



*Beyond
Menopause*

New Pathways to Holistic Health

Carolyn Torkelson MD and Catherine Marienau PhD



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Beyond Menopause

Beyond Menopause brings to light the unique healthcare needs of postmenopausal women. It offers women integrative-holistic approaches that bridge the gap between conventional medicine and systems of holistic healing. Integrative strategies are highlighted in the context of common health conditions, including anxiety, fatigue, sleep disturbance, sexual health, weight concerns, bone health, and brain health. Up-to-date information is provided about the use of hormone therapy during the menopause transition. Clinical vignettes illustrate how individual women explore pathways to better health through shared decision-making with their health practitioners.

Women of postmenopausal age want to remain healthy, vital, and engaged, yet they are often overlooked in the healthcare system. In this phase of life, women need to create their own integrative path to wellness. *Beyond Menopause* shows women how to prime their voice for self-advocacy and establish collaborative relationships with their health practitioners. Women are advised to create an adaptable network of practitioners to accommodate changing needs—their own “web of wellness.”

Beyond Menopause brings a fresh perspective to the mental, physical, and spiritual elements of holistic living. From the distinct vantage points of medicine and neuroscience, the authors guide women toward new pathways to optimal health and well-being.



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Many of the clinical vignettes are based on women in Dr. Torkelson's practice; names, details, and any other personally identifiable information have been changed to protect patient privacy.

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For our daughters, Erica and Anna



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Foreword

A number of excellent books have been written about menopause, but few focus on the years beyond menopause, and very few offer a holistic approach. Carolyn Torkelson and Catherine Marienau are the perfect duo to write this book for women and health providers. Carolyn brings years of holistic clinical experience and research in women's health. Catherine brings years of experience as a mentor, teacher, and author in higher learning for women, and she co-hosts a weekly podcast featuring inspiring stories from women over 70. Their work with thousands of women over five decades is the cornerstone of this book. Their collaborative spirit creates a deeper and more inclusive perspective on women's holistic living.

Carolyn brings the same spirit to our collaboration as co-chairs of the Minnesota Holistic Medicine Group (MHMG), which I founded in the late 1980s. The MHMG is composed of 900 Minnesota healthcare practitioners from all disciplines. We connect with like-minded practitioners to learn from each other and support a referral network. The MHMG is a branch of our national organization, the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine.

My path as an early adapter in holistic medicine began when my wife (a nurse) and I joined the Peace Corps in 1967. I was a medical doctor serving in Malaysia and Ghana, and part of my work was at an Aboriginal hospital near Kuala Lumpur. During those years, I was exposed to a wide range of healing modalities that expanded my vision and ideas of how healing can occur.

I returned to the United States to become one of the first physicians to complete a residency in family medicine. I found "my tribe" with the newly formed American Holistic Medical Association. Here were doctors who were interested not just in what was wrong with a patient but why the problem was occurring. I learned to always ask, "What is the body in its wisdom trying to tell this person?"

As integrative medicine moves to the forefront of health care, I believe that everyone, after reading this book, will better understand the true meaning of holistic and integrated approaches to healthcare for postmenopausal women. The authors encourage women to know themselves and prime their voice for self-advocacy. The book goes beyond the physical aspects of the body by integrating emotional, social, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. Now that is holistic!

Congratulations to Carolyn and Catherine for this incredible book of information for every woman aged 40 and beyond.

Bill Manahan, MD

Assistant Professor Emeritus

University of Minnesota Medical School &

Academic Health Center

Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine,

Lee Lipsenthal Lifetime Achievement Award, 2016

*Author of Eat for Health: Fast and Simple Ways of
Eliminating Diseases Without Medical Assistance*



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Preface

Ours is a friendship born out of a shared passion for adventure and wanting to make a difference in innovative ways. As young women born and raised in rural Minnesota, we lived relatively sheltered lives. Then, in the fall of 1967, college happened, and we left our small towns for university life. During the 1960s, college campuses were in turmoil with social justice issues including civil rights, student rights, women's rights, and the pervasive anti-Vietnam War movement. We studied hard and worked hard, and as graduation loomed on the horizon, the desire was brewing to explore and experience new adventures. So, the history major, Carolyn, and the anthropology major, Catherine, embarked on loosely planned, summer-long, independent study projects in Mexico.

Each equipped with a backpack, sleeping bag, two changes of clothes, and \$200, we traveled third-class buses from West to East coasts with forays into southern and northern regions. We explored numerous archeological sites, from Teotihuacan to Palenque to Tulum. Too poor to hire a tour guide or even splurge on guidebooks, we nonetheless marveled at the sights, with admittedly limited understanding of what we were seeing.

