

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021



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magazine

Endurance





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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Nurture ourselves, our children, our partners, and our community; create an environment of support, information sharing, and connection; learn, teach, create, have fun, and provide balance in our lives and in the lives of our growing families.

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Letter from the Editor: Losing Sight, Finding Our Way

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is an editor and mom to three extremely high-energy children whose antics give her endless opportunities to engage the skills needed for endurance.

and kicks the ground, unwilling to walk. These are feats of fortitude we display daily, usually without thinking, because we know there's no choice.

This pandemic has sometimes made us lose sight of what we're capable of. Unable to see relatives, constantly worried about the safety of every little interaction, overwhelmed by the impossible task of homeschooling upset children—it can seem like too much. Despair kicks in, we yell at our kids, grab the emergency Doritos, and furiously text our friends: “Guys, I don't think I can do this anymore; I'm going to crack.” But we

Moms know endurance. We know what it's like to jiggle a sleepless infant on our knees all night until the sunrise casts a yellow glow on our bloodshot eyes and we hear the sounds of the household rousing. We know what it's like to stand on a crowded sidewalk for an eternity, arms folded, jaws clenched, cheeks flushed with equal parts anger and embarrassment as a prostrate toddler wails

don't. We may say some regrettable things to our partners, we may kill that bottle of wine a little too fast, we may add a few too many impulse items to our Amazon cart. But by and large, our foundations stay intact. We're mothers; persevering in the face of exhausting, relentless obstacles is bound up in our DNA. If it weren't, we wouldn't have lasted more than six soaked pairs of pants into potty training before giving up. We wouldn't have tried for days, weeks, months, to establish a successful nursing latch, despite bloody, painful nipples. We wouldn't have surmounted the incalculable challenges that motherhood sends our way. But we do. And because we endure, our children grow up to be functioning, independent members of society—with clean underwear.

This issue reminds us of our ability to endure at a time when it's so desperately needed. On page 20, Veronica Reilly-Granich shares what endurance athletes can tell us about persevering through this pandemic. Clare Deignan, on page 16, faces the battle of food challenges head-on, telling

“We're mothers; persevering in the face of exhausting, relentless obstacles is bound up in our DNA.”

us how we can thrive in the face of celiac disease and gluten intolerance. And we are including one of our most popular archival articles demystifying menopause, which is a years-long experience but not something to fear.

Sonya Abrams

Housekeeping

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NEXT ISSUE: Beginnings

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggm.org.

THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: Holidays spent in isolation, one too many cookies, and a lot of board games; I've given up on life. If the dishes are done, it's a win; All-night guitar parties, family-friendly bonfires, and margaritas every Sunday at the beach; Resolutions, made and broken in under a month; COVID scares, puppy cuddles, preparing to turn 40, re-dedication to fitness, Seven Hills takeout; Finally being done with the K process for the last child and helping our company IPO at the same time; I invested in cute joggers. Lots of them; Sticker shock from the insane heating bill after a couple months of being at home 24/7 in California “cold” weather.

Letter from the Board: Making It Through

By Erin Cahill

We are in 2021!!! We endured 2020 (and even more years depending on who you talk to) and are looking forward to fresh starts this year...or hopefully at some point this year. Our theme for this issue is Endurance. Which got me thinking, what else have I endured in my life?

- I was that runner who said I would never run a half marathon and then said that about a marathon...and ended up running 6 marathons before kids. In my last marathon, my knee popped at mile 3 and I ran on a bum knee for the next 23 miles. Now that was endurance.
- I was induced at 41 weeks, endured over 30 hours in labor, there were forceps involved, and a lengthy postpartum healing complete with adult diapers for too many weeks.
- Those sleepless nights and trying to function at work during the day—I thought by now we'd be in the clear, but my 1.5-year-old still likes to wake up at midnight and not go back to bed.

My challenges also put into perspective how fortunate I am. I know many people with much harder things to endure—the loss of a family member, living with cancer for 20+ years, and other tragic events. Reframing helps me to appreciate how lucky I am; I have always made it through.

But how did I make it through and how do others make it through their own hardships? We focus on the end goal and know that with time we will get through it. We surround ourselves with people who love us and will cheer us on and support us. We turn to others who have endured for advice.

This is part of why GGMG was created. To help us all endure, whether through the hardships of pregnancy and birth, raising kids, or dealing with societal issues, with a supportive voice for difficulties many of us have experienced. GGMG has endured and will continue to be that support, that trusted

“Reframing helps me to appreciate how lucky I am; I have always made it through.”

friend, that place to vent and get advice for us moms.

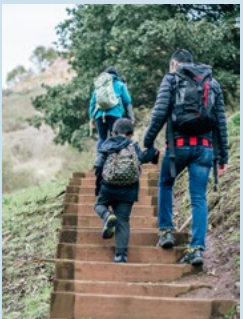
GGMG was founded almost 25 years ago. I would love to celebrate this amazing milestone with our community. GGMG is making it through and thriving during COVID, and GGMG will be here after this pandemic. We are planning to hold a celebration of GGMG's 25th birthday—with more to come and only after it is safe—and I know personally I am hoping to be able to celebrate with you all in person later this year.



Erin is both a mom—to Alyx, Jack and two orange tabbies—and a partner in a large accounting firm. Her husband and co-parent, Niall, helps to make this all possible. When she has free time, of which lately there is not a lot, she enjoys hiking, running, trying the latest restaurants, and, of course, wine.

Erin Cahill

Cover Outtakes



Only one shot can make it to the cover. Here are some of our other favorites.

Cover photo by Bhavya Thyagarajan Photography
Cover models: Michelle Ho, David Ho, Bryan (9), Owen (6)



Urban Hikes

By Christine Chen

We may be sheltering in place, but we can still get outside and stretch our legs. Here are some local hiking opportunities for the whole family.



Angel Island is the largest natural island in the San Francisco Bay. The five-mile perimeter road has views of the Marin Headlands and San Francisco.

Battery Spencer in the Marin Headlands has a breathtaking view of the Golden Gate Bridge. The military buildings that remain are fun for kids to explore.

Glen Canyon Park's picturesque and family-friendly two-mile loop winds through meadows and densely wooded areas.

Lands End's loop has amazing views of the Golden Gate Bridge and ocean. Kids will love the Sutro Baths ruins, labyrinth, and shipwreck remains.

Mount Davidson Park's loop trail winds through eucalyptus trees that provide the wonderful scent evoking the relaxation from a spa. At 927 feet, views from the highest point in San Francisco are breathtaking.

Santa Margarita Island Preserve in San Rafael is a little-known oasis of marshland and hiking that is home to a wide variety of birds.

Tennessee Valley's easy coastal trail has amazing views of the rocky Marin Headlands bluffs. Begin with the meadows and walk to the beach for great views.

Since blowing her ACL during ski week last year, Christine has NOT hiked or jogged, which according to her husband is not out of the norm, LOL. She is looking forward to going on longer walks now that she finally can alternate feet down her steps.



Li'l Kid, Big City: Bay Area Beaches

By Sonya Abrams

It's the heart of winter! Time to hit the...beach? Happily, Northern California offers us beach days all year long. In San Francisco, some of the calmest waves are found at **Crissy Beach**, where the Marina and Presidio meet. Crissy Field East Beach has plentiful parking, clean bathrooms, and killer Golden Gate Bridge views. For dramatic views and larger waves, consider **China Beach**, in Seacliff. A protected cove with good climbing rocks, China Beach offers wonderful views of the Marin Headlands. But beware of the grim restroom facilities. For the warmest weather in the city, check out the new **Crave Cove Park**, off Illinois Street in the Dogpatch. It comprises 7 acres of beach, picnic tables, lawns, and paths for bikes and scooters, nestled among the remnants of the city's old shipping infrastructure. North of the city, **Muir Beach** off Highway 1 in Mill Valley is a beautiful, sandy double crescent, with fire pits, hiking trails, and clean restrooms. Consider grabbing some fish and chips or shepherd's pie at the adjacent Pelican Inn before or after a visit. And warning: on nice days, the parking lot fills up. South of the city, **Coyote Point** in San Mateo is a large recreation area consisting of a huge playground, forest trails, exercise equipment, picnic facilities, and a small pebbly beach along the bay, with paddleboard rentals available in non-pandemic times.

