?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** For most people, but if it is severe, it is certainly one of the symptoms that can respond to some of the different treatments that we can offer for menopause.

**Sarah White:** Okay, so talking to your doctor, but being very careful to say ‘for-mi-cation’.

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** Yes.

**Listener Question 2:** I haven't gotten pimples and dry skin since puberty. Why, as a 51-year-old, am I getting pimples now?

**Sarah White:** This just seems so unfair. Pimples at 51. What's going on there?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** I know. It just takes you straight back to your teenage years, doesn't it?

**Sarah White:** It sure does.

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** And you really feel like I'm past that, and here it is again. So, a bit like when you are a teenager, it's because we're having changes in our hormones. As we progress through the menopause, we head towards a time where our hormones are low, and the one that I'm gonna talk about the most is the estrogen, because our skin really likes the estrogen. And when we are low in estrogen, our skin becomes drier. We make less of the, the good oil that keeps our skin moist and feeling plump and our skin can become more fragile. So combining all that together, our skin is a little bit more prone to breakouts and acne.

**Sarah White:** And does this mean going back to products that help clear acne in terms of managing symptoms?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** Yes, you can. You can also look at overall whether you'd like to come and talk about hormonal treatment. If for other reasons, you have other symptoms, or you're looking to manage a whole range of menopausal symptoms, you might find that there's improvement if someone wants to talk about menopausal hormone therapy.

But absolutely you can, just like when people were teenagers or younger, we can really look at acne treatments and there's some good different things that we can use and we can target the acne and try and improve how people feel about it.

**Sarah White:** And the dry skin, similar sort of approach to actually manage the symptom as it's appearing?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** Yes, I think so. I actually think that we can all talk about skincare at any age because it is important to use things that are good for our skin, that our skin likes, and talking to people about using a hypoallergenic soap substitute, all that fantastic general skincare can really help at this time too.

So we wanna make sure that we've got good moisturiser, but we want moisturisers that don't make us break out. So, have a chat to your GP, but you're looking for things that are hypoallergenic and don't promote blackheads.

**Sarah White:** And these are things that don't have to cost us a fortune either. You do not have to be going to buy really expensive creams and gels or anything like that, please tell me.

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** No, most of them you can buy at a supermarket. So it's just knowing some of those different brands and finding what you like. Doesn't have to be all the fancy things at your local shop, it can be things that are just really focused on making your skin feel less dry.

**Sarah White:** That's it from us today. We know menopause can be tough, but it's worse when you don't talk about it. To support conversations with your doctor, your colleagues, your family and friends, you can download the Menopause Symptoms Checklist on the Jean Hailes for Women's Health website, and the New South Wales Menopause Toolkit.

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Information about the podcast

This podcast series has been made possible by the NSW Government's Menopause Awareness Campaign. For help talking about menopause, download the [Perimenopause and Menopause Symptom Checklist](https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/resources/perimenopause-and-menopause-symptom-checklist) and take it with you to your next medical appointment. For more information visit: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/women-nsw/toolkits-and-resources/perimenopause-and-menopause-toolkit>

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Information about Jean Hailes for Women’s Health

Jean Hailes for Women's Health is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health of all women, girls and gender-diverse people. For free, evidence-based and easy-to-understand health information, visit [www.jeanhailes.org.au](http://www.jeanhailes.org.au).

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