SESSION TRANSCRIPT · THE MISSING PIECES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

Armour Weight™: Why Perimenopause Makes Everything You're Already Carrying Feel Heavier

with Lisa Barwise · Day 2, Tuesday, October 27 · The Unnamed Losses

7:30 in the morning. You're sitting on the edge of your bed, head in your hands, staring at the floor. You've barely opened your eyes. Your feet have barely touched the floor. And already your brain is running through everything you've got to do. The work. The house, the kids, family, the people who need you, the things you forgot to do yesterday. And all you can think is, "How am I going to do it all over again today? I just don't think I can do this."

But you will, won't you? Because that's what we do. That's what you do. You're the capable one, the dependable one, the one who holds everything together. Except lately, something feels different. You're exhausted, but you can't sleep. Your brain feels like it's full of cotton wool. Your patience has completely disappeared. Your body doesn't respond the way it used to. Some days you barely recognise the woman looking back at you in the mirror, and you're thinking, "What the actual hell is happening?"

Maybe you've been told, "It's perimenopause. It's your hormones. It's just part of getting older." And yes, of course your hormones are changing, and your biology matters enormously. But what if that's only part of the story? What if perimenopause isn't creating all of the weight you're feeling? What if it's making the weight you've already been carrying for decades impossible to ignore? Because there's a name for that weight. I call it Armour Weight™.

Hi, I'm Lisa Barwise. I'm a Wellness Alchemist and Fitness Feminist. I'm the author of Unarmoured, the creator of the Warrior Goddess Saga, and a podcast host. For the past 20 years, I've worked with women on their health, strength, and wellbeing journeys. And if there's one thing I've learned, it's that you can't separate what's happening in a woman's body from what's happening in her mind, what's happening in her life, and her sense of who she is. That's the foundation of my approach, called Wellness Alchemy: the triquetra of biology, psychology, and spirituality. Today, I want to show you why understanding all three might just change the way you experience menopause. Because before we can begin to release that Armour Weight, we need to understand what's happening underneath.

Here's something I really want you to understand. Menopause isn't simply about your periods stopping, your ovaries shutting down, and a few hot flushes. It's a whole-body transition. And one of the most fascinating places that transition happens is inside your brain. Oestrogen isn't just a reproductive or sexual hormone. Your brain has oestrogen receptors, and oestrogen is involved in systems that influence memory, attention, mood, temperature regulation, and how your brain uses energy. So as oestrogen starts fluctuating during perimenopause, it's not surprising that some women notice changes in how they think, feel, and function. You might walk into a room and forget why you're there. You might struggle to

find a word you've used thousands of times, or suddenly feel completely overwhelmed by something you'd normally do with ease.

Oestrogen has receptors throughout the brain, and it interacts with the chemical messengers that influence how you think, feel, and function every day. We call these neurotransmitters. During perimenopause, in that midlife transition, there's a reorganising of the cabinet of neurotransmitters in your brain. It's almost as if, as some begin to deplete or decline, others are given the mic and become more prevalent. So let's look at the ones you might be feeling on a regular basis.

Let's start with dopamine. You may know a little about dopamine as our reward or motivation neurotransmitter. But maybe you don't know that it declines in perimenopause, in that transitional phase. That can leave us feeling like nothing that used to feel exciting, easy, or enjoyable is doing it for us anymore, and we often have to look in different places to get that dopamine reward. This is also why a lot of women are getting a late diagnosis of ADHD. As we go through perimenopause and oestrogen declines and brings dopamine down with it, the ADHD is exposed, because ADHD involves a kind of dopamine deficiency. So women in perimenopause can feel a lack of motivation, a lack of get-up-and-go, and the things that once made them excited have left the building. If you're wondering why you can't seem to motivate yourself, or why you're struggling to concentrate on the things you used to love and enjoy, changes in these systems might start to give you an idea of what's going on.

Now I want to talk about GABA. Not a lot of people talk about GABA, but we need to. It's one of your brain's brakes. It helps regulate nervous system activity. Progesterone works with GABA by interacting with your GABA-A receptors, so when progesterone fluctuates, that calming system can be affected too. For some women, this contributes to feeling more anxious, irritable, and overstimulated, being unable to switch off, and constantly feeling wired but tired.

