

# How To Menopause

Take Charge of Your Health,  
Reclaim Your Life, and  
Feel Even Better Than Before

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TAMSEN FADAL

Foreword by LISA MOSCONI, PhD,  
*New York Times* bestselling author of *The Menopause Brain*

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NEW YORK BOSTON

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*To my mother, Libby Ann Fadal*

*We didn't know medical menopause (after treatment for breast cancer) was the reason you would get so hot at restaurants or spend nights unable to sleep.*

*Now I understand that every time you tried to laugh it off, inside you were probably feeling ashamed and embarrassed and wondering why this was happening to you.*

*My heart hurts when I think of it. I'm so sorry.*

*I have committed my voice to making sure no woman feels that alone again.*

*With everlasting love,  
Tamsen*

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*There is no greater power in the world than a menopausal woman with zest.*

—MARGARET MEAD

## Author's Note

1. HRT (hormone replacement therapy) is now commonly referred to as HT (hormone therapy) or MHT (menopausal hormone therapy). For the purposes of this book, we are going to stay with HT, since most of us are more familiar with that term.
2. It is important to know that menopause does not happen only to heterosexual, cisgender<sup>1</sup> women—many queer, nonbinary, and/or transgender people go through menopause as well, and many face challenges getting appropriate health care due to a lack of standardized treatments and data. It is important to find a health-care provider who is knowledgeable and informed when it comes to treatment options.
3. I use the words *female*, *females*, *woman*, and *women* to refer to “people with ovaries.”
4. In my interviews with experts, I added context or information in parentheses—these additions are my words, not theirs.
5. When it comes to perimenopause and menopause, diversity, equity, and inclusion must be a top priority as we continue to research, find solutions, and expand this conversation.
6. The quotes set off in bold type throughout this book are from real women who have graciously shared their stories with me.
7. In order to avoid typing out “perimenopause and menopause” throughout the book, I use “(peri)menopause” to connote both of these distinct phases of a woman’s life.

# **Foreword**

***By Lisa Mosconi, PhD***

*Director of the Women's Brain Initiative and Alzheimer's Prevention Program, associate professor of neuroscience in neurology and radiology at Weill Cornell Medicine, and New York Times bestselling author of The Menopause Brain*

**M**enopause has a way of sneaking up on women. One day, you're going about your life, and the next, you find yourself blindsided—feeling confused, out of sorts, and wondering what on earth is happening to your body and mind. Maybe it's the brain fog, the hot flashes, or the sleepless nights that come first. Maybe it's the emotional shifts that make you feel like you no longer recognize yourself. For many women, menopause feels like it hits out of nowhere, leaving us scrambling for answers, unsure of what to expect next. It's often a silent struggle, too, with too many of us feeling confused and isolated, not knowing where to turn for help.

When I first started my career as a neuroscientist focusing on women's brain health, I quickly realized how little we knew about this experience. It wasn't just the physical changes that weren't being discussed—no one was talking about the profound effect that menopause has on the brain. The topic was overlooked by both science and society, and that had to change.

So I launched the Women's Brain Initiative at Weill Cornell Medicine, and while my work initially focused on Alzheimer's prevention in women (who are disproportionately affected by the disease), we began to look at the impact of menopause on the brain. This critical phase in life can bring on

profound neurological shifts that many women, and even their health-care providers, are unaware of. From brain fog to memory lapses and an increased risk for Alzheimer's, menopause influences us in ways we are just beginning to understand.

Today, many discoveries—and headaches—later, I am proud to be part of a growing movement bringing these issues to the forefront, ensuring that women are informed and empowered as they navigate menopause. And it was through that movement that I first met Tamsen Fadal.

I was speaking at a menopause event, and I remember looking into her big, sparkling eyes and instantly feeling this wonderful, clean energy. There are some people you know you can trust the moment you meet them, and Tamsen is truly exceptional in that regard. Her warmth and authenticity radiated, making me feel not only welcomed but understood. From that very first conversation, I knew we would become both professional partners and great friends, bonding over our shared mission to raise awareness and provide women with the knowledge they need to take control of their health.

