

00:00:00 Michelle Obama: How many men, do you think, could deal with the severest form of cramps, which, literally feels like, a knife being stabbed, and turned,

Sharon Malone: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: And then released. And then turned! And then released. And you got to do that, and you got to get up and keep going [snaps], it's like, go to work,

Sharon Malone: Go to school,

00:00:21 *MUSIC*

00:00:42 *BREAK 00:01:07*

00:01:09 Michelle Obama: Hi everybody. I'm Michelle Obama and this is The Michelle Obama Podcast. And in this episode, we're going to be talking about our relationships with our bodies and our health.

My guest is one of my amazing friends. Her name is Sharon Malone, and I've known her for well over a decade now. Dr. Sharon Malone is an OBGYN in Washington, and she's been such a wonderful resource — a steadying force — in our group of women friends. So often, women have a lot of questions about our bodies—what we know, what we don't know, especially when we're going through a transition like puberty or menopause or anything else.

00:01:59 And Sharon has been such a godsend for us as we navigate these topics in our own lives, and I'm going to be honest — this might sound like a conversation that's just for women, but I really believe that men can learn a lot from this one, too.

So this episode might not be one to listen to alone. You may want to put this on the speaker and blast it throughout the house, so that your husband or your boyfriend, or your brother, they can hear it too. I think this one might help open up some eyes, and help you open up a conversation that you've been meaning to have. It's worth it for everybody to hear this kind of stuff.

00:02:39 Michelle Obama: And so with that, I just want to start by welcoming Sharon to my podcast.

Sharon Malone: Thank you so much for having me.

Michelle Obama: So one of the reasons why I wanted to talk about health, especially in this series of conversations where we're talking about relationships, and all the things that make us who we are, as women, in particular, we can't really full unravel that, that, that idea without us fully understanding the relationship we have with our own bodies.

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: It's a relationship that's fraught with complications, to say the least. And ones that I think that we as women, we need to spend some time exploring, talking, sharing, we come from a generation, our mothers, and grandmothers, and those before, who didn't talk about anything.

Sharon Malone: Oh, no.

00:03:34 Michelle Obama: And, I fortunately, had, my mom was, I think ahead of the game, because she, was like, we're talking about it all, here's your little kit, you remember, in our generation, you got the kit, um, that came in the box, it was a, it was a flower box,

Sharon Malone: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: And it had the pamphlet on all the information, and that was before tampons, and you had the belt, and the big ol' pads, and, and that got delivered, and we discussed it, and then it was stored, the box was stored under the bed. It was sort of like a little treasure, waiting for the moment to happen. But, unlike a lot of people my age and younger, I was prepared, in a way that I've come to learn, a lot of young girls weren't prepared.

Sharon Malone: No.

Michelle Obama: And so, imagine. That major thing is going to happen to you, one day you are going to wake up, and your whole, physical being is changed, and nobody, nobody told you, it was coming!

Sharon Malone: Right.

00:04:42 Sharon Malone: Everybody has a different level, a comfort level of what they feel comfortable discussing. And then, on the part of your children, or your daughters, they're only comfortable with hearing so much,

Michelle Obama: [laughs] It's true. That's true.

Sharon Malone: From you, you know, and, you know, cause, I used to go through this all the time, you know I'd try to talk to my girls, and then, you know, and they would be, I'd try to go someplace and they're like oh, mom, please, don't, I don't want to hear that, you know?

Michelle Obama: Well and you're a doctor, so everything is very matter of fact.

Sharon Malone: Oh, they don't want it, they don't want to hear it. But it's important that the information gets transmitted. However it does. So whether or not you have, you know, your girls have a favorite auntie, or they have, you know, or they go to their doctor, to their pediatrician, but it should be another person, in their lives, that, that's a trusted, person, and, you know, sometimes it hurts your feelings, but it may or not be, you, it was not me, um,

00:05:40 Michelle Obama: Yeah, [laughs]

Sharon Malone: But, I can talk to, it's funny, I talk to other peoples' daughters and young women all the time, and my girls are like, please, and it's only been really since they're probably, been in their twenties that they've come back around to say well, maybe mom does have something to say.

