

## **Transcript of podcast - Why didn't anyone tell me this?**

### **Season 4, episode 1: Professor Joyce Harper: Your Joyful Years: lets make good health and happiness sexy**

Welcome to season four of my podcast. So as always, the first podcast of the year is with me where I will take you through what I've been doing over the last year and some of the things I'm going to be doing in the following year. And I've titled this first podcast of the year, your joyful years. Let's make looking after your good health and happiness sexy. And the reason why I've been doing that is because most of the last year I've been working on my book, your joyful years and the subtitle is Empowering Good Health and Happiness Beyond 50. So if you've been following me on social media, you'll know quite a bit about the book already. But what I wanted to do was to help women who were feeling overwhelmed or those women who are now experiencing this life transition, which is going to be very common around this age. Many women will be postmenopausal and we've got women who were mothers with their children leaving the nest. We've got women who are thinking about retirement if they've had a career. And it's a really interesting time for women. And women are also needing very different lives, most likely than our mothers and grandmothers, where it's quite common now for women to have jobs and to be juggling so much more than previous generations did. So this is bit of a self-help book. I want to give women the time to find their new life because to be honest, we've probably got, if we're over 50, we've probably got maybe 20 good healthy years left. So I want women to be able to thrive. So what I wanted to do was not just write my views, I wanted to share the views of other women because I think that's the best way to live life, to listen to how other people are living their lives and then decide how you want to live yours. So what I did was I asked women who were thriving and happy if they wanted to be interviewed for the book. And I did snowballing where I first of all contacted some women that I know and then I asked them to ask them to give me some names of people who I could interview. So quite a lot of the women, most of the women I didn't actually know before. And it was a really beautiful experience. I told you about the interviews on the last podcast this time last year. So the book's all written now. It's just about to go off to the printers. I'm doing something called hybrid publishing. So I've got a little bit more control, various reasons for doing that. And the book's in two parts. And I think sharing the wisdom and the wise words of 50 women over 50 from around the world.

We've had very different life experiences. I think this is really powerful to hear their stories. So part one is about health. So I've talked about nutrition, exercise, sleep, mental health, friendships and community. There's a chapter on each of those topics. And then part two is about happiness. So it's about hobbies. So there's a chapter on hobbies itself and then one on creativity and travel and relaxation and quality time and alone, time in nature, sense of purpose and career, and also sex and love. So the book actually starts in the introduction with you learning a little bit more about the women that I've interviewed, especially about their ups and downs of their life, so that you can see that their lives have not always been rosy. And the next chapter is about their menopause experience. So a couple of the women were actually still having periods, so they weren't at actually post menopausal, but they had all experienced perimenopause

and I wanted to share their journeys so that we could all reflect and think about how our journey was and how it's affected us now. So I want women to read this book to give them permission to live their lives with self-love and self-care. It's very much about reconnecting with yourself, about rebirthing and about being yourself. So I think this is always a work in progress. No one's ever there. We're always still developing and evolving. So I really hope that this book will lead to lots of wisdom and great discussions with women. I'm really looking forward to go on a UK book tour when I released my last book, *Your Fertile Years* there, we were in lockdown and I didn't do a book tour and I was really upset because I love getting out there and talking to people and hearing what they think about what I've written. So if you want me to come and talk to your book club or to people in your village or your town or your city, please do get in touch. I really want to get those bookings in. I've got quite a few already and I've got my campervan and I'm really happy to travel around the UK or even abroad to talk about your joyful years. So I also wanted to say a little bit about the future. So one thing that really came out of this book was a very sad thing, and that was grief. So some of the women had experienced grief quite young. had parents who had died when they were still adolescents and they were women whose parents had died more recently, people whose partner had died, children had died or they'd experienced miscarriage or infertility. So grief was certainly something that jumped out at me from the book, not something that I really explored in huge depth in the book. I wanted the book to be very positive and I think grief needs to be positive as well.

So my next book is probably going to be called *Your Final Years* and it's going to be about grief and death, but I do want it to be positive. So I've drafted lots of ideas about this at the moment already and I've had people come up to me and start telling me their experiences about death, but also positive experience about death and grief. So get ready for that. I want to leave research for that till the end of the year. I want to enjoy my joyful years and get the book tour underway and get those discussions going. But *Hovering Under Already* is my next book. Your final years where we're going to talk about death and grief and also different ways people cope with death around the world. I want to interview women who have got a terminal illness women that have experienced grief in different ways, maybe children, partners, parents. And just to really explore this in much more depth, I think it's something that we don't talk about. And as I said, we've probably got about 20 healthy years left. Many of us over 50 are experiencing grief of friends, family, et cetera. So it is something that's going to come up more and more. And it seemed the logical progression for that.

