Workshop Summary Notes

Key takeaways from The Midlife Journey Workshop: From Cell to Soul to Spirit, with Daniela Hess and Kim Beekman. For the full explanation of every point, watch the replay or read the complete transcript above.

Why This Matters

Independence at 80 is built in your 50s. Cognitive clarity at 75 is built in your 40s. How a woman moves through Perimenopause and Midlife is one of the strongest predictors of her risk for dementia.

1 in 6 women lives with an autoimmune condition, often emerging in midlife, known or unknown. Hashimoto's is among the most common.

1 in 4 women is on an antidepressant or anti-anxiety medication, frequently without anyone first checking her sex hormones, thyroid, ferritin, vitamin D, or cortisol.

This is not a scare tactic. It is the reason this conversation took 3 hours instead of 45 minutes.

The Physical Layer: One Cascade, Not Separate Problems

Five things drive inflammation in midlife: sugar (the cap is about 25 grams a day for women, and one glass of orange juice can use most of that before breakfast), processed food (if your great-grandmother would not recognize it as food, treat it as processed, even from a health food store), chronic stress (cortisol keeps blood sugar elevated regardless of diet), the decline of estrogen (estrogen is itself anti-inflammatory, so its drop removes a natural brake), and too little movement.

Inflammation damages the gut lining, which is one cell thick. Once that lining is compromised (leaky gut), undigested particles and toxins pass into the bloodstream, the immune system grows confused, and it can begin attacking the body's own tissue. This is autoimmunity, and Hashimoto's is its most common expression in the United States. Only 12 percent of American adults are metabolically healthy at the cellular level, and roughly 53 percent of adult calories now come from ultra-processed food.

The Four Hormonal Pillars

Progesterone, the hormone of calm. Often the first to decline, sometimes in the late 30s. Low progesterone feels like anxiety: restless, wired at night, awake at 3am. Many women are offered anti-anxiety medication before anyone checks this.

Estrogen, the protector. Protects the brain, bone density, and cardiovascular system. There is a window in early Perimenopause where support is especially protective for the brain.

Testosterone, the surprise. Women make more of it than estrogen. It drives motivation, strength, mental sharpness, and libido. Dosing needs testing and retesting: too much can convert to estrogen or build up in the system over time.

Cortisol and the Pregnenolone Steal. Chronic stress diverts pregnenolone, the raw material for estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone, toward making cortisol instead. In midlife, cortisol's rhythm often flips: wired at

night, flat in the morning.

Know Your Numbers: Normal Is Not the Same as Optimal

A ferritin of 17 falls inside the conventional 'normal' range of 15 to 200, and a woman can still be told she is fine. Functional practitioners look for ferritin closer to 70 before a woman feels like herself. Under 40, hair loss follows, and regrowth needs at least 70. A vitamin D level of 30 is often called healthy; optimal is closer to 50 to 80.

The four core labs to request: a full thyroid panel (not just TSH, also Free T3, Free T4, Reverse T3, and both antibodies, TPO and TgAb), a full iron panel plus ferritin, your sex hormones, and cortisol mapped across the day. Who interprets your results matters as much as which labs you request.

Resources named for testing: Function Health (a broad panel through Quest, roughly $365 for two rounds), Ways2Well, and Rhythm Health (at-home finger-prick testing). For ongoing hormone support, Paloma Health, Parsley Health, and Midi Health were named as options, several now accepting insurance. Test, do not guess: supplementing without data (vitamin D, iodine, B6) can create its own problems.

The Ayurvedic Lens

Life moves through three stages: Kapha, the earth stage, up to about 17 to 19. Pitta, the fire stage, roughly 20 to 50, building and producing. Vata, the air stage, beginning around menopause, when the nervous system and mind need more grounding and less doing.

Vata in imbalance needs grounding: warm oil (Abhyanga), bare feet on the earth, slower rhythms, and simplicity. Pitta in imbalance needs cooling: less heat, less striving, more stillness. Kapha in imbalance needs activation and honest boundaries around always being the one who holds everyone else together.

The Soul and the Spirit

A resourced body is what allows a person to settle into their own transcendent nature. When the nervous system is in survival mode, spiritual practice can feel like treading water. Midlife is an initiatory transition: as the body is nourished and rebalanced, the capacity for embodied spiritual connection returns alongside it.

> **A note on this summary**
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> These are the workshop's central themes, condensed. They are educational, not medical advice, and not a diagnosis. For the full explanation of every point, including the extended question and answer session, watch the replay or read the complete transcript above. For the exact labs to request, see the Midlife Lab Wish List. For a pocket reference, see the 5 Questions Card.