Michelle Obama: Well, and I think our generation has an opportunity to send a different message, to the young, to the generations that follow us. I know for me, I've approached conversations with my daughters very differently, and we both have, have daughters. We started talking about, their bodies, what's gonna happen, what that means, talking about it openly, I found that, my girls would be as open as they saw me being, you know, so, if they, if they thought I was tiptoeing around something, or I was like, don't ask about that, or shut down when they had a question, even if the question was uncomfortable...

00:06:41 I had to learn how to put that mommy poker face on, and go, OK, OK let's, there's the, Oh, OK, well, you know sometimes I'd try to buy myself a night, Well, let's sleep on that! And talk about it, in the car, right, just to sort of, figure out what to say, because I always wanted my daughters to feel comfortable with their bodies, comfortable asking questions. And in order to do that, you can't have anything that's off limits, because, especially when kids are young, the minute they see you clenching up about something, they notice that, and they will never ask it again, or they're never ask you, and instead they'll go and talk amongst themselves, and I used to tease, what I told my girls when they were young, is like, I don't want you learning about your bodies and sex from another twelve year old. None of y'all know what you're talking about! You're twelve. Come ask me.

00:07:45 Michelle Obama: But it's so important to set the stage for talking, right.

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: But I think we have to kind of, kind of acknowledge, that that's, that's a good direction. I mean, that doesn't make your child more promiscuous, it doesn't, you know, information is power.

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: In all, in all areas of life, but especially when it comes to, health.

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: I want my daughters to grow up, seeking out information about themselves, because sexuality ties to other things around health. Mammograms, pap smears, all of that, is like, if you're, if you can't touch your breast, because you feel like you can't, you'll never discover a lump earlier, if you're not getting regular pap smears, you're probably not going to the doctor, at all, right, so, our comfort level with our sexual health is directly tied to our, in my view, our physical, overall well being.

00:08:41 And I don't want my daughters, to think that they can't ask questions when something is wrong, when there's a bump, or a lump, or a, you know, something out of sorts, if we've shut them down sexually, when they're young, it's their first interaction, as adolescents, with health. And, if we shut that down, what does that do to them later on in life, when they really need to be questioning when things feels different, when things are wrong, when there's a discharge, when there's an itch, when there's a, all of these are signs of bigger things that have to be dealt with, but if you've shushed that, that conversation, in your household, for, for girls and probably for boys as well, you're shushing down the power that they'll have, in the years to come, to have control over their health, to take control over their healthcare broadly.

00:09:35 Sharon Malone: I have been practicing now, for almost thirty years. And, it's interesting how things evolve, just in terms of my manner, how I talked to my patients, you

know, twenty, thirty years ago versus now. The one thing that I have come to, understand, is that, it's true. You never know the answer to a question that you don't ask. And when you're in a situation like that, one of the things that I have learned to do, is to bring it up. I ask questions about sex. You know. OK, well, how's that going? Or how is this going, and, it's just, you can see a sense of relief that just comes over, like, [exhale] I thought you'd never ask. And, but I realized probably for the first ten years of my practice, I, you know, you didn't ask, cause you're busy talking about other things, it's, you know,

00:10:33 Michelle Obama: Hmm. So that wasn't a part of your training? Or, what,

Sharon Malone: Well, yeah, it was not.

Michelle Obama: Wow. Mm hmm,

Sharon Malone: You were, you're busy talking, about, you know, contraception, and pap smears, just like you're saying, all the health stuff, and, we get you through a pregnancy safely, on the other side, but when you are done with that part of your life, that discussion about sex, very few women will bring it up. But once the topic is broached, then you've opened a door. And it helps to, you know, the same thing we do with, with girls, that we do with young women, you need to normalize the conversation.

Michelle Obama: Yes,

Sharon Malone: And to not, make it seem like, OK well I'm weird, or I'm the only person that has this, and you set the stage, and once you've done that, it's so much easier to have the conversation.

00:11:21 Michelle Obama: My conversation with my mother, you know, good ol' Marian, I love that, I love that woman, cause she talks about a lot of stuff, but then, there's just some stuff she's like I don't know, I don't, I don't remember menopause. I was like you don't rem- Ma, you don't remember it at all? Can you give me some hints, did you have hot flashes? Ahh, lunnnoo! Which, you know, and she's eighty something, so, you know, look, I barely remember what I did last week, so, I mean maybe by the time I'm eighty I won't remember menopause either, but that is, another reason why we need to talk about it, while we're remembering it. Our friend group, we've had many, many conversations over the last ten years or so, about menopause.

