# Episode 3 – I’m not myself

**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.

I am joined today by my colleague Louise Brown, Head of Public Health and Education at Jean Hailes for Women's Health. We're going to start today with a question that was, well, a little difficult to listen to actually.

**Listener Question 1:** Hello, Jean Hailes, I'm Robin. So something I've definitely noticed is the ‘brain fog’.

Four or five times a day I walk into a room and forget why I'm there completely. I can't concentrate like I used to at all, I'll be in the middle of watching a movie and suddenly realise I don't know what the heck is happening. My friends say it's normal, happens to everyone. But this is not normal for me.

**Sarah White:** I can really hear the distress in this person's voice. I think a lot of people going through menopause do talk about brain fog, and I've personally talked to people who've said it's so bad they've started to google early dementia. But difficulty concentrating, it's actually quite a common symptom I understand?

**Louise Brown:** Yeah, brain fog is the, is certainly the term that people are using these days and I think it is a really good description of what people, what's happening to people at this point. So, trouble concentrating, being distracted, misplacing things, not remembering the word that you wanna say. So this is really common and certainly much, much more common than dementia, early onset dementia, which is, you know, not common at all.

So I think if you are in the age of menopause, you have other symptoms as well, such as hot flushes, poor sleep, then, this is brain fog. This is, this is not early onset dementia. If this is out on its own and not related to menopause symptoms, then yes, definitely talk to your GP.

**Sarah White:** So this might be one of those symptoms that is actually quite hard for people to manage at work when we're talking about forgetting words or forgetting why we're doing something or getting distracted.

Do we have advice to give for people who are experiencing brain fog when they're at work and they're getting worried about that?

**Louise:** Yeah. Look, it, it's so common and, and I think the research tells us that about two thirds of women who—

**Sarah White:** Two thirds!

**Louise Brown:** —have menopausal symptoms have brain fog as the symptoms. So it is really, really common. So certainly mention it to your friends because they'll probably tell you they're exactly the same. So I think, not being too hard on yourself is really important. Thinking you are the only one that's happening too, you're not. But also things like, doing things that you, that relax you, that can make you de-stress a bit is, is a good thing. An important thing. Making sure you're getting out, getting some fresh air, finding ways to sort of, stop thinking about it. And also practical things like, so if you are forgetting things, then make yourself lists. You know, especially at work, if you, if you're under pressure at work, you, you need to break up your day into short sections, make lists for yourself, prompts to, to remember things.

And also if this is becoming a real problem for you, keep a record for your own benefit and then you can discuss that if you need to with your doctor, because there are menopause treatments that may assist with some symptoms like brain fog.

**Sarah White:** And this is again, probably one of those things where we just need to talk to our managers and our colleagues, try to make it a little bit of a light-hearted moment around, you know, ‘Oh gosh, let me just think a minute. This must be menopause strikes again.’ Is that the sort of thing that we have to address?

**Louise Brown:** Well, I think, the more we bring these things out in the open, the easier it gets for everyone really. So trying to hide it and pretend nothing's happening, I don't think that's helpful. And it probably makes you feel more stressed and more worried about that happening.

**Sarah White:** Mm-hmm.

**Louise Brown:** So if you can be honest and open, that's not always easy and it really does depend on your workplace, I guess, or the, the social situation. But I think, you will not be the only one, and sharing can actually relieve some of the stress you might be feeling.

**Sarah White:** Now here's one, Louise, that actually surprised me quite a bit because I didn't recognise part of this question as a menopause symptom. So let's hear it.

**Listener Question 2:** My partner is going through menopause, and had a panic attack at work the other day. I'm a woman in my late fifties and have been through menopause, but I never experienced panic attacks. How is her experience so different to mine?

**Sarah White:** So let me start by saying, of course people's experiences are going to be different, but is a panic attack a recognised symptom of menopause?

**Louise Brown:** Yeah, you're right. Menopause is different for everybody. And look, there's lots of symptoms that affect our emotional wellbeing related to menopause, probably the most common one would be changes to mood or anxiety. So a panic attack might be just in a really extreme anxiety reaction, but it wouldn't be one that we would say it's a really common thing. So I think that's one definitely that is definitely worth following up.

**Sarah White:** And that's exactly why we put together this Menopause Checklist because there's actually not a lot of knowledge about all the different symptoms and people's experiences are different. So this is exactly what the checklist was designed to do, right? To highlight something that might be unusual, or maybe to confirm some suspicions.

**Louise Brown:** Yeah, I think that's true, Sarah. Most people know hot flushes. They know night sweats, right? That's basically it. But until you are in the situation yourself, I think most people don't have any idea there are so many symptoms. We are really trying to raise awareness that people get different symptoms, and it's really important to understand when you might need help.

**Sarah White:** Yep. That sounds, that makes a lot of sense to me.

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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