Sonya is an editor and mom of three little water wigglers.

Stroller Jogging Sites

By Christine Chen

Normally crowded and busy, **the Embarcadero** between Pier 39 and Oracle Park offers one of the best stroller runs in the city, with wide and smooth sidewalks so you're not playing frogger with pedestrians. Gorgeous views of both bridges and an uncrowded stadium also make it interesting for your little one in the stroller. Miles of sidewalks and paths wind through **Golden Gate Park**, many which are wide and smooth enough to accommodate a stroller. JFK Drive is also closed to cars from Stanyan to Park Presidio. Though the path along **The Great Highway** at Ocean Beach is paved and the pavement may be a bit bumpy, it is a wonderful way for your little one to experience some ocean air, hear and see waves, or maybe stop to play in the sand. **Fort Mason to Pier 39:** Start in Fort Mason and follow the path along the water to Aquatic Park, where your little one will enjoy the view. There are also steps to run and climb on. The wide sidewalk next to Jefferson Street will lead you to Pier 39, which is less crowded due to lack of tourists. With **Lake Street** closed to cars, it is the perfect opportunity for a stroller run through Sea Cliff and Presidio's Park Trail and Mountain Lake Trail Path. **The Marina Green** to the Golden Gate Bridge is always a beautiful and smooth run with amazing views, but even now, still relatively crowded. **The Panhandle** loop between Stanyan and Baker and Fell and Oak is great if you're looking for a quick run. Parking is readily available for stroller runs around **Lake Merced**.

Christine hoped you liked her article on hikes, where her bio can be found.



Overcoming Postpartum Difficulties

By Mary B. Flynn



Mary is the Founder/ Executive Director of Bay Area Baby Squad (BABS), which provides new parents with infant care training, baby soothing techniques, feeding and sleeping schedules, breastfeeding support, baby safety, and lactation support. She created her business based on her own personal experience as a mother of 4. Learn more at bayareababysquad.com or on Instagram [@bay_babysquad](https://www.instagram.com/bay_babysquad).

What is the role of a postpartum doula?

A postpartum doula eases the transition into new parenthood by helping with feeding, sleeping, swaddling, bathing, burping, and scheduling a newborn. We come with a wealth of information that gets parents through those first blurry six to twelve weeks. We make this hectic period a positive experience as we reassure and support new parents navigating their own way through whatever parenting method their family feels is a good fit.

What is one part of postpartum life that could improve?

Life as a new family would be so much smoother if, soon after birth, the same lactation consultant or lactation educator were available in person for the first feed and every feed in the hospital. I believe we would see a lot more moms being able to stay the course with breastfeeding if it started off as a more hands-on, informed journey. New moms would leave hospitals and birthing centers more confident in breastfeeding. At the same time, I think we should reduce the pressure that is put on new mothers to breastfeed. I understand that breast is best, but so is a new mom’s mental health. All too often, I come across new moms struggling because breastfeeding isn’t working for them. There is nothing wrong. We are made to believe that breastfeeding is easy, but in the real world, there should be a larger message that there is no wrong way to feed. In an ideal world, I also feel if a new family’s wish is to breastfeed, they should have bedside support for the entire time they are in the hospital. If their decision is to bottle-feed only, they should not be judged, just shown how to feed with

a bottle and taught what their best option is. We may likely see a decline in postpartum depression because new moms are not under so much pressure to feed “like everyone else.” Breastfeeding proves to be a challenge to 95 percent of my clients and, in my opinion, it’s because we are so programmed to believe that it is the most natural thing in the world, which of course it is—in an ideal world. Do we live in the perfect world? No, we don’t. So, let’s not push something as being the most natural thing in the world. On your child’s first birthday no one will ask you if you breastfeed or not.

What are some pitfalls you see during the postpartum period?

The biggest pitfall in the postpartum period is expectation. You may focus too much on what you are “expected” to do when, in fact, you should take it easy and just adjust to your new role as a parent to the bundle that you are holding. Enjoy this time getting to know one another. If you take a step back and do this for the first few weeks after birth, then you

“A postpartum doula eases the transition into new parenthood by helping with feeding, sleeping, swaddling, bathing, burping, and scheduling a newborn.”

will find your way of parenting is just what your baby wants and needs.

How can loved ones best support a new parent’s postpartum transition?

Family and friends can help by listening to what a parent wants, keeping opinions to a minimum, and offering support by cooking, doing laundry, encouraging new parents to nap, and holding the baby while they shower. Remind parents to take care of themselves and let them know what a good job they are doing. In the Bay Area, a lot of parents don’t have support nearby and since the start of the pandemic, a lot of families can’t travel to support their loved ones. As a result, families are purchasing gift cards to hire a postpartum doula for support and a night’s sleep. We are told by the end of our time with new parents that we feel like part of their family. It’s wonderful that we can fill a little of that void.

CONTEST

Putting Yourself First

Want to create new wellness goals in 2021? Want to improve your COVID-era eating habits?



The winner of our contest this issue will receive a 60-minute video call with Karen Brein, former GGMG Board Chair, who has her own nutrition and fitness counseling business. During the consultation call, you will discuss how to develop a healthy mindset, craft an overall wellness plan, and kick-start your weight

loss goals. This hour will be spent diving into individualized tactics you can put to use within your unique circumstances.

Additionally, the winner will receive messaging access for one week following the call (to make sure you’re really set up for success!), as well as Karen’s digital *Intro to Macros* eBook and custom macro count tailored to you. The value of this prize is \$159. Learn more about Karen at her website, happymamanutrition.com, and at her Instagram account, [@happymamanutrition](https://www.instagram.com/happymamanutrition).

Please enter by emailing contest@ggmg.org with the subject line “wellness” no later than March 15.

The winner of our last contest is Sue Chan. Sue won a \$100 gift certificate to the San Francisco Italian Athletic Club in North Beach, for “Porta Via” dinner and drinks, either pick-up or dine-in as prevailing regulations allow.

Thanks to our generous prize donors; please patronize their services!



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Parenthood as an Endurance Sport

By Alan Knox

Being a parent can feel relentless. When it was just my wife and our stepkids (who spend weekends with their dad), parenthood felt totally manageable. Since my youngest daughter arrived two years ago, life has been absolutely unabated! To be available 24/7 literally any time of day (or night) is a whole other ball game. It demands endurance—physical, relational, and emotional.

Through parenting, I've grown to see endurance not as tolerating a steady stream of discomfort, but rather cyclically experiencing acute overwhelm. My daughter still wakes up many nights every week. I go tuck her in, hold her hand and explain that, no, she can't turn on the light at three in the morning because her brother lives in this room, too. Sometimes, I spend the whole time I'm in their room wishing I were in bed, resenting the interruption and fixating on how cold the floor is under my feet. Then it's an endurance event. Other times, I'm noticing how soft her hand is, wondering what fears come alive for her in the dark, and minding my own breathing. Then, it's just love in action, and she goes to sleep quicker, too!

Just this morning, I woke up to my daughter calling out for me. It's rare for her to be up before 6:30 a.m., so I hoped I could cuddle her and she'd sleep for another hour. This was not to be. She said something about "poop in the bathroom." I asked if she needed to go, and she said she didn't. That seemed suspicious, so, like a fool, I asked if she wanted to.



"If I'm doing it right, I'm most often tuned into the mutual gift of being loving towards my kids...and occasionally throwing a tantrum and enduring it too."

Of course she said, "Yeah," so I sat her on the training potty for three minutes. Nothing happened. But by that time, she was awake and I was enrolled in her morning routine and resenting it.