Sharon Malone: There is so, there is so little information that people know to really access. Because, sometimes with menopause, and the perimenopause, and I'll, just for definition's sake, perimenopause, is the years leading up to menopause,

00:12:15 Michelle Obama: Which, what, when does that start?

Sharon Malone: Anywhere, starts, usually in your mid forties, sometimes in your early forties, but it goes, and menopause itself is your last period, you've had your last period, that's it.

Michelle Obama: Hallelujah [laughs]

Sharon Malone: That's it, and, plus, and then you are postmenopausal, for sure, when it's your last period plus a year. And why it's so confusing, is because it, cause, it happens to you before you're even thinking about it, that's the problem. And so you're forty three, forty four, and you start to be irritable, or you've got hot flashes, or your periods get screwy. And that's why you kind of, need to know what to expect. So you don't think that, again, that there's something terribly wrong, or what am I gonna do about this, because women complain a lot

about, I just can't sleep. So, the range of symptoms is huge. And then there are some women, those few, lucky women, who don't really have any symptoms, they're kind of like oh, yeah, and then my period stopped.

00:13:15 Those are the same women who, Oh, yeah, I just went into labor, and I just had the baby, OK, they, they exist, but, I,

Michelle Obama: Right, [laughs]

Sharon Malone: You don't see many of 'em, you know.

00:13:29 Michelle Obama: Why the irritation, just like, you know, I guess the same thing is true, when you're gonna have your period, what, what, what is going on?

Sharon Malone: That is exactly it. That is, that is the perfect analogy, because menopause, is puberty in reverse. And you know how teenagers act, because their hormones, they're up, they're down, they're here, they're there, Ah! They're screamin' in one minute, "Hate you, mom I love you, the next, OK, exact same thing. But you're winding down, at that phase. And it's not just the presence or the absence of the hormones, because once you get done, and your, everything has settled down, then you're kind of back to a baseli- a different baseline, but you don't have those mood fluctuations that you have in the transition,

00:14:13 Michelle Obama: And then everybody's emotional changes are different, right, because your genetic makeup, your size, everything will, will impact how you feel, though, some people, like you said, that have those emotional shifts, and it just, they, it, it doesn't even register, because that's just, you know, Or, they don't register.

Sharon Malone: Right, that time of life, which is, which makes it even more complicated, because usually in your mid forties to your mid fifties, there's a lot of stuff going on in your life, too, and sometimes you're just mad, and upset, because sometimes they're really maddening and upsetting things, to, you know, going on in your life,

Michelle Obama: Mmm hmm, right [laughs]

Sharon Malone: So there's that, but what, that extra hormonal, sort of imbalance does, is it takes away your buffer. You know, your ability, something, that would be,

Michelle Obama: Your coping mechanism, mmm hmm.

Sharon Malone: Exactly. You'd be irritated on a regular day, you might be in a murderous rage, the next, because you just don't have that ability to modulate.

00:15:11 And that's why this sort of perimenopausal, menopausal phase is also a time when, either women who've had, history of depression, or anxiety, it's worse, around the time of the menopause, and sometimes it's women who've never had a history of either of these things, and then they find that, around the time, it's this great unmasking of all the, sort of emotional changes that go on.

Michelle Obama: Where are you on hormones? I mean cause that's another thing, right, to take them, to not take them?

Sharon Malone: It depends. it depends...

Michelle Obama: Right, [laughs], it's like, you know, just when I thought you would be good for everybody else, but there are like eight thousand options,

00:15:52 Sharon Malone: No, but they're not, but you know, I think, the first, divide, is hormones or no hormones. Are you, do you want 'em or do you not want them? And, I, and it depends upon which category you fall into. I think the women who have the most symptoms who are most bothered, who've got hot flashes and night sweats, and you know, and just all the mood stuff, that's an easy sell, because you're going to, when you take hormone replacement therapy, there are a lot of other alternative things you can do, and that's assuming that you've already exercised and you're eating right, and you're, you know, mitigating the stress in your life. But nothing is going to hit all of those things as efficiently as hormone replacement therapy. The other imponderable about this, is that even though after I've told you all those symptoms that you could have, and you say, well, how long does it last, well, if it lasted for two months, you might be fine and say I'm good, I'm,

00:16:49 Michelle Obama: Right, right, That's how I felt about an epidural, you know, it was just like,

Sharon Malone: Exactly,

Michelle Obama: It was just like, now, in the height of your pain, it's like now how long is this gon' be? [laughs] It's like, if it's a twenty four hours, it's like, stick me in the spine!