Then we have oxytocin. This might be the most interesting one for women in midlife. It's involved in bonding, trust, and social connection, and also in connection with meaning, in having life feel meaningful. Oxytocin is also associated with love, with your heart. And given that heart disease is one of the biggest killers of women, this has a particularly interesting connection for me. Oxytocin fluctuates during perimenopause along with oestrogen going up and down, and you can start to feel disconnected from yourself. Relationships can shift and change, which can also have an impact on your heart and your heart health. And from a spiritual point of view, there can be a lack of connection to yourself, to your intuition, to something more meaningful. That's a major impact during perimenopause and this midlife transition.

None of these chemicals work in isolation, and menopause doesn't simply switch them on or off. But these hormonal changes can influence how they all communicate, and that's what's important. Sometimes something goes into decline and has an impact on how you think, feel, and function. Sometimes something is moved to the forefront and given the mic, and that becomes more prominent for you in that moment.

All of this matters. Imagine you've spent 30-something years being the woman who's completely on it: knowing all the details, keeping track of everything, knowing what's important and what's the priority. Maybe your job involves remembering lots of detailed information, and you're the best at keeping all those plates spinning and keeping tabs on everything. You've built an entire identity around being the capable, strong, organised, sharp one. And then perimenopause arrives, and suddenly all those facts and details you could spit out verbatim are leaving you. You can't remember why you walked into the kitchen, let alone the words you're trying to say. You used to be an articulate communicator, and now you're stumbling, trying to find the right word. Your sleep is disrupted, your concentration is suffering, and your emotional responses feel completely different. Maybe you get overwhelmed easily, or tired easily. Maybe you become snappy and full of rage. All of this is part of the perimenopause transition. But imagine how it affects the identity you've built up over those 30 years.

So we can see how the hormonal effects of declining and fluctuating oestrogen and progesterone affect what's happening in your brain, and also how you think about your identity, the connection you have with yourself, your sense of self-trust, and your connection to meaning.

This is where I want to talk more about my concept of Armour Weight. Armour Weight is the physical, but also emotional, energetic, and ancestral weight we carry as women, and it's exposed during this time. As those neurotransmitters fluctuate, our give-a-damn begins to diminish, because our body becomes a lot more stress-sensitive. I'm going to come back to that in a minute. It means we hold on to this heaviness. It can be a physical representation of weight: a shield around the body that keeps us at a distance from the world. Whether you've built up that shield, that sense of safety, because of something that happened, or whether you're carrying a heaviness from fatigue, from an overworked brain, from an identity you're carrying that's no longer yours, from unresolved trauma, unprocessed grief, or people-pleasing, putting everybody else first and suppressing your own desires, your wants, and your emotions. That's pretty heavy, right?

I talk about this as Armour Weight, whether we can physically feel it on our bodies or we feel it as heaviness throughout the day. And that Armour Weight can really be felt when we sit on the edge of the bed every single morning. In my book, Unarmoured, I speak to how the biological and neurological changes happening through perimenopause result in this Armour Weight, and how we can begin the process of Unarmouring so we can actually step into a powerful time during this midlife transition.

I said I'd come back to the impact of stress on our bodies during this time, and why we felt the need to put on the armour in the first place. The armour we carry is often the result of decades of good girl conditioning: years of people-pleasing, accommodating, putting others first, along with unresolved grief, trauma, and big emotions. All of this has contributed to us feeling more stress and carrying the weight of that stress. And the stress I'm talking about here isn't just "the world's a bit crazy right now." It's stress within the body. During perimenopause, women become more stress-sensitive. As oestrogen declines, it takes with it this buffer that has been shielding us from the world so that we could stay in a state of

nurturing. When that oestrogen buffer declines and we become more stress-sensitive, we tend to react more. We can become emotionally unstable and reactive, more irritable, even full of rage.

That stress shows up in the body because our nervous systems become easily dysregulated. That can look like overwhelm. It can look like fatigue and exhaustion. It can look like full burnout and emotional collapse. So when you feel that sense of exhaustion, it's not just body exhaustion. It's emotional exhaustion. It's spiritual exhaustion. It's whole-woman exhaustion. That's why nervous system regulation can play an enormous part in your perimenopausal journey, as you learn the process of Unarmouring.