We tried several arrangements: resting together in her brother's bed (he's at his dad's), her playing while I went back to bed (yeah, right), before we ended up in the living room with me huddled under throw blankets while she climbed all over me using the corner of a book as an ice axe for grip. I whined to her about wanting to sleep and protested that it was too early to read a book, all while feeling guilty for rejecting her.

At some point, it dawned on me that she was going to play happily no matter how grumpy I was and that I could put on a sweater and be both low-key and engaged. I started to feel much better. We looked at the pretty yellow cloudlets of the sunrise, got some pistachios for a pre-breakfast snack, and I congratulated myself for enduring my own tantrum. All joking aside, I truly believe that this is what the endurance of parenting looks like. If I'm doing it right, I'm most often tuned into the mutual gift of being loving towards my kids...and occasionally throwing a tantrum and enduring it too.

Alan loves being outside with his three kids, whether it's the playground, the beach, or up in the mountains. He looks forward to continuing the FatherHood dads group at Kinspace when live events are possible again.

How Things Work



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Nature Through a Native American Lens

By Laure Latham

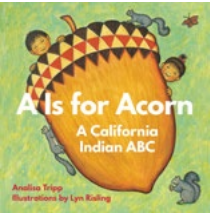
Knowledge is power—have you heard that one before? How about nature literacy? At a time when we need the outdoors more than ever, for our physical and mental health, it is also essential that we understand how nature inspires other cultures. Thanks to these books, your family can learn to appreciate nature as seen, respected, and loved by Native Americans.



Sweetest Kulu
Written by Celina Kalluk, illustrated by Alexandria Neonakis
Filled with the animals of the far north and the values of the author’s Inuit culture, this story welcomes a new baby into the

world. Written as a spiritual poem, *Sweetest Kulu* is a message of hope and love based on the indigenous appreciation of the natural world. The gorgeous illustrations alone are worth finding this little gem.

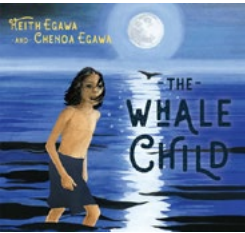
Ages: 0 to 3 years



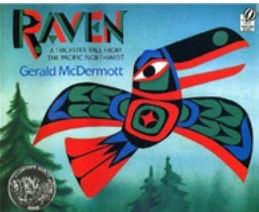
A Is for Acorn: A California Indian ABC
Written by Analisa Tripp, illustrated by Lyn Risling
Did you know that the Oxford Junior Dictionary deleted the word “Acorn” to replace it with “MP3 Player” in 2015?

Whatever dictionary you use at home, your kids deserve to know what acorns are, and this book can help with that and other familiar plants, animals, and cultural objects of California. Sturdy enough to withstand any toddler’s love, this alphabet board book is a great place to start when introducing the diverse and abundant world of Native California to your home.

Ages: 2 to 5 years



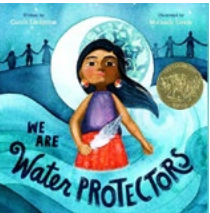
The Whale Child
Written by Keith Egawa, Chenoa Egawa, illustrated by Jessica Hernandez
Two children explore the human impact on land and water, weaving traditional storytelling and Indigenous lore into this magical story. Seen as the “decolonization of Western construction of climate change,” the story features positive messages on fighting climate change as well as material on environmental education. If you have ever wondered about the Indigenous Pacific Northwest take on conservation, this book is enlightening. **Ages: 7 to 10 years**



Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest
Written and illustrated by Gerald McDermott
When all the world was in darkness, Raven, the trickster,

wanted to give people the gift of light. Could he find the source of light in the house of Sky Chief? In this retelling of the First Nations (Haida) traditional tale, children will learn the story of the sun in the sky. Folktales are wonderful because they attempt to explain why things are the way that they are, and that’s what all children want to know.

Ages: 3 to 6 years



We Are Water Protectors
Written by Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade
As a member of the Tlingit and Haida Indian tribes in southeast Alaska, Goade became the first Native American to win the prestigious

Caldecott Medal for best children’s story, in January 2021. *We Are Water Protectors*, written by Carole Lindstrom, is a call for environmental protection that was conceived in response to the planned construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline through Standing Rock Sioux territory.

Ages: 4 to 7 years

Laure is the author of the mommy blog Frog Mom (frogmom.com), as well as the book Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Massive Life Changes

By Gail Cornwall

Collectively this past year, the mothers of GGMG have had to endure death, disruption, and many other manners of loss, like watching careers and marriages slowly circle toward a yawning drain. Even if the only thing swirling downward in your bathtub are plastic unicorns, you’ve likely seen your support system dissolve like a cheap bath bomb. This issue’s books were both written by women grappling with family restructuring, but they impart generalized lessons on how to display endurance in the face of all you have to endure. (Spoiler alert: Embrace intuition and mindfulness; eschew expectation and perfectionism.)



Keep Moving
Maggie Smith is a poet who wrote herself daily affirmations as she struggled to accept and conceptualize a life without her husband. *Keep Moving* shares these post-it tips for putting one foot in front of the other with intention: “Commit yourself to the present. Loosen your grip on the life you had before... so that you can be here, where you’re needed, right now.” She shares bits of her own story in prose, but most pages display only an Instagram-worthy few lines, making for a quick read. One or two sittings will leave you feeling accomplished (you read a book!) and, hopefully, better equipped to sit with both loss and uncertainty: “Stop rewinding and replaying the past in your mind. Live here, now.”

Like most self-help books, *Keep Moving* struggles to find the line between universal and trite, and there’s a familiar flirtation with boot-strapping. But Smith is a mom most of us will find relatable in some way. For me, it was when she described hours spent with a challenging infant: “I sang her ‘You Are My Sunshine,’ as if singing it could make it so.” Smith includes some of my favorite metaphors for managing rumination and regaining emotional perspective, plus this one I’d never heard: “Imagine the view from an airplane window: everything toy-sized, miniaturized below. Whatever feels enormous now won’t always be this size. You’ll rise up and away from it.”

Overall, Smith strikes a good balance, providing practical tips for warding off both perfectionism (“Write breathe on your to-do list”) and wallowing (“Throw away the old blueprint for something that will not be built. Instead, rethink that space.”).



Untamed
If you don’t know Glennon Doyle’s headline-worthy scandal already, you can Google “Christian Blogger Abby Wambach.” She’ll catch you up: “When I got pregnant with Chase and quit drinking, drugging, and purging, I thought it might be my last chance to stop being bad and start being good. I married Chase’s father, and I learned to cook and clean and fake orgasms. I was a good wife. I had three babies and put all their needs so far ahead of my own that I forgot I had needs at all.” He cheated; she fell in love with a woman.

Like *Keep Moving*, *Untamed* alternates between narrative and instruction, revelation and reflection. Of enduring, Doyle writes: “What I thought would kill me, didn’t. Every time I said to myself:

I can’t take this anymore—I was wrong.” She concludes, “The truest, most beautiful life never promises to be an easy one. We need to let go of the lie that it’s supposed to be.” A static notion of “happily ever after” needs to go too: “If we are truly alive, we are constantly losing who we just were, what we just built, what we just believed, what we just knew to be true.”

Women who’ve made drastic changes to find fulfillment follow a common theme, Doyle says: “Each honored her own discontent. She did not dismiss it, bury it, deflect it, deny it, blame it on someone else, or tell herself to shut up and be grateful.” They reconsider the story of Adam and Eve, rejecting the idea that “when a woman wants more, she defies God, betrays her partner,

“‘Imagine the view from an airplane window: everything toy-sized, miniaturized below. Whatever feels enormous now won’t always be this size. You’ll rise up and away from it.’”

curses her family, and destroys the world.” Doyle writes, “Eve was never meant to be our warning. Maybe she was meant to be our model. Own your wanting. Eat the apple. Let it burn.” Burn “the memo that define[s] selflessness as the pinnacle of womanhood,” and decide “that the call of motherhood is to become a model, not a martyr,” she preaches.