So that's all about the writing and the research for my books that I've been doing. Now about the podcasts themselves. So in 2025, we started with a series about understanding reproductive anatomy, which I absolutely love doing. So helped everyone understand the difference between their vulva and vagina, talked about the womb, the penis, the testicles, and I hope that we all learned something from those podcasts. certainly did and it was such a privilege to even have a discussion about the clitoris with Professor Helen O'Connell, who was the person who described the structure of the clitoris not that many years ago. So I learned so much as it was a real pleasure to learn so much during these podcasts on understanding reproductive anatomy.

I then went on to female icons. I've been running a women's group in my town for about eight years and we've often discussed about female icons. I think it's really important and this is something with the book as well, to see people, to see other women who are really shining beacons of what we can achieve and we need those role models. So I did a series on female icons, which I will revisit again. There's obviously lots and lots of female icons. So I'll do that again, maybe this year or definitely 2027. And then I did a mini series about reclaiming joy.

And I am going to start this year with podcasts about becoming jolly. I'm going to start first talking to Dr. Lauren about social media misinformation, which is something I talk a lot about at conferences and to the public. But after that, we're going to head into more about joy and happiness. And in last year's podcast, I really loved doing that. We talked about singing and hiking and drumming and all sorts of things, sound bars. This year we're going to talk about dancing and breath work and I'm also going to talk in this series to some of the women that I interviewed for my book and their views about joy and our joyful years beyond the age of 50. I have actually interviewed quite a few of the women on my podcast already that I interviewed for my book. Later this year in the podcast, we will also revisit what I did last year, how I ended the podcast, which was looking at chronic health conditions. So last year I looked at dementia, obesity, and osteoporosis. And this year I'm going to look at heart disease, cancers, and some other chronic health conditions.

I also finished off last year with a couple of podcasts that I think are really important about how we live our lives. So we looked at alcohol and how that's normalized in society and how problematic that can be. And we also looked at the chemicals in our environment.

I think those were two really, really key podcasts to end the year on because I think listening to both of those, we can really improve our health and our happiness. So please revisit some of those podcasts from last year. All of my podcasts, from season one, are all available on all the podcast channels and also on my website and can find a link to the podcast there. Please also share the podcast, like the podcast, write a review about it so that it gets out there. I'm not very good at marketing. I do do bits and bobs, but I really hope that my podcast can get out there to more people. So please share, like, tell your friends about it and let's get more people listening to my podcasts. So I...

Also, I'm going to be doing a podcast this year with Amber, who runs the Big Retreat Festival. And it was a total pleasure to be a speaker at that event last year. And I'm doing it again this year. And we are having the Big Retreat Festival in Wales but also near my home turf in Cambridge in September. So I really hope that you can come along. I will be at both of them and we will be publishing this year hopefully our paper we did a survey last year people that attended the Big Retreat Festival to ask them what they thought about it how how did it possibly help their physical and mental health and it certainly did improve their physical and mental health and mental health even more so than physical health so I think it's so important to improve our lifestyle by making sure we have time to relax and to close our brain down and reset it and reconnect and

attending something like the Big Retreat Festival will give you many, many ideas on how to do that. And I will be interviewing Amber on my podcast to talk about our research and about retreats in general.

So talking about retreats with my wonderful dear friend and also my agent, Wendy, we ran our first wild swim and yoga retreat in France last year. a sellout retreat and we're going to be running this again at the end of May in 2026. We've even set the date for 2027 and have already had some people book on for next year.

So the retreat will fill up, we've got a couple of spaces left. If you want to come along, please get in touch. You can either just Google it or just contact me. It's via Wendy's website. You'll be able to find out about the Wild Swim and Yoga retreat. You will feel very nurtured at this retreat. We do yoga every day, we do meditations, we will go to some beautiful places to do some wild swimming. So we go to the sea, we go to rivers, we go to lakes, we go to hot springs, we go to waterfalls. It's set in the most beautiful location and we have the most amazing chef who really gives us beautiful food and also some therapists come along to do reflexology and massage and we will have many evening discussions about being healthy and happy as we age. it's a really fun, relaxing, resetting week, ticks those boxes that I always want to tick when I go to a retreat. And it's a week long and it's a real bargain for such a week, a week of being pampered and relaxing. So please, if you want to come either in 2026 or 2027, get in touch and we'll see if we can book you on. So I also wanted to talk to you about my research. I obviously do a lot of research being an academic at UCL. And most of my research now is about education and support for reproductive health, which includes menstruation, and our menstrual cycle, our fertility and our menopause. So I am continuing this year to work with my teams at University College London and globally to make sure that everyone, not just women, but everyone is educated and supported to understand their reproductive health. I think this is absolutely essential. And so I'm really excited about this work and I'm really hoping that we get some big funding so that we can get both of my big projects, which are reproductive health globally and menopause education support in the UK. We really want to move those forward. So we're going to be applying for funding. I've done a number of studies looking already at supplements.