Because here's the exciting part. During midlife, our brains become more open to change through neuroplasticity, which is a cool word for being able to create new pathways, new experiences, new thoughts and beliefs about ourselves. That means we can step into a new identity and begin to forge a new path for ourselves. Our brains are more like a sponge during this time, which means it can be easier for us to carve out a new identity, to set new beliefs and new behaviours, and to make habits stick, if we understand what's going on in the system. It's our ability to adapt, learn, and create real connections throughout our lives. So although our biology may be changing, our psychology says we're still capable of learning new things. In fact, this is often an invitation to step into a new era, what we like to call the Warrior Goddess era.

Here's what else we know about the season and transition of menopause. Women weren't supposed to live this long. We're now living 40 to 42% of our lives post-menopause. Part of the reason things haven't been studied, and that we haven't had a clear path until now, is that women weren't expected to live this long. What does that say about medical misogyny? Well, we could bring the patriarchy into this. But what I want to talk about here is that we never had a clear path before that showed the evolution of our lives.

In her book, Dr Joan Briscoe talks about the woman's life cycle, the book of life, as she calls it. What she found was that what older and ancient traditions called the triple goddess, Maiden, Mother, and Crone, needed evolving. As we're spending more than 40% of our lives post-menopause, she believes there's an extra phase that needs to be acknowledged. She calls it the Guardian phase, between Mother and Crone. In this phase, women are still contributing to the causes, fights, and issues that are really important to them. They can step into more of a guardian role, using their strength, their voice, and their sense of fight to contribute to, look after, and safeguard others in their societies, from children to the elderly to the planet. And this can be a more meaningful connection to a purpose, a passion, or a legacy they want to leave.

What I really enjoyed while researching my book is that there are very few mammals that go through menopause the way we do, but orcas do. Orca whales. And researchers found that when there was a post-menopausal orca in a pod, that pod was stronger. It had less disease, fewer deaths, and more abundance and prosperity in terms of energy, reproduction, and size than pods that didn't. The guardian orca was very strong. She was able to look after both the younger and the older members of the pod, and to be a guiding force, an extra layer of protection for the whole pod. She still had the strength and the ability, and actually more time and energy to focus on looking after the pod as a whole. Because her own

reproductive and child-rearing responsibilities had evolved, she could look after the whole pod and its community, rather than focusing only on her own young.

I think it's really interesting to see this in nature. Rather than women going straight into the Crone phase of life, which is what we're sold in marketing, that menopause is a decline, we have the opportunity to step into something more meaningful and more purposeful, and to leave a legacy during this time. The post-menopausal orcas were shown to be very strong, very active, and very able, which is the opposite of what women in menopause are told now, right? "It's just your age. That's why you're declining. You're not strong. You don't feel well." Rather than understanding that this can be a transitional time where you can be strong, fit, and healthy, and guide others to do exactly that.

So if we're talking about the missing piece of menopause, what I would say is this. Not only is this a time of evolution, a time when you have a call to rise into a new era. Not only is your psychology supporting that, with your neurotransmitters and your neuroplasticity set up and ready for you to work with what your body is going through. But there's also the spiritual and identity piece, where you can step into who you want to be.

So rather than grieving who you once were, saying you don't recognise yourself in the mirror, that your body doesn't work the way it used to, that it feels broken, start to understand how biology, psychology, and spirituality work together. Understand the concept of Armour Weight, so you can Unarmour and release it. Then you can forge a path as the warrior guardian in your own life, and help and serve others too. Rather than seeing midlife as a decline or a crisis, I invite you to see it as a reawakening: a transition that is both natural and exciting, an opportunity to truly step into this phase, to Unarmour, to forge your path, and to crown yourself the Queenager, as I like to think of it. It can feel like the hormonal transition of being a teenager, but this time, you're the Queen.

So if the concept of Unarmouring is interesting to you, if you feel the Armour Weight deep in your bones, if you feel a tug of war between what you think midlife should be and how you're struggling to get yourself back, versus accepting, and being excited by, the call to rise and step into this new era by understanding where biology, psychology, and spirituality come together, then I invite you to come and download two free chapters of my book, Unarmoured. Begin to learn how Wellness Alchemy can help and support you in midlife, and start to think of the missing piece of menopause as a mindset shift, first and foremost.