# Episode 9 – Weighty issues

**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.

Two guests with me today. Louise Brown, Head of Public Health and Education at Jean Hailes for Women's Health, and Dr. Sara Whitburn, a GP who specialises in women's health. We're gonna start with the number one thing we get asked about at Jean Hailes when it comes to menopause.

**Listener Question 1:** I've gained a lot of weight recently, but feel like I'm eating and exercising the same. Where has this weight come from?

**Sarah White:** Now, I think this is a little bit controversial. Is that right, Louise?

**Louise Brown:** Yeah, look, we surveyed, I think 1600-odd women a year or two ago and asked them what do they want information on, and I think probably about 55% of them talked about weight. So we know that weight gain is what women talk about.

What the research tells us, and you may not wanna hear this, but what the research says—

**Sarah White:** I think I don't.

**Louise Brown:** —is that you are not gaining weight, but the weight is moving. So when you go through menopause, you lose the hormone ‘estrogen’, it reduces. And what happens when that hormone is gone is that it changes where you store your fat.

So instead of storing fat around your hips and thighs, suddenly you are storing weight around your middle.

**Sarah White:** So I've heard people talk about ‘meno belly’, is that what you mean? This is menopause belly?

**Louise Brown:** Yeah, it is. So you become, instead of being pear shaped, which I suppose we think of lots of women are pear shaped with weight lower, that all of a sudden they're kind of shaped like an apple. So that weight is all around the middle. So you develop this lovely spare tire and that is what women are really complaining about, at this time.

**Sarah White:** And are you going to tell me that there's no magical cure out there? No vitamin gummy, strange thing off the internet that's going to help me here?

**Louise Brown:** No, Sarah. Unfortunately, there is no magic pill. But what is important to remember is this is not impossible. But you probably are gonna have to do things a little bit differently. Weight at midlife is really, weight changes at midlife I'm not gonna say ‘gain’, but changes, it's really common, but there's other things going on. You're getting older. You're maybe not exercising as much as you were. You may be eating the same amount, but you may not need the calories that you were eating when you were 40. So there's a few things you can do and, and healthy diet, healthy eating, eating lots of veggies, not eating calorie-dense foods, is probably gonna be really important. And staying really active, getting your heart rate up, making sure you're exercising at least three or four times a week.

**Sarah White:** So this is the sensible activity that we hear about from lots of other groups, and we should never think about menopause as a time to throw my hands in the air and say, ‘Well look, it's just menopause.’ Actually we do have to keep working at it. That's what I'm hearing.

**Louise Brown:** Yeah. And I think the really important thing to remember with menopause is that after menopause, when you have lost the estrogen that you once had, there's other things that happen as a result of that. One is you are more at risk of heart problems and heart disease, so higher blood pressure, higher cholesterol, things like that. And you're also at risk of bone density issues. So, osteoporosis.

So it's even more important to really eat well, make sure you're getting the nutrients you need and staying really active because that's gonna help reduce that risk of heart disease and osteoporosis in the long term.

**Sarah White:** Okay, Dr. Sara, this one's for you and I must say this is a question I can really relate to.

**Listener Question 2:** Hi, my name is Shantha. I'm going through the menopause and suddenly I'm feeling really old. My joints and my muscles are aching all the time for no reason.

**Sarah White:** So I'm with Shantha, what, what are we gonna do about these aching muscles and joints? Please help me.

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** I think a lot of people are unaware that as we go through the menopause and the changes in hormones can actually impact on our joints and our muscles. People are often surprised, but when you ask them about it, they say, yes, me too. I'm, I'm feeling really sore.

**Sarah White:** That's absolutely where I am. So what can I do?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** So it's really important to continue exercising within your comfort levels. You wanna stay active, you wanna keep moving. However, if you are finding that you are having pain or problems, speak to your GP to look at menopause management, but even speak to your GP because it may be that working with allied health can help as well.

**Sarah White:** So, allied health, that's physiotherapists, people like that?

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** Physiotherapists, osteopaths, massage therapists, so people who can help you keep active and physical.

**Sarah White:** I want to thank you very much for giving me an excuse to go and have a massage.

**Dr. Sara Whitburn:** You're welcome.

**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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