The connection between this story and the story of how we came to write a book together, so many years later, lies in a little-known, enchanting island off the east coast of Mexico. In the summer of 1970, we hopped on a motorized rubber raft, leaving from a deserted white sand beach that thousands of tourists now know as Cancun, to arrive at Isla Mujeres—Island of Women. The native undeveloped beauty of the island inspired Carolyn (always the visionary) to pronounce “I will live here someday.” Sure enough, more than 25 years ago, Carolyn and her husband purchased a condo on Isla Mujeres, and Catherine has been a regular wintertime visitor.

And so, our co-authorship was born. In February 2019, on Isla Mujeres, we spent a week sketching out an outline for *Beyond Menopause: New Pathways to Holistic Health*. We became excited about connecting our passions—integrative women's health and adult learning and the brain. We imagined that postmenopausal women—and their healthcare providers—could benefit from a focused look at common health conditions during this time of life and integrative approaches to address them. We imagined that women could become more engaged advocates and partners in their own healthcare.

Although we have been friends for more than 50 years, traveled and vacationed together, and talked extensively about our work in innovative education and health, *Beyond Menopause* is our first professional adventure as a duo. *Adventure* is the right word as we explored how to stay connected while living in different states (Illinois and Minnesota), express our collective and separate voices, identify the intersections of our expertise and perspectives, and present mature women as inspiring heroines through their stories of integrative health and well-being.



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About the Authors

Carolyn Torkelson, MD

Dr. Torkelson's route from history major to integrative health physician has been circuitous. She began her health career as a nurse, eventually working as a nurse practitioner in a holistic clinic, an experience that inspired her to go to medical school with a focus on preventive care and holistic health. But once in practice, she quickly learned that Western medicine had few answers to the array of chronic illnesses that plagued her patients. She committed herself to find alternative solutions to the myriad problems and concerns she heard about every day. At the time, formal training programs in integrative-holistic medicine did not exist, so Dr. Torkelson studied botanical and functional medicine, explored self-care, and became active with the American Holistic Medical Association, a group of like-minded practitioners. What sets Dr. Torkelson apart is her quest to complement traditional medicine with her rich knowledge of other healing approaches. She spent a year in Guatemala working in a mission clinic, worked on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota, and spent time in northern India learning about Tibetan medicine.

After 10 years in family medicine, Dr. Torkelson joined the faculty of the University of Minnesota and completed a master's in clinical research. She has been involved in numerous research studies on integrative medicine. Since 2004, her clinical practice has focused on women's health and providing integrative healthcare to women of all ages. When she reflects on how she came to be an advocate for integrative healthcare, Dr. Torkelson realizes it was in incremental phases. In her words, "I did not have a transformative experience or an 'aha' moment that sent me on a quest for enlightenment. Rather, it was a slow emergence of an innate understanding that how we eat, think, sleep, and move affect our emotional and spiritual states." Dr. Torkelson is emblematic of many women her age who experience ups and downs, successes and failures, but more importantly, are infused with the desire to continue on a purposeful life journey.

Dr. Torkelson is on the boards of Pathways, a crisis healing center, and of the National BOLDER Women's Health Coalition. She co-chairs the Minnesota Holistic Medicine Group, an organization that started 30 years ago and now connects 900 holistic providers from multiple healing disciplines. Although Dr. Torkelson retired from the University of Minnesota in December 2019, with the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, she returned to a faculty position as a community preceptor.

Catherine Marienau, PhD

For more than 50 years, Dr. Marienau has been listening to women's stories in their pursuit of higher education. While serving as an academic tutor at the Center for Higher Education for Low-Income People (HELP) at the University of Minnesota, she witnessed the power of learning for nontraditional learners—people who because of age, location, life circumstance, or ethnic or racial identity—had been shut out of higher education. The women attending the HELP Center had especially inspiring life stories because they pursued learning in the face of enormous barriers, including

limited finances, family responsibilities, work obligations, low self-esteem, unsupportive family and friends, and more.

Dr. Marienau continued serving adult learners in the University Without Walls program during its experimental start-up year in 1971, going on to become the program director and academic mentor from 1974 to 1983. Her philosophy was “the ethics of choice and care,” and her goal was to reform higher education, along with providing access and quality learning opportunities for nontraditional or marginalized learners. Three-quarters of the students in the program were women in their 30s to 60s, a statistic that persists to this day in adult-focused programs across the country.