In some sense then, *Untamed* is both a variation on *Keep Moving*’s theme and an anecdote to it. And I’ll give the opposite advice for pacing. Read Untamed one or two chapters at a time. Doyle seems to recognize that the pungence and repetition of her sermonizing require cutting in the form of captivating storytelling, but there’s not quite enough of the latter to comfortably binge read. Coming up for air maximizes her message: “We must decide that if the truth inside us can burn a belief, a family structure, a business, a religion, an industry—it should have become ashes yesterday.”



There’s an app for that!
Mindfulness features heavily in both of these books. There are lots of meditation apps out there, but I’ve personally had the most luck with Sam Harris’s “Waking Up.”

Gail works as a mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at gailcornwall.com/articles or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.

The Triumphs of Childbirth

By Emily Beaven

Endurance isn't something you start with... it's a muscle you develop, train, and grow. A marathon runner doesn't run 26.2 miles out the gate, they have to start from somewhere. Most women are innately able to give birth, but that doesn't mean it's easy; some women and babies don't survive the experience. Instinct is similar to endurance in the way that it can be grown, trained, and developed. I can't think of two more valuable skills to develop as a mother, because motherhood is the ultimate marathon.

For the birth of my son, I had little instinct or endurance. I had a general sense of what I wanted as a birth plan, and attended "natural" childbirth classes with a popular SF teacher. But the breathing methods they taught didn't resonate with me, and although I had a doula and my husband at the birth, I felt pretty unprepared.

I wanted to give birth with as little medical intervention as possible, because looking back, the classes scared us into thinking any medical intervention would result in a C-section. So at 42 weeks, faced with an induction, I opted to start the process with Cervidil, then misoprostol, and then a Foley bulb catheter. Basically anything to stay away from Pitocin. After hours and hours of excruciating pain, I wound up getting Pitocin anyway, and an epidural along with an infection called chorioamnionitis. Luckily, a healthy baby boy came nonetheless. Looking back, it sounds a bit traumatic, seeing the torture I put myself through to avoid an epidural.

I endured 3 days of labor because of some preconceived idea that an epidural should be avoided at all costs. As I write this, I feel a bit of anger and resentment towards the birthing class I attended.

My daughter, my second birth, felt like a giant reward. The muscles were developed, the instincts honed from one birth and raising a baby. My daughter was a week past her due date and contractions started at home and came about every



15 minutes for a whole day. They woke me up around 2 a.m. and we went to UCSF. Of course I wasn't dilated at all and they wanted to send us home. I felt defeated and as though we should just stay and get induced like last time because that's likely what would happen anyway. I knew the experience of an epidural and was comfortable with wanting that again. I vowed not to endure the previous experience I had with my son again—I was no martyr.

The contractions at that point were beyond intense. This time, I didn't go to any baby classes, and did my own research in preparation. I found on my own something that instinctively made sense to me, a breathing technique from Bailey Gaddis, author of *Feng Shui Mommy* and YouTube creator. The concept is that before each contraction you expand your belly like a balloon in the exhale, making it as large as possible thus making room and space for the contraction. This made so much sense to me and it worked—I could manage and move through the contractions.

It was a hard decision, but I trusted my instincts and decided to go home. They gave me a shot to help me sleep and we went home around 9 a.m. I awoke around 1 p.m. and my water broke—it was so gratifying! We raced back to the hospital, and I was admitted quickly. I asked for an epidural, but when the anesthesiologist came in, I was already in transition. I couldn't really talk to anyone, and needed to push.

Seven grueling and beautiful minutes later, our daughter was born. They immediately placed her on my chest and it was over. What a difference, what a reward, what a completely opposite experience. In both births I got the opposite of what I had wanted, but I endured; I triumphed.

Emily Beaven is a member of the Center for Reproductive Rights, Bay Area Leadership Council, Realtor, and mother to two.



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Enduring a Gluten-Free Life

Learning to live with a food allergy

By Clare Deignan

Celiac disease can be an overwhelming and frightening diagnosis. According to the [Celiac Disease Foundation](#), it affects an estimated 1 in 100 people worldwide. Many don't know they have it. Celiac disease is a gluten-triggered autoimmune disorder with only one cure: cutting gluten from your diet. For some, giving up gluten isn't the end of the world. For others, the fact that they will never again taste fresh French bread, deep-dish pizza, a flakey pastry, or even sip a cold beer can take the joy out of life. When you receive a diagnosis like celiac disease, how can you build the endurance to commit to a restricted diet for the rest of your life?

Gluten is your poison

So, what's the big deal? Why not delight in a glutenous piece of chocolate cake—especially if it's just once in a while? Because it is a big deal, and it begins with understanding the diagnosis.

"If you have celiac disease, gluten is your poison," says Dr. Nielsen Fernandez-Becker, MD, gastroenterologist, celiac disease specialist, and director of the Stanford Celiac Disease Program. Dr. Fernandez-Becker explains that for those with celiac disease, consuming gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley, damages the small intestine, making it difficult for the body to absorb nutrients. This can lead to such symptoms as gas, diarrhea, weight loss, and anemia. If left untreated, celiac disease can cause osteoporosis, certain autoimmune disorders, and even some cancers.

Although celiac disease can't be cured, the damage can be reversed. Dr. Fernandez-Becker emphasizes the importance of strictly adhering to a gluten-free diet consistently. "Some people may start feeling better within weeks, but the median time for the gut to heal completely is about three years," she says.

With gluten in so many products, even some salad dressings, navigating the diagnosis can be daunting. "You have to learn where there are hidden sources of gluten, which

takes time. There is definitely a learning curve," explains Dr. Fernandez-Becker.

Dr. Fernandez-Becker admits she often doesn't have time to review the ins-and-outs of a gluten-free diet with celiac patients. She recommends working with a nutritionist so the newly-diagnosed can ensure they are informed, educated, and prepared to take on a gluten-free life.

An emotional diagnosis

"If you're new to a gluten-free diet, there's a difference between following a handout and working with a registered dietitian that can help you actually integrate and implement this diet based on your day-to-day activities and your lifestyle," emphasizes Neha Shah, a registered dietitian specializing in gastrointestinal disorders at UCSF.

Committing to a gluten-free diet impacts not only an individual's relationship with food, but relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Maneuvering social events, celebrations, business lunches, dinners, and work and leisure travel can be challenging. Shah believes listening is a vital aspect of her work.

"Sometimes, the diagnosis is overwhelming. If a person is not in that mind space to roll up their sleeves and start tackling this diet, initially, I do a little bit more hand-holding," she shares.

Shah begins by identifying which foods are naturally gluten-free such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meats, and reading labels. Although she can't go grocery shopping with her patients, she's been known to log into a grocery store delivery service and create a virtual gluten-free grocery list. Shah will even look over a favorite restaurant's menu to review what is gluten-free and point out questions to ask the server, or troubleshoot gluten-free meal plans for work and travel.

Even with gluten off the table, there's a lot they can still eat. Shah points to the positive. "It's so easy to focus on what you can't have, but where's the positive reinforcement? My philosophy is that yes, the gluten-free diet is an exclusion diet, but what can we add to the diet that you also enjoy?" adds Shah.

Gluten-free for life

"I did one final meal," recalls San Francisco mom, Michelle, the day she was diagnosed with celiac disease. "I had one last hoorah with my favorite thing—Shanghai soup dumplings. It's basically heaven on earth for me. I ordered an obscene amount of dumplings."

After years of struggling with stomach issues, Michelle's doctor ran tests and an endoscopy which came back positive for celiac disease. Michelle was surprised since she didn't have many of the symptoms. But after committing to a gluten-free diet, her chronic migraines and

"I remember coming home feeling overwhelmed, but also grateful that it was just food. I can figure it out. There's no medication. It could be a lot worse."

headaches disappeared. She had never connected them with her diet. Once diagnosed, Michelle became a woman on a mission. She scoured gluten-free blogs and websites to create replicas of her favorite foods. Her best compliments are when she makes a recipe, and her family and friends can't even tell it's gluten-free.

