Midlife Clarity with Dr. Tracy Page

"Clarity Changes Everything"

Hosted by Dr. Tracy Page

Episode # 2 — How to Feel Stronger at 60 Than You Did at 35: Strength, Hormones, and Health

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Hi, welcome to the podcast. I'm really glad you're here. And for those of you who don't know me, I'm Dr. Tracy Page. I'm a functional medicine physician, and I'm passionate about helping women expand their education and knowledge and really understand how to age well. Today's topic is just about that — we're going to talk about how to feel stronger at 60 than you did at 35: strength, hormones, and healthy aging.

Today is a pretty personal episode, because it took me a long time to be able to say this out loud, but, you know, I'm turning 60 this year — actually, in the month of March I turned 60, and I don't identify with it. So for the longest time, I wasn't embracing my age. I felt like, you know, gosh, I don't feel it, I hopefully don't look it — this doesn't feel right. But then someone said something that really resonated: aging is a privilege. And that really stuck with me, and I started trying to think about aging differently. So I decided to title this podcast "How to Feel Stronger at 60 Than You Did at 35," because when I think about my life, I actually do feel better, I honestly look better, and I'm healthier at 60 than I was at even 35. So I want to tell you how you can age—how you can age with vitality and grace, and create longevity. Honestly, I feel like 60 is the new 40, without sounding too cliché. But yeah, I do feel better in my body, I take care of myself differently, and I just want to share that with you — what you can do, what you can watch for, and what habits and things you can put in place so that you too will be saying, at 60, "I feel like I'm just like 35." I say that to my patients every day.

And, you know, aging is a privilege, and I'm grateful to be able to start this podcast. I'm grateful to do the work that I do; I feel a tremendous purpose, and I want to empower all women to feel that way, if it's right for you. I want to empower you to know that getting older is a privilege, and something we can control and improve—we don't have to look our age, feel our age, or fight our biology. There is a strategy to aging, and I want to teach that to you.

But first, I want to tell you a couple of things. There's a big myth we should retire: that feeling older isn't inevitable. Because some of us are going to feel older — but oftentimes, feeling older is because we've lost sleep, or our hormones are out of balance, or we've lost muscle, so we don't like how we look. It is inevitable to grow older, but you don't have to age — and that's the part I want to teach you tonight, or

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today, I happen to be recording this at nighttime. It's because, you know, things that we do or don't do can change how we age. And one of those is: women can actually lose up to 8% of their muscle per decade after the age of 40, and that's without strength training. You're going to see some themes throughout all my podcasts of things I think all women need to be doing, because they are foundational to longevity. Muscle is the organ of longevity, and women start to lose it rapidly after age 40 — and gravity is not our friend.

So I really want you to understand that you can feel stronger, clearer, and be more capable at 60 than you are at 35, and we're going to talk about why and how. And it's not because my aging stopped — I'm still aging — but because I learned how to work with my biology instead of fighting it. I learned strategy for maintaining vitality, cognitive function, and all the good things that make aging wonderful. So it's not something, like I said, that simply happens to you — it's something that you can influence, and quite profoundly. And so I want to teach you that in this podcast.

Okay, so at age 35 — most women, and I was like this, you're exhausted because you're juggling multiple responsibilities. And this could be at age 35, 45, whatever age you think back to where you kind of felt your best, or you thought you felt your best. You're usually under-fueled, you're sleep-deprived, you're overstressed, you exercise inefficiently. I remember when I was 35, I was so into cardio—aerobics, aerobics, aerobics—for long stretches, like hours upon hours; it was crazy. And also, at that age, sometimes you put yourself last—but not always last in what you choose to do, but in what's truly a priority, if you know what I mean. We don't prioritize the right things, which puts us last.

When I was 35, I wasn't in my best health or shape. I weigh less now than I did at 35. My skin didn't look as good, I didn't feel as good, I didn't have as much energy, and my brain wasn't as sharp. I had just finished — it's funny, because I didn't go to med school until I was 30, so I went to med school at 30, I was what I consider a little bit of a late bloomer. I stayed an extra year and did a master's in solid microbiology, so I kind of got out late. And I was right around 35, and I remember I was just starting a surgical internship. I didn't have the confidence I have now; I didn't have the wisdom and

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experience I have now. But I thought I was, you know, strong, and I could do anything, just throw it at me. And I worked really hard — I don't know that I worked really smart, and that's something that's definitely changed for me over the years. And the thing I didn't understand was, one, how to work smart — I just knew how to work hard. I had always exercised, so I always made it a priority in my life, but maybe not efficiently. I didn't always prioritize the right things—often I prioritized studying, working, or decompressing with less-than-healthy things like TV. I didn't prioritize what would fuel me and make me feel my best. Even though I was in med school and finishing and learning all about medicine, I don't think I understood how medicine applies the way I do now, or how we can really affect our longevity.