Sharon Malone: Perfect, that is perfect, that's exactly, it's like, I could do this for twenty minutes, but, mm mm, no.

Michelle Obama: That's right! [laughs]

Sharon Malone: It's the same thing. Those sort of immediate things, hot flashes, sleeplessness, the bleeding stuff, it tends to go away, in time, but there are some other things that actually don't show up until later. And there are things like, um, you know, vaginal dryness, painful intercourse, urinary symptoms, those happen, just when you think, phew, I'm out of that,

Michelle Obama: I'm me again! And then it's like what?!

Sharon Malone: Phase 2 kicks in.

00:17:43 Sharon Malone: I will, you know, not be oversharing and say that, I take hormones, and I take hormones, because at the time that I was actually having those things, there was just too much else going on in my life, well you know where I was ten years ago,

Michelle Obama: Yes, Yes. right,

Sharon Malone: And we've had this conversation, I said, I can't be any madder than I am right now,

Michelle Obama: Right! [laughs]

Sharon Malone: I just cannot. So, I think the better lemme see, mm hmm,

Michelle Obama: Easy way out of this, deep anger, or,

Sharon Malone: Let's, let's take some hormones. Killing somebody, you know, so, [laughs] right,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Sharon Malone: If you are bothered, and I say bothered to the point that it is affecting the quality of your relationships, how you do your work, how you feel, then that's an easy sell. And for everybody else, you know, if you're not, you know, if it's kind of like a, a non-event, like you're, if you say, your mom, she kind went through it, and it was over,

Michelle Obama: Well she doesn't remember,

Sharon Malone: Well that's true. You, you know what else, [laughs]

Michelle Obama: [laughs] She could've been swinging from the chandeliers, and I was in college, my father's not here to share, so, she might've been like I'm fine, and he's like oh no she wasn't!

00:18:54 Sharon Malone: But there are some non, sort of menopausal symptom benefits, really, of hormone replacement therapy, and it prevents osteoporosis, you know, so you have less fractures later on down the road, and, you also, will have less of those longer term complications I was saying, you know, like vaginal dryness, painful intercourse, if you want to remain sexually active.

00:19:17 Michelle Obama: I, too, am a hormone taker, low risk, on all the other fronts, because I have a, a a very healthy baseline, and, and also, you know, well I was experiencing hormone shifts because of infertility, having to take shots and all that, I experienced the night sweats, even in my thirties, and, when you think of the other symptoms that come along, just hot flashes, I mean, I had a few before I started taking hormones, I remember having one on Marine 1,

00:19:49 Michelle Obama: I'm dressed, I need to get out, walk into an event, and, literally, it was like somebody put a furnace in my core, and turned it on high, and then everything started melting. And I thought, well this is crazy, I can't, I can't, I can't do this.

00:20:16 Michelle Obama: And Barack was surrounded by women in his cabinet, many going through menopause and he could see it, he could see it in somebody, cause sweat would start pouring, and he's like well what's going on, you know, and it's like no, this is just how we live. You know, he didn't fall apart because he found out there were several women in his staff that were going through menopause, it was just sort of like, oh, well turn the air conditioner on, you know, because, there's a lot of the functions of day to day life when you're going through menopause that just don't work, it's like how we dress, wearing a suit?! Any person who's going through menopause who's going to work everyday in a suit, you can be drenched in sweat, down to your core, in the middle of a freezing cold office, and have to shower, and change clothes, and fix your hair all over again.

00:21:02 There's a lot of stuff that women need to talk about, so some, some of these cultural norms change, like, how you dress,

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: The temperature in the room, but again, if we're trying to hide this stuff,

Sharon Malone: Right, right.

Michelle Obama: And we're not talking about it, that doesn't mean you bring it up in the meeting, but, it's like we've got to be aware that this is happening, if it's happening from women beginning in their forties, the whole system of the workplace, doesn't work for us in the right way. What a woman's body is taking her through, is important information. It's an important thing to take up space in a society. Cause half of us are going through this,

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: But we're living like it's not happening.

00:21:45 Michelle Obama: Our power as women, our power and our voice, comes from, it also comes from our ability to value our, our health. And the vessel that we exist in.