After years of gluten-free living, Michelle shares, "I'm really not a disciplined person at all. But, I've been able to stick to gluten-free eating. I've never cheated." She continues, "I actually got retested, and they said, 'Your colon looks really good. We can tell that you haven't been eating gluten.'"

The realities of celiac disease give Michelle the endurance to commit to her gluten-free diet. "If you keep eating gluten, it's not just that it makes you sick at that moment, it's that your long-term health prognosis in many areas is much worse," she reasons.

"I always dream that someday they'll invent a pill that a celiac can take and then eat something with gluten," says Michelle. But for now, she focuses on what she can eat.

It's just food

According to the Celiac Disease Foundation, it's recommended when a family member is diagnosed, that all first-degree relatives (children, siblings, and

parents) be tested too since they have a 1 in 10 chance of developing celiac themselves. It's particularly important to test children, because celiac disease can impact their growth and development, and cause more serious symptoms.

In 2002, South Bay mom Kelly Fowell's son was diagnosed with celiac disease at two years of age. A couple of months after his first birthday, Fowell noticed a change in her son. "He literally looked like he swallowed a basketball. His stomach was rock hard, and you could start to see his ribs and his spine. He was getting very emaciated," describes Fowell. "He was

actually developmentally going backwards. He was not walking anymore. His speech was declining. So, it was a very scary time."

Fowell describes her son would scream

in pain, but emergency room visits brought no answers. After months of testing and exhausting all options, they were referred to a gastroenterologist at Stanford's Pediatric Department.

"I walked into the exam room with my son, and this woman said, 'He has celiac disease.' And I asked, 'What do you mean?' and she said, 'He's got the distended belly, he's very thin, his face was all drawn with big dark circles under his eyes,'" Fowell remembers.

Blood tests were ordered, and an endoscopy confirmed it was celiac disease. Although her son's energy came back quickly, it took about six to nine months for his stomach to return to normal.

"It was a blessing that he was diagnosed so early because some people can go decades before they're diagnosed." Fowell continues, "Then he went gluten-free, and boy, did I have a different child!"

Food scientist overnight

When they finally got the correct diagnosis, Fowell went home and cleaned out her kitchen. "I remember coming home feeling overwhelmed, but also grateful that it was just food. I can figure it out. There's no medication. It could be a lot worse," she says.

But in 2002, not many people even knew what gluten was, let alone celiac



disease. So Fowell says she became a “food scientist overnight.” She notes, “I just realized that there were no resources for anybody. Everybody who was diagnosed had to start from scratch and try to figure it out on their own.”

Checking food labels and even calling manufacturers while in the grocery store aisle, Fowell remembers how her shopping trips would take hours. She and another celiac mom created an online support group for South Bay and Peninsula families, sharing everything from celiac health and diagnosis information, gluten-free recipes and options, to gluten-free Halloween candy lists. She would even do walk-throughs of new celiac families’ kitchens to ensure they were celiac safe. Although their group is no longer active, Fowell stresses the tremendous support she and others found as a group.

Figuring it out

Since his diagnosis, Fowell and her son learned to navigate gluten-free living from his toddler years when there were few gluten-free options, his school years, and now to college life. Each year at school, Fowell would speak to her son’s teacher to ensure they understood his condition. She made gluten-free playdough for his kindergarten class and ensured he had a special bag of gluten-free goodies to choose from if there was an unexpected class birthday or treat.

Since Fowell’s son had such strong adverse reactions, learning to read labels and avoiding random traces of gluten was vital. “We certainly knew when he had gotten “gluten-ed.” He would just vomit from his toes,” shares Fowell.

Although Fowell ensured her son did not miss out, she felt it was important he

learned to navigate his food needs independently. She recounts, “Early on, I involved him in the reading of labels and educating himself, and advocating for himself, because I’m not going to be there with him forever. He needed to figure it out.”

These skills were put to the test on her son’s first weeklong trip away from home to science camp. After weeks of Fowell working with the camp’s chef on gluten-free options, the menu was changed last minute. But her son didn’t even call home. “It was a great learning experience,” Fowell says with a laugh. “He ate very few things that week, but he still did it.”

Fowell encourages individuals and

families with a new celiac disease diagnosis to have a positive attitude. “There are many worse things to be diagnosed with,” she says. “Now, as opposed to 20 years ago, I think we’re so fortunate. You can travel anywhere and figure it out. Educate yourself and your child, and remember it’s just food.”

Find support for celiac disease in the San Francisco Bay Area at Celiac Community Foundation Northern California: celiaccommunity.org

Clare is a freelance journalist and mother of two daughters.

SF Mom Michelle Shares Her Top Gluten-Free Discoveries

Before trying any suggestions below, be your own food scientist and ensure the suggested product is certified gluten-free.

Cookbook:

The How Can It Be Gluten-Free Cookbook, (Volumes I and II) from The America’s Test Kitchen

Bakery:

Mariposa Baking Company: It operates a dedicated gluten-free facility with shops in Oakland and the SF Ferry Building.

Flour and baking mixes:

King Arthur: Fantastic mixes, especially the Chocolate Brownie and the Yellow Cake mix.

Krusteaz: Make sure to try the Honey Corn Bread, Cinnamon Crumb Cake, and Blueberry Muffins.

Pasta:

Banza Chickpea Pasta – “hands down.” Michelle says with leftover gluten-free pasta: You can’t eat it cold, like regular pasta. For best second-day results, microwave it.

Bread:

Michelle’s favorite? **Canyon Bakehouse Gluten-free Bread**. Michelle recommends gluten-free bread be “treated” with a bit of toasting or heating in the oven.

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Making the Impossible Possible: Lessons from Endurance Athletes

A year into living in a global pandemic, one writer tries to uncover the secrets to pushing through the exhaustion.

By Veronica Reilly-Granich



We are now almost a year into the ultra-marathon of the pandemic that has gripped the world. Last February, the idea that we would spend at least a year minimizing social contact and wearing personal protective equipment outside the home, while still watching hundreds of thousands of our fellow Americans die, was unimaginable. As difficult as it feels, and as exhausted as we all are, now is the time to endure. For insights and advice on how we can persevere through these extremely challenging conditions, I turned to a group of people who have spent years learning how to do hard things and enjoy it: endurance athletes.

Believe in yourself and be realistic

Minerva, a GGMG member who preferred we only use her first name, spoke at length about her two-year journey to complete the Kokoro, a 50-plus-hour nonstop endurance event modeled on Navy SEAL Hell Week, which she undertook as the single mother of a preschooler. At the time she finished the event she was about to turn 43, she was the only woman in her cohort of 33 participants, and she was one of only 25 women to complete the challenge since its inception. An essential part of her preparation was to list her strengths and weaknesses relative to the event and accept that reality. She said, “humility is a big part of it. I had to be

ok going into it knowing that I wouldn’t be the strongest or most capable, even that I might suck at certain things.” Although she initially thought the event sounded “impossible,” she believed that people can do more than they think they are capable of, so she took on the challenge. Her frank realism combined with a strong belief in herself helped get her through each grueling component, as well as the years of training leading up to it.

Jasmine Surti, a mother of two and distance runner who enjoys marathons and half marathons, tries to stay positive, even when she is in pain. She says, “I try not to complain, even to myself.” When the end of a long race nears and she’s feeling fatigued, she puts one foot in front of the other and relies on past successes to pull her across the finish line. All the training she has done and the races she has completed bolster her confidence during those difficult moments. We can pull on the same source of strength in our current situation. By now we have survived months and months of stress and isolation and made huge adjustments that didn’t seem possible a year ago. We can use the confidence of making it through the past year to foster a belief that we’ve got a good chance of getting through the next month, or even just the next whole-family meltdown. We can keep going, one foot after another, one minute after another.