I did change over the years — I created more intentional health practices; I changed my trajectory, especially so much so. So my first job out of training, I did interventional spine and some sports, and had a bumps-and-bruises clinic, and covered high school sports. And I still, at that time, didn't really know what I know now about the priority of sleep and recovery and efficient exercise, compound movements — I was just starting to learn. And I remember, even back at that age, I used to almost smirk a little bit — I hate to say that — about people who were doing yoga, like, "Who has time to lie on the floor? If you have that much time, you have too much time on your hands." And I remember, later in my life, I got certified in yoga, actually, and the people who say comments like that are probably the ones who need to be on the floor more than anybody, including myself. Yoga taught me how to get in touch with my body and my brain, and how to decompress, soothe my parasympathetic system, and downregulate my sympathetic system.

So at 35, I definitely didn't know and didn't have the things that I have now. They have really helped me understand what aging looks like. And also, too, aging well is not luck — it's cumulative investment, is how I think about it. So just like a savings account — I've used this example with my ladies about their adrenal health — if you have been nurturing your adrenals, taking care of yourself, doing restorative things, and kind of protecting your adrenals, that's kind of like protecting your 401(k). So when your ovaries stop working, you have your adrenals as your backup to help produce hormones. But

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most of us don't invest in all those things — taking care of ourselves, restorative sleep, prioritizing our health and wellness, eating well. So you get to this age, and all of a sudden we're like, "okay, I don't have a backup plan, and my 401(k) — quote, my healthy habits — is empty, and now I have to fix everything." I find that women in midlife come to me, and it's like we have to do a complete reboot to help them improve, because they haven't been able to invest in themselves.

So I want to say that I kind of learned — and I would say it was really in my 40s — that I really started investing in my long-term health. And this is really important, because most of the women listening are 40 and above, and I want to say you're not too far gone. So remember: it's not luck; it's a cumulative investment you're going to have to make.

So why do I keep preaching about muscle? Because this really is one of the key things that helps you age well. Beginning in your 30s, and really accelerating in your 40s, women lose muscle mass — we call it sarcopenia, where we see a loss of muscle. And I've struggled in this area, and I still think I struggle in this area — I still have to really work on putting on muscle. But muscle regulates our metabolic rate; it controls our blood sugar; it's our bone health, so we don't get osteopenia or osteoporosis. It's our functional strength — you've heard that saying, "I've fallen, I can't get up" — well, a lot of times it's because you don't have muscle to pull yourself up. It's also your immune function — muscle helps lower our fat storage, helps with our energy levels, and helps our overall immune system, because we need muscle. It's like an endocrine organ, and it helps us stay healthy. It produces myokines, and myokines affect our health and well-being. So when you have less muscle, you have a lower metabolism, more fat storage, less energy, and you're more susceptible to immune problems. It's just so important — muscle really is the key to metabolic efficiency, health, well-being, and longevity.

The other thing I mentioned, which I also haven't mastered — especially after starting my business — is that I think I mastered this before I started my business, but the demands of the business have kind of taken a toll on my sleep. But sleep is my foundation; I mentioned that on another podcast, and it still is, so I prioritize it. I don't know if you really realize the consequences of poor sleep, because sleep disruption

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changes are hormonally driven. So as we start to change during this part of our life, our hormones affect our sleep because they affect our ability to get deep sleep.

So the consequences you're going to experience if you're not going to invest in your sleep are: elevated cortisol — and cortisol is our stress hormone, and when it goes up, it depletes our progesterone, and therefore our sleep worsens even more. We also see increased insulin resistance and weight gain. We see belly fat, facial fat, swelling, and fluid retention. So cortisol is huge, and sleep affects it. But I can tell you personally: when I work late into midnight and beyond and have to get up at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, I am puffy—my legs are swollen, I definitely retain more fluid because of that cortisol, and I feel achy. So it definitely affects how we show up every day.