00:22:08 Anna Holmes: More on the Michelle Obama podcast. After the break.

00:21:54 BREAK 00:22:49

00:22:54 Michelle Obama: How many men, do you think, could deal with the severest form of cramps, which, literally feels like, a knife being stabbed, and turned,

Sharon Malone: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: And then released. And then turned! And then released. And you got to do that, and you got to get up and keep going [snaps], it's like, go to work,

Sharon Malone: Go to school,

Michelle Obama: Go to school, you know, go play on the basketball court, every woman who's playing a sport now, is doing it through all those circumstances. And I don't know any men who could possibly conceive of what that feels like.

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: If we can't acknowledge what's going on with us, we can't, we can't fully celebrate, just how amazing we are. We got a whole channel dedicated to men throwing a ball in a hoop, and I love sports, I love watching men play sports. I get it. But there should be like, some, birthing channels, [laughs] just some, Did you see what she did, did you see that little woman push a ten pound baby out, let's give here a, where's her ESPY?, or there should be an award ceremony!

00:24:05 Michelle Obama: When you think, of all that a woman's body, has to do over the course of her lifetime, going from, being prepared, to give birth, to actually giving birth, and then having that whole reproductive system shut down in menopause, right, the changes, the highs and lows and the hormonal shifts, there is power in that. But, we were taught to be

ashamed of it. And to not even, seek to understand it, or explore it for our own edification, let alone, to help the next generation.

Sharon Malone: Right, right. And then, after you go, from that, after you've given birth, then your children become your priority, so you know, still, there's still this point at which, you kind of say, alright, when is it my turn?

00:24:57 And this is, I think the good news, about menopause, is that, even though getting there, is complicated, you know, it may be the first time, in a lot of women's lives when you're not tied down by the other things that are, that are just part of your day to day life. The notion of, trying to present yourself, to someone, other than your truly, authentic self, kind of fades away. You know?

Michelle Obama: Yeah, Yeah,

Sharon Malone: You just get to say, you know,

Michelle Obama: This is it.

Sharon Malone: This is it, you know.

Michelle Obama: I have changed, and tried to adapt, and I've been accommodating, I've accommodated my husband, I've accommodated society, I've accommodated my children, now I'm done. Whew.

00:25:47 Sharon Malone: When I turned 60, I said to myself, you know, I'm going to give myself this gift, and the gift is, I'm going to say yes, to everything I want to say yes to, and no to everything I don't. And I don't think I have ever, in my life, given myself permission to do that.

Michelle Obama: And let's stop there, so that the men that could be listening to this, hear this, because, they start doing that, when they're 20. They adopt their, that philosophy much earlier in their lives. Men, it takes us, until we're 50 or 60 to feel free enough, physically and emotionally, to say, I'm going to think about what I want, and say yes and no to the things that bring me joy, or turn me off.

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: It takes us a lifetime to get there.

Sharon Malone: It does. And some people unfortunately never get there, you know, we are, accommodating because that is how, that is what is required of us, you know,

Michelle Obama: To get through,

00:26:47 Sharon Malone: Right. You say, you know, sex, for a woman, you have to have another person into your body, another person. Pregnancy means you've got to share your body, with another human being, for nine months, and that is a, a level of accommodation that you realize that that's why we're always second, because there's always like, I've got to keep this here, got to keep, you know, this pers-, then you get this baby, I've got to keep this baby alive,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Sharon Malone: Because it's a lot harder than it looks, but, you know, I look at it now, and I think about it, and I say hmmm, first time, first time, that we are not having to accommodate

other people. And I think that's a beautiful thing, and I think that's how, women should really, look at menopause. Don't think it, think of it as the end of things, it's the beginning of things, it's the beginning of your new chapter, or as I like to call it, we're entering our third, trimester, you know, of life.

00:27:50 Michelle Obama: Well one of the things we've talked about, and that I'm, I'm finding as I get older, not just dealing with menopause, but dealing with, what does health mean for a woman of our age? Right. So, you know, there's that,

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: But then I think backwards, and I think, well what's what does being healthy mean for women, period? And, we've always talked about how there's so many conflicting messages out there, about, weight, about, mostly about weight, right, first of all, because it seems to be that that's the only thing, from a PR standpoint, that people tend to care about. But, we don't sort of, have a real clear baseline, for what health means for a woman.