One of our more recent collaborations was when Tamsen visited my lab for her PBS documentary, *The M Factor*. Spending the day with my team at the Women's Brain Initiative, Tamsen dove deep into the research, exploring the brain scans and the science behind our studies on menopause and brain health. Her curiosity and genuine interest in our work were palpable, and it wasn't just me who felt it—my entire team was absolutely thrilled to have her in the lab. Even the shyest among my students stepped forward with newfound confidence. They proudly presented their achievements, energized by Tamsen's warmth and encouragement. It was a joy to witness how her presence sparked such enthusiasm and pride in the team.

When our first-ever study on estrogen activity in the brain was accepted for publication, I immediately asked Tamsen to join me for an Instagram Live session to announce the results. She brought her characteristic warmth, clarity, and enthusiasm to the discussion, helping me translate complex scientific findings into practical advice for women everywhere. We've since appeared on national television together, advocating for greater awareness

of how menopause impacts brain health. Tamsen's commitment to the cause is unparalleled, and her work has made a lasting impact on how we talk about menopause today.

*How to Menopause* is Tamsen's indispensable guide for every woman navigating this inevitable life transition. With her signature blend of expertise and relatability, she demystifies menopause, making it less daunting and much more manageable. Tamsen has synthesized a road map of insights from over forty experts, her own health coach training, and real-life stories of women, that not only addresses the symptoms of menopause but also empowers women to take charge of their health. And one of the things I admire most about Tamsen is how she presents information: she brings an informed yet optimistic, much-needed perspective to menopause, the "upside" that women deserve.

Now that menopause is having a moment, so to speak, many voices have jumped on the bandwagon, and women are bombarded with messages that are difficult to parse. Is menopause just healthy aging? Is it a condition that must be treated with prescription therapies? Are there more than thirty symptoms of menopause, or are there more than thirty reasons why midlife women can have a hard time? These conflicting viewpoints can be confusing, leaving many women feeling unsure of what to believe, and what steps to take.

Rather than taking sides or adopting a polarized stance, *How to Menopause* achieves what most scientists truly value: balance, nuance, and open-mindedness. Tamsen acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all answer, and that every woman's experience is different and just as valid as any other's. I particularly appreciate her message that menopause is not the end, nor is it a sign that you are broken. Instead, it is a life event—though often challenging—that every woman can navigate through successfully. Tamsen's reassuring voice makes it clear that this is not a time to feel defeated, but rather a chance to embrace a new chapter with strength and resilience, and appropriate clinical advice.

This book covers everything from the early signs of perimenopause to the



more complex aspects of hormone therapy, nutrition, and how to rediscover joy in your sex life. Tamsen also tackles topics that are often neglected, such as how to navigate menopause in the workplace and how to maintain strong relationships during this transformative phase of life. Through her candid and heartfelt writing, Tamsen ensures that no woman feels alone or confused by the changes happening to her body. In fact, her book is like having a big sister by your side—someone who has been through it all, has heard it all, and is eager to share her wisdom so that you can not only “survive” menopause but thrive during and beyond it. Her commitment to helping women feel empowered and informed is woven throughout the book, providing readers with both practical advice and emotional support.

*How to Menopause* is more than just advice—it provides a lifeline. Through her honesty, humor, research, and relentless commitment to women’s health, Tamsen Fadal has created a guide that is both practical and deeply personal. Whether you’re just beginning to experience perimenopause or are well into this transition, these words will leave you feeling more confident, more informed, and—most importantly—never alone.

This book is the trusted friend every woman needs as she navigates this new chapter, and I couldn’t be more proud to be part of it.

Lisa Mosconi, PhD  
September 2024

## INTRODUCTION

### In Menopause... Any Questions?

“If I fall over,” I said, “somebody catch me.”

On November 19, 2019, at ten thirty p.m., I heard myself saying those words out loud. A minute earlier, delivering the evening news on television as I’d done for nearly thirty years, I could not remember how to pronounce the word *subpoena*. As a prime-time news anchor with a very public job, this was obviously a problem.

It had been happening more and more often in recent weeks. I would read the news from the teleprompter, but then I would get to an ordinary word and ask myself, “*What is that word?*” I couldn’t get it from my brain to my mouth, so I had to skip it. I knew that if you were listening closely, a lot of my sentences didn’t make total sense. Understandably, I’d begun feeling nervous on the air, something that had not happened for years.