As I said, no sleep causes insulin resistance because of elevated cortisol. And, you know, my patients ask me, "What's the one thing I could do to lose weight during this time in midlife?" And I always say, the one thing I could tell you that costs you nothing is to sleep more. Because the more you sleep, the more cortisol goes down — and the easier it is for you to regulate your weight and to lose weight. And I saw it myself: my husband and I went on vacation, right after a really busy time for me, and I probably slept — as did he — 8 to 10 hours every night when we were on vacation, and I literally came back 5 pounds lighter, and I ate more — just from losing that water weight from cortisol. So it definitely makes a difference.

I do see appetite dysregulation — so when we're sleep-deprived, we crave sugar and caffeine, and our appetite is not regulated. We're actually hungrier because cortisol makes us hungry, and insulin resistance makes us hungry. So definitely appetite dysregulation when we're not sleeping. Impaired recovery — we're not going to recover well, because when we rest, we digest and we repair and recover. And then even cognitive decline — they've done studies on airplane pilots; they've done studies on nurses who work third shift. We just know that when you're not sleeping, your ability to function from a cognitive standpoint goes down by almost 60%, which is a little scary — especially for us who are in healthcare and doing things that affect other people, or if you're flying an airplane, or doing someone's financial taxes. It doesn't matter what your profession is; your cognitive ability goes down. If you're taking care of your grandkids, if

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you're taking care of your children, if you're working, it does make a difference, and you don't show up the same. And that affects your longevity.

Hormonal shifts can also affect your longevity. As we age, we have declines — as I said before — in estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone, and that impacts our ability to build and maintain muscle. It affects our mood, energy level, libido, brain function, and bone density. We think hormones are reproductive, and they are, but they also affect every system in our body — I tell patients all the time, estrogen has 400 reactions in your body. Testosterone helps with motivation, drive, energy, focus, concentration, libido, putting on muscle, burning body fat, mood, recovery after the gym — all of those things. And those are all important things when you're aging — we want all of those things; I don't know what woman wouldn't want those. Progesterone supports nerve recovery and sleep, and it helps balance estrogen — it can help with brain fog and thyroid function. So many people don't realize that progesterone plays a huge role in immune system and thyroid function. I see this every day in my practice — patients come in, and they have thyroid dysregulation, and they have brain fog, cold intolerance, they can't lose weight — and I fix their progesterone, and their thyroid gets fixed. That's why it's so important to look for the root cause and not just treat the symptoms.

And then what else ages us, or is important to invest in when we're aging, is our stress and managing our stress. Because when we have high stress, it goes back to high cortisol — and especially people who have sustained stress, they really produce a lot of cortisol; they actually produce it so much they get to the point that they stop producing it, and their adrenals become fatigued. It's called adrenal insufficiency, or adrenal fatigue. Then they'll have muscle breakdown, fat storage, inflammation, sleep disruption, and a foggy brain.

So you're starting to see a theme here, right? These are four pillars: stress load, hormonal shifts — or managing and maintaining hormonal balance — sleep disruption, and muscle loss. These are foundational things that cause aging, and these are all things that you can invest in and improve, so that you too feel like you're 35 at 60, or feel like

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you're 20 at 40, or feel like you're, I don't know, 15 at 30 — I don't know, but you get the point, right?

So let's talk about how these pillars can really help you feel younger, and how you need to invest in them. I've talked about strength training in many of my podcasts already and how it can reverse many aging processes. Science shows us the benefits of strength training include building muscle mass, improving insulin sensitivity, enhancing bone density, reducing fall risk, and boosting our mitochondrial function — and mitochondria, think of those as the engines in all of our cells; every single cell has mitochondria where energy production takes place. Strength training also improves our mood and cognitive function. And none of that is aesthetics — we haven't even talked about what happens with strength training aesthetics, and, I mean, it's even more fabulous, right, because we have less saggy skin. So I'm trying to show you that muscle is not just cosmetic; it's protective. And even modest strength training, like two to three times per week for 20 minutes, can really show measurable benefits. And if you're not someone who's done strength training, reach out to me at info at Wisconsin Functional Med, and I'll send you some YouTube sites that are great for strength training.