00:28:43 Sharon Malone: Women's value, goes up, with how little space you take up, you know.

Michelle Obama: [laughs] Mm hmm.

Sharon Malone: So, the smaller you can make yourself, the higher perceived, you know, socioeconomic group that you're in, and whatever, it's all about being thin. But you're right, being thin, and being healthy are two completely different things. I'm going to focus more on function, than form. So what you look like, and how much you weigh, is less on an issue, particularly as you get older, because the question is, what can you do? What's your function level like?

Michelle Obama: And also, we, we we, come with different skeletal structures.

Sharon Malone: We do.

Michelle Obama: I am, 5'11, and I have hips, and thighs, and I can look over my family, and I can see, that's genetically who I'm supposed to be.

00:29:36 Sharon Malone: We spend a lot of times, a lot of time, being unhappy with our, in our physical selves. My breasts are too small, they're too big, this is too what, that was right, I'd look better if I had, on and on and on and on.

Michelle Obama: Do you know a woman who's happy with herself?

Sharon Malone: Off the top of my head?

Michelle Obama: I mean, yeah, if you just think about it, do you know any woman who would come in and go I'm good? [laughs] I don't know one,

Sharon Malone: Mmmm, mmm , no, cause we were always, we're always trying to fix or tweak something.

Michelle Obama: Yeah, and how exhausting is that?

Sharon Malone: It is,

Michelle Obama: It is an exhausting way to have to live, and so many of us are doing it. Women of a certain age, we, we lose our value in society, unlike men, who gain value the older they get. You know, and those images are propagated in, on television, where you see the frumpy, funny old guy, with the young, vivacious, or even if she's our age, she is perfect.

00:30:41 [laughs] you know. Hair laid, you know, the woman always looks a lot better than her husband in the movies, and it's like well, how is she with him? You know, so that, you know I've heard a lot of women my age, feel like, as, with each age, they feel less seen in a public place. You know, no longer do heads turn, because heads only turn, in your twenties or thirties, or maybe forties, if you, keep up that, bod, you know, in order to be noticed. Women are rewarded for not looking their age, you know, it's like, oh, she snapped back, she doesn't even look like she ever had a baby, she doesn't, so that's essentially saying, she doesn't look like she's maturing,

Sharon Malone: Exactly.

Michelle Obama: And so, wow, that's the goal.

00:31:29 Sharon Malone: People need role models, and they need someone to look, to say, because they don't have, whatever you have in your mind, of what, fifty looks like, or what fifty five looks like, it might be based upon something that is really, not, you know, the way that you would aspire to be, but that's in your head. But the more women that they see, who are, fifty five, sixty, who are out there living their best lives, and being, you know, active, and, physical, and beautiful, you know, but beautiful in a fifty year old way, not in a twenty year old way,

Michelle Obama: Yeah, not in a twenty year old way! Yeah.

Sharon Malone: You know, it's a different way of doing it, and I think that, you know, that's what, you know, we've got to keep putting out there, I think for women, uh, I'm not trying to be twenty, and guess what, I'm just, nope.

Michelle Obama: Mmm mm. I wouldn't, not for, all the tea in China,

00:32:21 Sharon Malone: But, you know, once you sort of redefine what that space is, then it becomes, I think, easier for the women who come behind us.

00:32:37 Sharon Malone: We have had many conversations around a dinner table about health, and everything else going on in the world, and it's good to be able to share, because I think, not many people have, the girlfriend group that we have. That's a safe space, that you can say whatever you want to say, and ask whatever questions come up, and you know, we've solved quite a few problems around that w, around that table.

Michelle Obama: We have, we have, to give people a sense of our women's health group, started in the White House, I have always had this wonderful group of girlfriends. And I thought well I need to not just see them, I have to be out and physical, and doing something that gets me into the fresh air, so I started organizing what I called boot camps. Which were held at Camp David, and I invited a group of women friends, and we started off pretty strict, because I, I was kind of losing my mind back then.

00:33:33 Michelle Obama: I know that I've always had a big commitment to my health, but in the years in the White House, I found that I was more desperate to hang on to that part of

myself, so for me the weekend was important, not just for a physical jump start. But it was an emotional jump start, to be able to be surrounded with some women, that lifted me up, and, I know for me, you all took me out of the world that was stressful and tense, and where the spotlight was burning bright, where we felt like we couldn't make a mistake. And by the end of those three or four days, and over the course of the years and years that we did it, I saw some of my friends, just physically transform themselves, to find a different power, and I thought, wow, what did, what does this say about us as women, that we can, get to our middle age, and and many of us have never discovered or invested in our physical selves in that way.