It's a bit of a bugbear for me. On social media, we have so many people selling things. And one of the big things that people sell are supplements. And we even have some medics selling supplements. And I've been very interested in the evidence about this. Is there actually evidence that these supplements will help you? And when anyone wants to take a supplement, I say to them - Why do you want to take it? What do you want to achieve by taking the supplement? If you feel there's something missing in your diet, I think you should look at your nutrition. One of my sayings is back to basics. We need to get back to basics in our health and not think of quick fixes. So we can take drugs and supplements to try and put a bandaid over what's really going on in our life. But I think being back to basics and looking at our lifestyles really, really important. So if you think you've got something missing in your diet, what about replacing that in a more natural way than a supplement? If you've got a symptom that you feel a supplement may help, my advice would be to go to your doctor. If there's a symptom that's affecting your quality of life, your doctor really needs to look at you holistically, see what's going on

and give you the relevant treatment. It may be a supplement, but it may not. So I'm very cautious about people taking supplements. They can cost hundreds of pounds a month and for most of them there's no evidence that they're really going to help. So I started this work last year, we started on menopause supplements and we're continuing this year looking at fertility supplements.

Thinking of going back to basics and looking after our health, I organized our Institute for Women's Health International Women's Day events, which is in March. So International Women's Day is actually the 8th of March, but we always do a number of events around this. Many of them are, well, they're all around lifestyle and they're all around back to basics. So please keep an eye out. They're all open to the public. Some will also be online and you're all welcome to come along and learn something about health and how we can look after that. And there was terrific news when I've recorded this podcast, the week I've recorded it, there was news this week that in the UK, the government announced that from 2027, the NHS will be offering online support for women to discuss any severe menopause or menstrual problems. And we could have online appointments with a GP or expert who can be across the UK, across England. So I think this is going to hopefully speed up how women can get assessed and get the right tests and get treated. So I think that's absolutely brilliant. But to help with this, you're going to see your doctor to be treated, I think getting that education and support before you even go to see your doctor so you can understand your body and so you're more informed about how your body's working and how you can improve that and look after that but also be aware of how it can go wrong and when you need to go and see your GP or a specialist I think's really essential. So that's where my research is going to be concentrating, making sure that we get the information out there to women across the world. And another project I'm starting with that with our international reproductive health education collaboration is we're starting a project in the next few months where we're going to look at what's being taught in schools within Europe. So we've done this in the UK. We've published some papers a few years ago looking at the school curriculum for reproductive health in the UK and we're now going to look at in different countries in Europe and then we're going to continue that work working with teachers and young people in various countries because our international group has made a number of resources for reproductive health education right through from puberty to menopause. We've got free information leaflets on our website, we've got a fertility education poster, we've got some videos listening to people tell their different stories and we've also done this huge piece of work with teachers and young people where it's a resource for teachers to use within schools. So we need to roll that out in different countries and evaluate how teachers are using it and how we can help them. And it's brilliant that in the UK

We are now teaching about menopause in school, but I do wonder whether there's any other country that also has menopause in their school curriculum. So my research is going to find out the answer to that question. So on menopause education, I'm continuing my work with the UCL team, especially with Shima Tariq, our InTune project, where we want women to be in tune with their menopause, in tune with their bodies, and in tune with each other.