Don’t fight reality, accept it and work with it

“Don’t fight the reality of things,” says Cory Nyamora, a clinical psychologist and a certified coach for USA Triathlon and USA Track and Field. “For example, if I’m in a triathlon and I have a flat, that’s the reality. Don’t focus on ‘this is horrible,’ though you might have that thought. Instead think, ‘this is terrible; what do I do next?’” This advice resonates in this moment. It can be tempting to rail against current circumstances and look back on life before the pandemic with great longing. Remember when we could visit elderly family members without the fear of endangering them? It’s impossible not to miss the things we can

no longer do with ease, but shifting our focus to what we can do next is helpful and adaptive to get us through these unprecedented and challenging times.

When we’re really missing those joyful experiences from the past, endurance athlete Minerva suggests that it is effective to simply relive them in your mind and body. She says, “There are times when it can be helpful to remember on a physiological level what feeling good feels like. When I was in the ice bath—it was the last day of the event—you are submerged in a tub of water with ice up to your neck, I imagined that I was in Maui and it was so hot that this felt refreshing.” This is a technique that she has brought into pandemic life, allowing herself to feel in her body what it’s like to have a fun dinner with a girlfriend, for example. Then instead of missing these things, they can be constantly present in our lives.

“...one of the best ways to get through the most challenging part of any experience is to do something that makes it easier for someone else.”

Make a plan with incremental goals

When I asked Nyamora what lessons from his work with endurance athletes might help people endure the pandemic, he

suggested that having a plan is very helpful. “With so many endurance sports,” he said, “you have to have routine and structure. You have to train six days a week, and that requires that you sleep well and eat well. That structure and routine helps you cope. You know what you’re doing, or at least you have one or two plans for tomorrow. Just having that is really helpful right now.” Sandra Polsinelli, a mother who has completed 48 marathons over the past 15 years, echoed this in reflecting on how she ended up falling in love with running. She began with a very simple plan, because she had never been good at running. She set a goal as a challenge to herself to run for 20 minutes consecutively. She says, “I found this plan that broke it down. The very first thing was to run 90 seconds, walk 90 seconds, repeat 7 times.”

Over the years she has accomplished a great deal, including significantly reducing the time she takes to complete a marathon, and all of it comes from following a daily training plan. She says, “I like being on a plan.

You focus on this week’s schedule or tomorrow’s schedule. That’s another thing that keeps me going and doing races—having a plan and goal. I don’t have to think, I just do.” Nyamora suggests identifying something you want to work on or





need help with, and making a plan to focus on that for the next month. It is best if you can make it simple and concrete. For example, if you are feeling isolated, make a plan to call someone every day during the coming month. Write it down and post it where you can see it, or schedule it into your phone, depending on how you like to stay organized. Then make sure to do it! Nyamora also suggests being very gentle on ourselves right now. As he points out, “There is no race to deal with the pandemic in the best way.” We’re all just trying to get through until tomorrow or next week.

Build on what is already working

There are definitely days that just feel like one long disaster at my house. But we’ve all made it this far, so something must be working. Build on that thing that works to make something else work and capitalize

on your strengths. Minerva suggests that “sometimes it is ok to choose your priorities and just let something suck.” For example, during the pandemic she has prioritized getting enough sleep, so she goes to bed by 10 every night, even if some things are left undone. She says, “Things can be equally important but not at the same time.”

Get outside and get active

When I asked Jasmine Surti if anything she had learned doing endurance sports had helped her through the pandemic, she said, “Having running as a habit has enabled me to take refuge in nature very frequently, which has helped deal with the stress of the pandemic. When you’re out running and the wind is blowing through your hair and the trees are going by, it helps me put things in perspective.” Nyamora also encourages being active

outside whenever possible. He recommends exercising without headphones and allowing this to be a time to reconnect with nature and your own mind. He advises, “one of the big benefits of actually doing long sports without too much distraction is you really get to know your mind. A lot of times we are so busy and distracted. That quiet time allows us to notice what our minds do when we’re suffering and when we’re happy. It’s a gift you can give yourself by really being with your thoughts and your worries and your joys.”

You are already doing it

No matter how successful or unsuccessful you may feel today or this week, you are already almost a year into surviving a global pandemic. There have been ups and downs for all of us. We may not have signed up for an endurance event, but here it is. Let’s be kind to ourselves and each other. Minerva, who also completed a rigorous certification program in Traumatic Stress studies, says that one of the best ways to get through the most challenging part of any experience is to do something that makes it easier for someone else. “It forces a different part of your brain to work and takes the focus off of yourself and your suffering and moves it to compassion, then to taking action,” she told me. Even a small act, like passing her teammates chocolate, made a big difference as she completed the Kokoro.

With a COVID-19 vaccine in sight but not available to most of us quite yet, Nyamora makes a comparison to the end of a long race, which he calls “...one of the hardest periods, because you want it to end.” Hopefully these ideas will help you get through to the finish line.

Veronica is a writer and educator. She is deeply grateful to Cory Nyamora, Jasmine Surti, Minerva, and Sandra Polsinelli for taking time to talk with her for this article. You can learn more about Nyamora’s work with all levels of athletes, from beginners to experienced triathlon participants, and read his blog at endurancecenter.org. You can learn more about the Kokoro Challenge at sealfit.com.

CAREERS & ENTREPRENEURS

Free Hand Labyrinth Workshop February 25

Do you find yourself wanting to be more intentional with how you spend your time and what you do with your career? Join us on Thursday, February 25, from noon to 1 p.m., for a free online “hand labyrinth” workshop brought to you by the Careers & Entrepreneurs Committee. We’ll be doing a guided hand labyrinth walk led by trained labyrinth facilitator and certified life coach, Paula Jenkins.

What is a hand labyrinth walk, and what does it have to do with career guidance? A labyrinth is a meandering path, with a singular path leading to a center. Labyrinths are tools for personal, psychological and spiritual transformation, also thought to enhance right-brain activity. Labyrinths evoke metaphor, sacred geometry, spiritual pilgrimage, religious practice, mindfulness, and community building. A hand labyrinth walk is much like walking a larger physical labyrinth, but instead of using your feet, you trace the line of the path with your hand or a stylus. For our workshop, you will use the labyrinth as a metaphor to discover what your heart longs for as you look for clues to living your best life and having a meaningful, fulfilling career.

A printable hand labyrinth will be sent to those who register as well as details on how to order an inexpensive handheld labyrinth if you prefer. A recording will be sent to those who register but cannot attend live. RSVP at ggmg.org.



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Menopause 101

Some of its symptoms may be unpleasant, but menopause doesn't have to be something to fear. Embrace life's stages.

By Catherine Symon

It's coming. Whether you're already thinking about "The Change" or it's the furthest thing from your mind, menopause is coming.

Menopause ushers in significant changes to a woman's body. But in our youth-centric society, there aren't too many (honest and open) conversations happening about menopause. So many of us, through unintentional ignorance, denial, or being consumed with raising children—or all of the above—will be caught by surprise when menopause lands on our doorstep. You don't need to be.

The menopausal years represent almost half of a woman's life span. It's during this time that many women live the most productive and satisfying years of their careers and personal lives. Understanding what menopause entails and how to manage the symptoms can greatly improve

your quality of life in the menopausal decades(!). It's time to get prepared for your second act.

What is menopause?

Menopause is when a woman has gone 12 months since her last menstrual period. It marks the end of her reproductive life. On average, women in the United States reach menopause around age 51, but there is a wide range of normal, spanning the mid 40s to late 50s. Currently, there are no accurate methods for predicting a woman's menopause age. But there does seem to be a strong genetic component, so your menopause age will probably be similar to your mother's.

A small percentage of women with a family history of earlier menopause or who smoke will reach menopause at a younger age ("early" if before age 45, and

"premature" if before age 40). Menopause can also be brought about by treatment with chemotherapy, pelvic radiation, or surgical removal of the ovaries (oophorectomy).