I always tell patients, just start with 15 or 20 minutes once a week, and then once you've mastered that, add in a second day, and once you've mastered that, add in a third day, and once you have three days of 20 minutes, then you might want to expand the amount of time that you're strength training. But I would say, start small, because small hinges move big doors, and small changes have great outcomes. So I really want you to focus on the small little habits — it might just be first going to, like, Play It Again Sports, and buying some dumbbells. You only need fives, five-tens, fifteens to start with — you don't need a huge investment to get started in strength training. Even your own body weight is a great place to start.

So the second thing I really emphasize to help you age well is protein intake. I kind of feel like I'm doing my first podcast all over again, but again, these are foundational, and they're worth talking about. Muscle maintenance requires amino acids — amino acids are the building blocks of muscle — and with age, muscle protein synthesis actually declines, so it's even more important that we focus on protein. And women

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need higher-quality protein intake — it's so important that you get those amino acids, because protein supports lean mass preservation, creates satiety so you're not hungry, and supports immune function to help you build those cells. I'll see a lower white count in a patient who doesn't get enough protein—they're at risk for disease, viruses, and bacteria. Protein helps our metabolic function and tissue repair. Protein is important for so many reasons.

And a lot of you might think, well, how much protein should I be getting? I always say a good place to start is 30 grams of protein with each meal—if you do three meals a day, that should be a standard, and that's just the minimum —then go from there. Or, 0.8 to 1 gram per pound of your ideal body weight — so if you weigh 150 but your goal weight is 130, then you should use 130 as your goal for that 0.8-to-1-gram-per-pound calculation. You don't want to use your current weight if you have weight to lose. So that will give you an idea of how much protein you should have.

The next thing I always emphasize in helping you age well is sleep protection. Deep sleep is when we release growth hormone. Growth hormone is released from our pituitary — it's what made us young and healthy, and it's what made everything grow and be wonderful in our 20s and 30s. So we want to protect that, and we make that when we sleep — it's pulsatile, so you can't actually measure growth hormone directly. It goes to our liver, and we make IGF-1 — insulin-like growth factor — which is what you can measure, and you can actually ask your doctor to measure that for you. We protect that when we sleep, and that's where peptides have come in — we're talking about peptides all the time, what they can do, because they actually increase our natural, pulsatile production of growth hormone and make our anterior pituitary produce more. That's a whole other podcast, and I'll talk to you about peptides. But if you just sleep deeply, you can actually improve growth hormone, tissue repair, memory — that's actually how our brain repairs — and then even our immune function strengthens when we get proper sleep. Sleep deprivation actually accelerates our aging process.

So, you know, I feel 35. Sometimes I don't feel like I look 35, and part of that is that I don't always prioritize sleep — so I'm a work in progress, just like the rest of you. And this is one

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area this year that I'm really working on — connection, which I talked about in my previous podcast, and also sleep, and prioritizing myself on the list of taking care of myself. Because I love, as I said, I feel very purposeful, and I love what I do — and you may feel the same way about your work — but we still have to take care of ourselves so that we can take care of others, and we still have to take care of ourselves so that we can show up for others and do our work in the world. You can't do a lot if you're not taking care of yourself.

Okay, what else do I really emphasize to help my patients age well? And that's hormone optimization — and again, this is not medical advice, and this is when appropriate. You should have your labs checked. But I do know hormones improve sleep; they reduce hot flashes, which improves sleep; they create mood stability, which makes us show up differently; they enhance our muscle preservation, and they protect our bones. Individual care is super essential in this area, because benefits and risks always have to be discussed — and there, I believe, are more benefits than risks, if it's done right. There has been so much unnecessary scare about hormone replacement, but almost every woman is eligible for bioidentical hormone replacement if it's done right, and it can make a world of difference. Many of my patients ask me, "Well, how long should I be on hormones?" And I always tell them — because they have asked — I'm going to be on them probably until I go to my grave, unless, you know, there's a reason not to, because I feel amazing. And part of the reason I think I feel like I'm 35 is that I have my hormones, and they have helped me age well. What I see in my practice: when people lose their hormones, disease certainly happens — I see it all the time. I would say, definitely get your hormones checked and find a great provider. If you don't know one in your area, reach out to me — we do telehealth, and we'd love to help take care of you, because I believe hormones are foundational, too.