So we are working on ways to roll this out. We have had a huge number of meetings and conversations and brainstorming over the last few years about how we can do this. But we know that we need to give everybody, but especially women, two stages of education. Be prepared for menopause, ideally before they get to age 40, so they understand what menopause is and what can happen, the symptoms and the treatments that are available and how they can look after their lifestyle, but also be supported through menopause. So when women are experiencing menopause symptoms, perimenopause symptoms, we want to give them a more detailed education and support at that time when they're actually in it. So those are the two projects that we're working on which comes under the umbrella of InTune. So we're very excited on how we're going to do that and watch this space for more information. So I am also excited to announce that I am undertaking some formal training as a life coach. I've already started this course and it's been fantastic already. I'm looking so forward to the next modules I'm going to do. It's going to run up till the summer. And then hopefully I will be a certified life coach and I'm mainly going to deal obviously in women's health and use my almost 40 years experience in helping women understand their health. So as a women's health coach, I'm going to be dealing as I've already mentioned with those three key areas of menstruation and menstrual cycle. Those women who are thinking of getting pregnant or trying to get pregnant and helping them through that life stage and also helping women through the menopause transition. So I will be asking for some guinea pigs to do some one-to-one sessions with. I'll do my first ones obviously for free. So if that's something that you'd like to be involved with, let me know. And then once I'm qualified later in the year, I'll be offering more one-to-one sessions and be doing more seminars and webinars and all sorts of things to help women understand their health. So that's everything that I, well not everything, that's most of the things I've been doing over the last year and where I'm heading.

I really want 2026 to be all of yours, healthiest and happiest life yet. And I think that to do this, we have to practice self care and self love. We need to reconnect with our bodies. We need to reconnect with our friendships. Sisterhood is so important for women. I am really loving my growing sisterhood community and loving those relationships that I have developed over my life. I have one important thing to say about something that came up through the book and some discussions I've had with women about relationships with other women. I think that when we're younger, I don't know how much is hormonal or societal, but women have reputation for being a bit bitchy and we can be hard on each other. We can be very critical. I know I've been very hard on my friends through my earlier years and I do regret that - really regret that. But I have noticed that as we've got older, we park so much of that. And my great example is my relationship with my school friends. So we've known each other for way over 50 years. I'm 63 in a couple of weeks. So we've known each other, some of us for 57, 58 years. And when we used to meet up, we've met up pretty regularly throughout those decades. When we used to meet up, common story that I've heard from other groups of there can be some underlying currents, there can be a bit of bitchiness and a little bit of tension. But I have noticed in the last 10 years that when we've met up, that's not there anymore. It's gone. There's just love and warmth and caring. And we come away feeling so wonderful and in tune with each other. And I think this is something that women really need to think about. Think about those female relationships and that sisterhood. think

it's so important. I think female spaces, female circles, women's circles have become really important as we age and I'm sure many of you will have heard this as well. There is this urge for us women to live together. I certainly don't feel that I would like to live with a guy again. I've got some of my sons still here. The house is messy. I just think certainly as we get older sometimes that relationship with men does change in men and women, some men and women, I am very generalizing here and I am probably going to get people trolling me about these comments, but I'm just speaking from the heart. I think we do become a little bit more distant. We can, we may be. I know there are many women and many of the women I interviewed for my book are in loving long-term relationships with their male partner and a very, very happy living with them and being with them. But I also see women who are very happy being single or very happy having a relationship but not living with that person. So I think sisterhood is a real theme for me for 2026 and think about your female relationships and think about your friendships. Reconnect with friends that you may have lost touch with.

If you haven't spoken to one of your dearest friends from when you were younger for a long time, just give them a ring or send them a message and see something beautiful might come from that. And something beautiful comes from new relationships with women as well. So certainly for me, this urge to think about living in a female commune is growing. I wish it could be possible. I am hoping to move house in a few years. We'd all managed to do that. I don't know, because I've got friends all around the country and we do want to live in different places. But for me, I know I definitely want to live near water. I want to continue my hobbies, which I love. Being outside, being in nature, being in water, as you know, again, if you follow me on social media, I think it's such a great way for me to relax. think hobbies are really, really important.

So I want you to think about your visions for 2026. We are doing our vision boards next week with my women's group, The Purple Tent. And I know for me, it is going to be about all the things I said at the beginning of this podcast, all the things that are in my book, looking after my five pillars of health, my exercise, my nutrition, my sleep, all the things that can help with my mental health. And as I said, my friendships and community. I am going to do more hobbies. I'm going to be creative more, spend even more time in nature, try and spend more time relaxing and being calm. I want to read more. I want to be still more. That's very much a work in progress. I have a hammock in my garden, which I have hardly ever sat in in the last few years. 2026, I'm going to sit in my hammock. So all of these topics are going to be on my vision boards for 2026. I always do two, I do one for work and one for home, but they've really overlapped a lot over the last few years and I keep wondering whether I should just do one to cover my whole life, but I think I'm going to do two in 2026. So if you haven't done a vision board before, I think it's really great because I think it gives you time to reflect on the previous year, what worked, what made you happy, what made you healthy and think about what you want to do in 2026 to build on that and be even happier and even healthier. So it's great because you think and reflect about your visions. So that's one of the bonuses of doing a vision board. But I also think it's very powerful to make that vision an actual thing that you can see. mine are both in a place that I can see every day. So you mustn't make it and put it put it in the back of a cupboard, you must have it on view. So I know, I think I talk about this in all of my podcasts, but think about your vision and your goals for 2026.