Tonight, though, was different. My heart started beating very hard against my chest. As I broke for a commercial, I felt a hot blast from inside, an epic eruption that instantly superheated the surface of my skin. Sweat began to trickle down my hairline and darken the armholes of my sheath dress, as if I had just run a 5K. I had no idea how intense some hot flashes can be, or even that I was experiencing one, but I knew I was not going to be okay on the air. That’s when I heard myself saying, “If I fall over, somebody catch me.”

In a studio full of men, only the sports anchor turned and looked at me.

“Tamsen,” he frowned, “you okay?”

“Sort of,” I told him. My voice sounded very far away. My heart was

racing out of control. Sweat was dripping down my neck, between my breasts.

And then I felt him taking me by the arm, and we were walking out of the studio, down the hall to the women's restroom. I felt as if I were going to pass out or be sick. Once inside, I did something I would never do if I were in my right mind. I lay down on the cool floor—germs be damned—and closed my eyes. I tried to breathe. I had been an anchor for three decades, and this was the first time I would not finish a show.

That night, riding home in a taxi, I watched the city pass by in a blur of lighted buildings and thought about the last few months. That word recall had become a consistent problem. And there had been more strange things happening, including restlessness, insomnia, anxiety, and weight gain. Could it be my thyroid? My heart? Or worse—my brain?

When I went to the doctor, he told me it was stress. “Why don’t you meditate?” he’d asked with a condescending smile. “Try being more mindful.” *Mindful of what?* I thought. I hadn’t been anxious that night. I had been happy. It was Friday, and I was looking forward to the weekend. Then, this—was it a panic attack?—had come on like a storm.

I felt a deep sense of shame and embarrassment. What was wrong with me?

Little did I know, there was nothing wrong with me. I was not imagining things. I was not sick. I did not have an anxiety disorder. What had happened was that I had run smack-dab into the best kept secret out there.

### **The Diagnosis That Rocked Me to My Core**

I’ll tell you one word I never saw on the teleprompter: *menopause*. But that’s the one I saw staring back at me from my patient portal a few months later.

After weeks of going from doctor to doctor, I finally learned the truth. My gynecologist, who I’d been seeing for twenty years, dropped a bomb on me in a curt, four-word message to my patient portal:

“In menopause... any questions?”

It arrived as my boyfriend (now husband) Ira and I were boarding a plane back to New York City after a weekend away.

I stared at my phone. Those four words stared back.

*“In menopause.”* How could that be? Even though my previously regular periods had become pretty erratic over the last several years, I was shocked. I thought my cycles had just been thrown off by work stress, anxiety from my divorce, a new relationship, an aging parent, and everything else that had been preoccupying me.

I turned to Ira and said, “I’m in menopause.” I’m not sure that any man knows how to respond to that. Our row was called, and as we got in line to board the plane, I felt the tears coming.

As our plane flew us home, I flashed back to some super odd times over the past several years. One time, I had bled for an entire month. At work during newscasts, I’d craftily hide a tampon in my cleavage and run to the bathroom in the commercial breaks, constantly battling the heavy bleeding that soaked through everything. (In my case, I’d also had endometrial polyps—overgrowths of the lining of the uterus that can be either benign, precancerous, or cancerous [mine were benign] that can contribute to irregular bleeding, which I assumed had caused the bleeding. I’d get the polyps removed, and then start bleeding erratically again, which explains why I hadn’t realized that I had experienced that hallmark of menopause—going a full twelve months without a period.)

And there was more: My sleep had been off for years. The woman who used to fall asleep the minute her head hit the pillow spent a lot of time sleeping on the couch in hopes that a change of environment would bring on a good night’s rest. I had started losing my hair. My arms were changing and so was my waist (without any alterations to my eating or exercise). And then there were the times my body felt like an inferno, and I was sure I was coming down with something. Turns out I already had it: menopause.

I didn’t recognize the changes as being hormonally related because no one was talking about what women’s hormones go through in midlife, least of all my doctor. Even though millions upon millions of women were