In 1983, Dr. Marienau joined the School for New Learning at DePaul University in Chicago, where, again, most learners were mature women. For 35 years, she taught a course on women’s issues, in various formats. She conducted research on the barriers to higher education for rural women and on experiences of vital women in their 70s and beyond. Again, she based her mentoring on and practiced her philosophy of choice and care, working in partnership with women to ensure that their learning and its outcomes mattered.

Dr. Marienau holds a master’s degree in the social and philosophic foundations of education, with an emphasis on anthropology and innovative higher education, and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis on adult higher education. She is a master practitioner of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), which complements more recent study and writing in affective neuroscience and learning.

PERSONAL NOTES FROM THE AUTHORS

My inspiration to write about postmenopausal women comes directly from the many women I’ve seen and listened to throughout 30 years of clinical practice. Women have encouraged me to share their stories from a holistic perspective, one that touches on all aspects of well-being. Now, in the early phase of retirement from clinical practice, I am quieting my mind to recall their voices and listen to my inner voice, and to intertwine their stories and mine into a narrative that speaks to the heart of women. When Catherine agreed to co-author *Beyond Menopause*, I was excited (and relieved) that I could share thoughts, ideas, and stories with someone who has walked with me through the ups and downs of life for the last 50 years. It has been an honor to collaborate and write about women’s journeys through the lens of innate learning and wisdom. Recently, I have developed a website (womenagingwell.org) to provide women with holistic approaches and innovative pathways to optimize their health.

—Carolyn Torkelson, MD

In my doctoral studies, I was taught the prevailing models of human development that depicted women as less developed, intellectually and ethically, than men. Really? This is a prime example of reality disputing theory. I dedicated most of my career to mentoring women in their educational pursuits and supporting them in their quests

for personal development. Since I turned 70 and retired from my full-time faculty position in 2019, I am fortunate to be collaborating with women colleagues on topics that matter to women. With them, I am extending my public voice: writing and consulting about neuroscience and adult learning; advocating for end-of-life options; contributing to a longitudinal study of vital women's experiences of aging; and co-hosting a podcast—*Women Over 70: Aging Reimagined*—that features women, ages 70 to 100+, who lead inspiring and meaningful lives (womenover70.com). The opportunity to co-author *Beyond Menopause* has added a whole new dimension to my mission to support aging women in creating their best life.

—Catherine Marienau, PhD



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Introduction: Women Coming of Age

If you are a woman beyond menopause, you likely have one-third or more of your life left to live. You are part of the growing female demographic—older women who have unique healthcare needs yet are subject to a health system that has both historically and currently overlooked them. Rather than settle for being ignored, we believe that women can learn to advocate more forcefully for the care they need. With 30–50 years left to live after menopause, we want you to optimize your health no matter where you are on the health spectrum. We believe that women benefit most from a preventive and integrative approach to health that addresses their diverse needs.

Postmenopausal women are growing in numbers. The baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, make up a large portion of postmenopausal women and are living long, healthy lives. Members of the Silent Generation and Generation X are also part of this growing demographic. American women aged 65 and older tripled between 2005 and 2015 and will double again by 2030.¹ This unprecedented number of women presents the healthcare system with significant healthcare challenges and many opportunities for improvement. We are at the precipice of transformative change! We need a more comprehensive, integrative healthcare system that reaches beyond the conventional model and considers other wellness systems and healing modalities. Leading this charge are older women who have matured through decades of paternalistic socialization about health, as well as gender, race, and age discrimination.

THE MYTHS OF SEXISM AND AGEISM

Consider the environment in which most contemporary postmenopausal women were raised. *Sexism*, a term first introduced in 1968, was embedded in societal messages that permeated our lives. The roles for many of our mothers were well defined: a domestic life centered on childbearing and childrearing, homemaking, and being a good wife. Many of us growing up in the '50s and '60s faced limited choices and opportunities, just because of our gender. For example, in most schools, formalized sports activities were available only for boys, so exercise did not become a regular part of girls' lives. On the career front, young women were encouraged to consider chiefly secretarial, nursing, or teaching roles. These discriminatory limitations placed on girls and women fit comfortably into daily life without much thought.

Many of us came of age in the 1960s when social turmoil, women's and civil rights movements, and educational innovations were exposing the many discriminations faced by women. Despite the pressures to comply with social norms and sexism, the postmenopausal women of today have been trailblazers in every phase of their adult lives. We have integrated higher education; entered and changed the workforce; and redefined sexuality, marriage, childbearing, and parenting.