They could be small or as large as you want them to. Some things you might want to be really large. For example, I would love to do some documentaries about your joyful years. I'd love to do that. I've been interviewed for one. But I want to get these messages out there. I want to do more podcasts, more things on TV and in the media to get these messages out there and to give women permission to have good health and happiness.

So at the end of my podcasts, I always ask people what makes them happy and where is their happy place? So I think I've just covered that. Mine's pretty much been the same, I think, in all of my podcasts. And this is my fourth one that I've done on my own.

But I then finish by asking, what is your advice to your younger self? And in my book, this is all covered in the final chapter. So my final chapter, I bring together the answers to the questions to the women. Do they feel free? I think we need to feel free. We always have commitments. If you've got children or people that we're looking after, but I still think you can feel freedom for some of the time. I also asked them about their views on religion and spirituality and I covered that in the last chapter but the very final part of Your Joyful Years is the answers to the question what advice would you give your younger self and some of the women gave it very specifically to them themselves so something that had very specifically happened in their life that they wish that they hadn't done. So there was quite a few, for example, that they wish they spent more time picking the right partner because they hadn't picked the right partner. And that was been their advice to the younger self. Some of them said they wish they'd said yes to more things. Some said they wish they'd said no to more things. Some said they wish they traveled more or been on more adventures. So there was all sorts of things that were very, quite specific, but some of them were just quite general and were good advice to any woman. So it was a really powerful way to end the book. And it's the only place in the book where I share quotes from all 50 women. Throughout the book, I've shared different quotes at various points. So it makes the book flow better. But there I've shared what every woman said about their advice to their younger self. So when I first did this podcast in series, Series one, my advice to my younger self was very specific to me. It was to sort out my sugar addiction and to spend more time being still and quiet. The latter is still a work in progress, but I have sorted out my sugar addiction. I have now been 18 months without eating cakes, sweets, desserts, biscuits, ice cream and chocolate and I never thought I'd do that and I have tried to do it before and I've done it for a month every now and then in my life and I always went back to it but I'm done I'm done I might never eat any of those things again and I really don't care it is it's tricky it's like if you try to give up alcohol or reduce your alcohol it's socially um looked on as a bit a little bit unacceptable not to have an alcoholic drink or not to eat that dessert that someone has cooked you or the cake that someone's bought in for their birthday celebration. But I think if you just stop and say I'm not doing it at all, it does actually make it a little bit easier. So my advice to my younger self that I've actually written in the book, I have said that again, sort out your sugar addiction earlier. And I've also said more about the stillness, try to invest more time in relaxing and being still. It is, I think it's always going to be a work in progress that.

But I've also added, think more about your relationships. So I think in my life, very specific to me, you have to read this in the book about why this happened to me, but I



never really trusted men. I always thought they were going to leave me. So my advice about my relationships is to trust the men in your life. They love you. And I've also said, don't gossip so much. It may backfire. I definitely said too much about too many people in my life. was too honest about people. And sometimes that came across as too gossipy and too bitchy. But as I've said, I really think that's changed. And I think partly that's due to age. But I also finished by saying, don't be so critical of others. And that's to do with definitely a bit of that bitchiness of when I was younger. I think I've been too hard on people, too hard on my friends and now at this stage of my life I feel so much more love for everybody and accepting of different people's personalities. I know that I can be really annoying. So I want people to be less critical of me as well so yeah don't be so critical of others accepting different people's personality types.

That's the end. That's the end of this first podcast. I hope you are appreciative of the work that I'm doing. I am really trying to help people. Not everyone's going to agree with my view. I don't agree with everyone else's view either. I do get criticized on social media a bit and it hurts. It does really hurt. So we have to be accepting that people have different views and agree to disagree, but we should also be allowed to say our own views about things. And I will continue to do that and I'll try to continue to be strong and tell everyone my opinion, but it's just my opinion. I wish you all good health and happiness for 2026 and I hope you have a brilliant year. Thank you.