00:34:37 Sharon Malone: You know, over the years, I've always sort of considered myself, hmm, relatively physically fit, but, you know, that meant, like, oh, couple, 2, 3 times a week I'd do something,

Michelle Obama: Mmm hmm.

Sharon Malone: And I'll never forget that first time I came to Camp David, and I said, we're going to work out three times a day?

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

00:34:58 Michelle Obama: So we would essentially go to Camp David, for three days, where we had intensive workouts, and, healthy eating, that started like, with seven o'clock meditation. And then we'd do a morning cardio, followed by breakfast, then a workout, a second workout, followed by downtime for lunch, where you could get massages or run away from me [laughs] and then we would end, with an afternoon workout, so it was three a day workouts, and, our evenings were really spent, kind of, complaining about the day's workout, probably cursing my name, for making everybody go through all that.

00:35:41 Sharon Malone: We had something that is quite a luxury, cause we had, we would have two or three hours, to talk about things, and, even if you go to your doctor, and you have legitimate questions, you got fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, tops, and, it's hard to get into a rhythm of what you're really trying to ask, and a lot of times, you don't even know what to ask, you're just hoping that someone can direct the conversation, but when you have the luxury of ten women sitting around a room, you know, one thing will spur another question, or another comment, about, what's going on. And, and having the safety, that's also a big, big, big factor in all of this, because most people don't trust enough to be able to say what really is going on with them, or what you really fear.

00:36:31 Michelle Obama: And, cohorts matter with women. They've always mattered for me. Health for me, I enjoy it in community. Like I always joke, it's like, my husband can get on a treadmill, he can follow a workout on a piece of paper in a dark corner in a room, And he could do that everyday. And I look at him sometimes, his workout situation, and go, That's sad. That just makes me sad.

Sharon Malone: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: That you're down here lifting weights by yourself, And he's like, Well, what are you talking about? He's like, doesn't want anybody around! I am happiest, when I am

exercising with my friends! Exercise, if like, I gotta have somebody else, cause we have to talk, while we're doing it, or talk before, or talk afterwards. I say this because if that's part of who we are, as women, and we're trying to fit our health plans into a male model that is very individualized and isolated, well no wonder we're not embracing our health.

00:37:27 Because it's no fun! And, it's, it has to be fun, it has to be collaborative, which is, goes back to our boot camp retreats, you know. We got through those, because we knew well, we're going to eat breakfast together, and then we're gon' workout. And then we're gonna talk, and then we're gonna workout, and then we're gonna complain together, and then we're gonna workout. I want to encourage women, who find it difficult, to get started, to think about, shaping their health communities. Right. You know, cause maybe that's the thing that will keep us in it. I will quit on myself, faster than I'll quit on my friends. So, thank you, Sharon.

Sharon Malone: Oh, you are so welcome, it's been the ride of a lifetime, and we're still on it.

Michelle Obama: Yeah.

00:38:20 Michelle Obama: Isn't she brilliant? I'm so lucky to have Sharon as a friend for so many reasons. And I hope all of you learned something from her too.

As we discussed, I hope you find a way to develop a wellness routine that works for you — a routine that fits who you really are, not one that fits someone else's standards. And I hope you start asking those hard questions and having those conversations about your health—whether that's with your doctor, or your girlfriends, or your partner, or your children. Because that's really the only way we can get through any confusion or uncertainty — by talking through this stuff, together.

That's why I wanted to do this podcast... and that's why I want to thank Sharon for joining us, and thank you for listening, over all these years, girl, thank you so much. Everybody take care, and we will talk soon.

00:39:18 Anna Holmes: The Michelle Obama Podcast is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio, Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes and Mukta Mohan are Executive Producers. Janae Marable is our Editorial Assistant. Adam Sachs is our Consulting Producer.

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Our theme music is by Stevie Wonder. Original music by Andy Clausen and Tele Fresco.

The song you heard at the beginning of this show is "Do What I Do" by Lady Bri.

Thanks for listening to The Michelle Obama Podcast.

00:40:52 BREAK 00:41:12