Okay, so what else I want to share with you about aging is the psychological shift. And I want to empower you, because I think as we age, we have less external pressure; we have less need to meet everyone else's expectations. I know that's happened for me — everyone has an opinion; I don't need to hear it. So I think as we age, we shift out of that people-pleasing mode, and part of aging well is really honoring what's right for

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ourselves. We have more intentional living — I know my decisions are value-driven, rather than reactive and going with the flow. And I think the more you can do that, the better you age, because you live authentically. I definitely protect my time — but, as I said earlier, connection is important, so I make time for that, and for other people. But I do protect my time and my energy. And really, your health has to be a priority for you to age well, so you have to put yourself on the calendar. As I said, aging isn't luck — it's actually just what you invest in yourself, cumulatively.

And I think also, too, with aging, we get a sense of confidence, and it accumulates over decades — like, I know my competence has accumulated over decades of self-trust. I've had my share of young ones who've worked for me, and when you take care of young people, they want confidence, but confidence comes with experience, and experience happens over time. But I would say by midlife, you should have built that confidence, because you've built self-trust and experienced a lot of different things.

And I think many women discover, for the first time in their lives, that they truly live for themselves. I see this a lot — I have my fair share of patients who have gone through divorce during this time and really have just started living for themselves. And I'm not advocating for divorce in any way, but I am advocating for you to get in touch with what's important to you, and to live an authentic life, a purpose-driven life, and a life where you put yourself on the list and take care of yourself — because you will age better because of that.

Okay, so the other thing I wanted to talk about is reframing aging, and how you think of it, because I've had to reframe it for myself too. Aging is not really a linear decline — it's more of a recalibration; I think of it as resilience. So you're not chasing youth; you're not chasing anything, actually — it's strength, it's living into your own. I think of it as physical strength plus emotional intelligence plus life experience. Physical strength plus emotional intelligence plus life experience is a powerful combination, and a way to age well. It's not about looking younger; it's about functioning better. And I think having those things — physical strength, emotional intelligence, and life experience — helps you function better in the world.

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And it's so important, because if you could just feel 20% stronger, clearer, and calmer this year, that would truly change your life and would put you on the trajectory of aging well. So visualize yourself with more energy, less pain, a better mood, greater confidence, and increased independence—those are all the things that help you move toward aging well. There's not a special recipe — these are foundational things, and these are small things that make huge, huge changes in how we age, and they're available to all of us.

So if you're feeling fatigued or weak, or you're feeling like decline is inevitable —and this is, quote, "just part of aging" — I'm here to challenge you: it's not, and you can feel better than you did at 35. Granted that you felt great at 35, but you can feel better than that. Your body has huge capacity for adaptation at every age, and it's remarkable how you can change your body to feel better and younger. So small, consistent investments in strength, nutrition, sleep, and stress management, along with some medical guidance from someone like myself, can really dramatically change how you experience the next decade ahead — the next several decades.

You know, my patients come in to me at their late 40s and 50s, and I'm like, my goal is to help you have the next 50 years and feel amazing, and feel vitality and strength and wellness. I have some favorite couples in my practice — I have a couple who told me that I gave them back their sex life; they feel like young kids again. And I have another couple who told me that they put all their pictures on their Google Drive, and it cycles across their TV, and they told me they don't even recognize themselves anymore — like they're totally different people, because they put their health and well-being ahead of other priorities, and they enjoy being healthy together. So I do know this is possible for everyone, at every age, no matter where you are in your stage of life. You're never too late to start investing in your health and your longevity.

I hope that you walk away from this episode knowing that you too can be 60 and feel like 35, or be 40 and feel like 20, or be 50 and feel like 25 or 30. You do not have to be your age. And aging is a privilege — I'm very grateful for my age, but even more grateful for aging with health, vitality, and wellness; for having my faculties; for being

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able to share this information with you; and for letting you know this is available to you too. I want that for all my patients and for all my listeners.

I also want to say that the best birthday gift that I could receive is to know that I inspired one person who listened to this podcast to invest in their health and well-being, so that they too, someday, can say the same thing that I'm saying today about turning 60 — that I feel better than I did, wiser, smarter, stronger, healthier, more vibrant than I even was at 35. So give me that birthday gift, and be that person. I would love to hear about it — you can always send me information at info at Wisconsin Functional Med. I'd love to hear from my listeners — I wanted to say, my patients, I'd love to hear from my patients too, but I'd love to hear from my listeners and how you're making changes to live younger.

All right. Take care. Until next time.

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