The key contributor to the symptoms of menopause and the resulting changes in your body is the decline in the amount of estrogen your body generates. Estrogen, a hormone primarily produced by the ovaries (but also produced by the adrenal glands and fatty tissues), travels through the bloodstream to stimulate activity in the uterus, breasts, bone, heart, liver, and other areas of the body. Estrogen contributes to a wide variety of functions during a woman's life including development of female sex characteristics, thickening of the uterus in anticipation of pregnancy, and prevention of bone loss. (Males produce estrogen as part of the sperm maturation

What is a *hot flash*?

Your body operates optimally in a fairly narrow temperature band; in persistently cold or hot conditions body processes start to get sluggish and eventually shut down. Maintaining your core body temperature is the responsibility of the hypothalamus, an area of the brain that also regulates thirst, hunger, mood, and the release of numerous hormones. Below a specific lower temperature your hypothalamus will tell your body to shiver so it can warm up, and above a specific upper temperature it will send the signal to sweat in order to cool off. The range between these shivering and sweating temperatures is called the "thermoneutral zone"—your body's comfort zone. These shivering and sweating set points are different for every person and also fluctuate during the day with your circadian rhythm. For reasons that are not yet clear, the thermoneutral zone narrows during our perimenopausal and postmenopausal years. So a temperature condition that used to be squarely in your body's comfort zone now sits above your sweat set point and a hot flash kicks in. The hypothalamus sends an emergency message to dilate the blood vessels near your skin to release heat (so your skin looks flushed) and crank up the sweat mechanism to cool you off. Hot flashes are sometimes followed by chills as the body cools down below the new shivering set point.

process, among other things, but at much lower levels than females.)

For most of her reproductive life, a woman's ovaries will produce estrogen in a fairly regular cycle that peaks and dips twice during each 28-day period. In combination with several other hormones, estrogen regulates the monthly menstrual cycle. When a woman reaches her early- or mid-40s, she enters what is known as perimenopause, the phase leading up to menopause that lasts for an average of 7 to 10 years. During perimenopause, estrogen production declines and the ovaries' estrogen release becomes irregular. Monthly periods change in duration and flow, and the timing between periods

worth noting here that even if your monthly periods are irregular or seem to have stopped, you may still ovulate occasionally. So if you don't desire pregnancy, remember to use some form of birth control until you are confident you have reached menopause.

Typically, menopause is diagnosed based on age, family history, and symptoms. But a doctor may measure the levels of follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and estradiol (E2, a form of estrogen produced during the reproductive years) in the blood to rule out other conditions.

What are the symptoms of menopause?

Because estrogen stimulates many different tissues in the body, there are a variety of symptoms associated with declining estrogen levels. The most common symptoms include hot flashes, vaginal dryness, shifts in body composition, trouble sleeping, irritability, and mental foggyiness.

Hot flashes (the clinical term is vasomotor symptoms) are the most common bothersome symptom, but not all women have them, and those that do experience them with different intensities. Women who smoke, are African-American, or who went through sudden menopause due to medical treatment or surgery tend to have

more severe hot flashes than other women. On average, women live with hot flashes for 4 to 6 years, but some women continue to have hot flashes into their 70s.

Estrogen stimulates blood vessel production in the vagina, which keeps the vaginal walls flexible and lubricated. With decreasing estrogen levels, the vaginal walls get thinner and dryer. The vagina can also get narrower and shorter, particularly in the absence of sexual intercourse. (In other words, use it or lose it!) This can cause discomfort in general and is a significant cause of pain during sex.

Many women gain weight after menopause, though weight gain is tied more to a decrease in physical activity that comes with age. Low estrogen levels, however, do affect your body composition by shifting where you gain weight; while most younger women put on weight in their hips and thighs, peri- and post-menopausal women start to gain weight in their abdomen.

Trouble with sleep is also very common, particularly for those who experience night sweats (hot flashes at night). Perimenopausal women may also wake up very early, decreasing the number of hours of sleep they get each night. This sleep deprivation can contribute to irritability and mental foggyiness, something many of us who have raised or are currently raising small children can relate to.

What other changes are associated with menopause?

In addition to the symptoms you may experience, declining estrogen levels can increase your risk of developing certain diseases and conditions.

You may already know that your body produces different kinds of cholesterol: high-density lipoprotein (HDL) and low-density lipoprotein (LDL). Generally, high levels of HDL and low levels of LDL are associated with good cardiovascular health. The presence of estrogen seems to increase HDL levels. As you near menopause and estrogen decreases, your HDL may decrease while your LDL drops, thereby increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease. The abdominal weight gain associated with aging and menopause also increases your risk for cardiovascular disease and may contribute to diabetes.

Postmenopausal women are also susceptible to osteoporosis (brittle bones) or osteopenia (a precursor to osteoporosis). Throughout life your bones are constantly being broken down (resorption) and built up again (deposition) in tiny increments as part of the natural cycle of bone maintenance. Estrogen decreases bone resorption to keep bones strong. Following menopause, resorption outpaces deposition and osteoporosis develops.

Managing the symptoms of menopause

Lifestyle changes

Not surprisingly, diet and exercise are important factors in peri- and post-menopausal health. Including soy products in your diet may diminish symptoms because they contain phytoestrogens, plant-based, estrogen-like substances. Foods that are rich in calcium and vitamin D are also important for bone health.

Regular exercise can help you maintain or lose weight, sleep better, feel less irritable, and decrease your risk of heart disease. It can also contribute to bone development and maintenance. If you don't already have a regular exercise routine, try to establish one.

If you smoke, stop.

Non-hormonal treatments

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and clinical hypnosis have been found to reduce hot flashes. The selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) class of prescription antidepressants has also been shown to reduce hot flashes.

Hormonal treatments

Hormone Therapy (HT, formerly called Hormone Replacement Therapy) works by supplementing the hormones that are declining in your body. Estrogen is a standard component of HT and it can be taken by mouth, through a vaginal cream or flexible vaginal ring, or via a skin (transdermal) patch. Estrogen stimulates the growth of the lining of the uterus (the endometrium), so women who have a uterus should take progesterone along with the estrogen to lower the risk of endometrial cancer. (Progesterone keeps the growth of the endometrium in check.)

HT does not affect the timing of menopause but can be very effective for countering symptoms and reducing risks. HT is not right for everyone; even women who are good candidates for HT need to weigh a variety of risks that change based on age and stage of menopause. For example, HT during perimenopause minimizes hot flashes and decreases your risk of heart disease while it increases your

risk of stroke. On the other hand, HT after age 65 decreases the risk of diabetes and osteoporosis but increases the risk of heart disease. HT at any age increases the risk of breast cancer and is not recommended for women who have had breast cancer because the stimulatory effects of estrogen could cause a recurrence.

If your peri- and post-menopausal symptoms are troublesome enough to interfere with your life, ask your healthcare provider if HT is a viable option for you. Together you can determine which treatment makes sense based on your family history, your personal health profile, and your appetite for risk. Remember that knowledge about HT continues to evolve, so stay informed, and keep the conversation going with your healthcare provider.

You're not alone

If you're feeling overwhelmed, take comfort in the fact that you are far from alone. As you read this, 43 percent of the female population in the United States is either peri- or post-menopausal. There may be a lot to learn, but you're in good company. Welcome to the second act.

Catherine is a medical writer. For her, the line between child-rearing brain fog and perimenopausal brain fog has gotten very, very blurry.

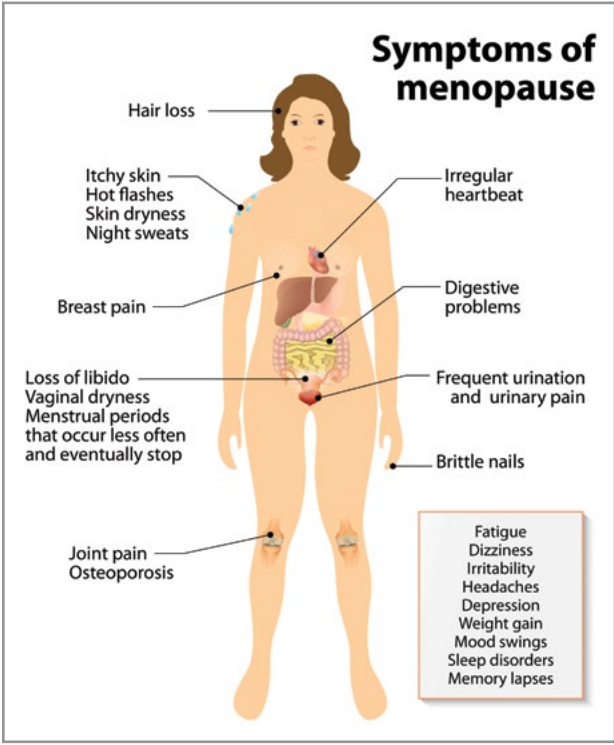
Where to get more information on menopause

North American Menopause Society (NAMS) (menopause.org) NAMS is a nonprofit, evidence-based medical society focused on the health of peri- and post-menopausal women. The website offers free consumer-friendly summaries of research and NAMS position statements, menstrual trackers, blog, video interviews, and book reviews. NAMS also publishes a *Menopause Guidebook* (\$10).

The Wisdom of Menopause by Christiane Northrup, M.D. A comprehensive and bestselling guide to physical and emotional health during the menopausal years.

The Mayo Clinic's The Menopause Solution by Stephanie S. Faubion, M.D. Shorter and more direct than Northrup's guide, Faubion's book highlights practical solutions to managing menopause.

Sources: National Institutes of Health, North American Menopause Society (NAMS), Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Women's Health Initiative (WHI), WomensHealth.gov, US Census, *Nature Reviews Disease Primers*, US Food and Drug Administration, Mayo Clinic



Due to the ongoing shelter-in-place and related COVID-19 shutdowns, we are not planning events more than 3 to 4 weeks ahead. As things slowly start to open back up, and we add more events, we will update the events calendar on the GGMG website as well as the GGMG Facebook page. Hope you are all safe and healthy.

Baby Sign Language

Stop guessing what your baby is trying to tell you and learn how to sign with your baby in Happy Baby Signs' six-day workshops. This course is aimed at expectant parents through parents of 18-month-olds, though toddlers and preschoolers are also welcome. Baby Sign Language gives babies the opportunity to communicate long before they can verbalize their wants and needs. Fun activities and songs will show you how easy it is to integrate simple signs into your everyday routine to jump-start your child's verbal skills. Signing with babies accelerates language acquisition, reduces frustration, enhances a child's self-esteem, and deepens the bond between parent and child.

Teacher Bill White is the founder of the Happy Baby Signs and co-author with Kathleen Harper of *Signs of a Happy Baby*. He has facilitated baby sign language programs at Kaiser Permanente, Dignity Health, Sutter Health Hospitals, Harmony Birth and Family, Blossom Birth and Family, Stanford Work-Life, Cisco Systems, Children's Creative Learning Centers, Genentech, Bright Horizons Family Solutions, and multiple libraries and mothers' clubs.

- Date: Wednesday, March 3 through Wednesday, April 7
- Time: 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- Place: Zoom
- Cost: \$30 members, \$75 non-members. Fees paid for the event can be counted toward GGMG annual membership fee



February Playgroup Formation Mixer—RSVP By February 20

You've become a mom—or will become one soon. Congratulations!! You've embarked on the treacherous and rewarding journey of motherhood, but you don't have to walk alone. Sign up for GGMG's Virtual Playgroup Formation Mixer and meet the women who will support you along the way. We are all practicing social distancing, but the last thing we want is for new moms to feel isolated during the time they need support the most. Therefore, the Playgroup Formation Mixer must go on!

On February 27 at 3 p.m., we will host the Playgroup Formation Mixer via Zoom for all RSVP'ed attendees. This meeting will include introductions by members of the GGMG Board and Neighborhood Directors with important information on how to take advantage of the benefits of your GGMG membership.

On February 28 and March 1, each of the newly formed playgroups will connect via Zoom at a TBD time to meet one another virtually. We encourage you to hold these virtual playdates regularly until you are able to come together in person.

Typically, this event is targeted to new moms with infants under 1-year-old, but all moms are welcome. RSVP by February 20 so that we can organize you into playgroups before the virtual event. Once the playgroups are organized, you will receive a Zoom invitation for the informational meeting on February 27, and an invitation with the time and date of your individual playgroup's meeting. Questions? Get in touch with us at me@ggm.org.

- Date: Saturday February 27
- Time: 3 p.m.
- Place: Zoom
- Cost: FREE for members

Virtual Moms Night In: Every Last Wednesday of the Month

Looking to keep social connections alive during shelter in place? Come hang every month at our Virtual Moms Night In via Zoom! Wine, pajamas, messy bun—all are accepted. There is no agenda, just hanging out and connecting with each other.

- Date: Last Wednesday of every month
- Time: 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Place: Zoom
- Cost: FREE for members

Toddler-Mama Virtual Group: Every Tuesday

If you have recently said, "What's in your mouth?", "Please nap!", or "Don't lick the slide!", you may have a young toddler. Join a group of fellow toddler mamas with kids aged 12 to 24 months, for weekly support, friendship, and advice on Zoom. We've all been there! Many of us will have our toddlers with us on/off screen, in case naps just aren't happening. We welcome the chaos!

- Date: Every Tuesday
- Time: 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.
- Place: Zoom
- Cost: FREE for members



REGISTER FOR EVENTS AT GGMG.ORG/CALENDAR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

It’s important to celebrate and support Black Lives all year long, but Black History Month (February) is a great month to pause and check in. You can educate yourself about topics, support nonprofit organizations, and shop at Black Owned Businesses (check out Bay Area Black Owned Businesses at bayareablackmarket.com!). Here is a roundup of issues impacting the Black community and how you can learn about important topics or engage as an ally.

Beauty

The idea of mass-market cosmetics with inclusive skin tones is relatively new. Today, brands created by Black women, such as Rhianna’s Fenty, have brought inclusion to a new level, with over 40 different shades available. In the Bay Area, companies including [GloGirl](#) make cosmetics that reflect our local flavor.

Online Dating

Studies including [a five-year study OkCupid released in 2014](#) have shown that racial bias runs rampant on dating apps, with Black people and Asian men faring the worst in terms of racial and gender preference among 25 million users. In a year where dating in real life has been nearly impossible, online dating platforms have taken steps to address these issues, although they still have work to do.

Black Trans Rights

Over 40 trans or gender non-conforming people were killed in 2020; a number that far exceeds all trans deaths in 2019. Most of these people were Black and Latinx trans women killed from a fatal shooting or a similar violent act. [Transgender Awareness Week](#) is from November 13 to 19.

Feminism

For too long, white feminists have not embraced—even rejected—the intersectionality of the lives of women of color. Rachel Cargle addresses this

(and more) by [explaining](#), “Going up against liberal progressive white feminists who refuse to let down their guard of “ultimate liberation” to actually learn from women of color who have been fighting this fight with grit and grace for generations, is the most straining part being a black feminist activist.”

Environmentalism

The environmental movement suffers from a similar pain as feminism—a [denial of black people](#) taking up the call, and the issues that they raise. Instead, as reported by Malini Ranganathan in *The Environment as Freedom: A Decolonial Reimagining*, “A further silencing is the fact that given the elite leadership of prominent environmental organizations, many problems that afflict poor urban and rural communities—white and nonwhite alike—are not taken seriously as “environmental.” Environmental issues permeate all environments—take a look at the world through the eyes of a [Black eco-poet](#) or the [families of Flint, Michigan](#). As Dr. Chelsea Mikael Frazier reminds us, “Black Feminist Ecological Thought also reminds us that Black women are not, and have never been, passive victims of environmental degradation...”



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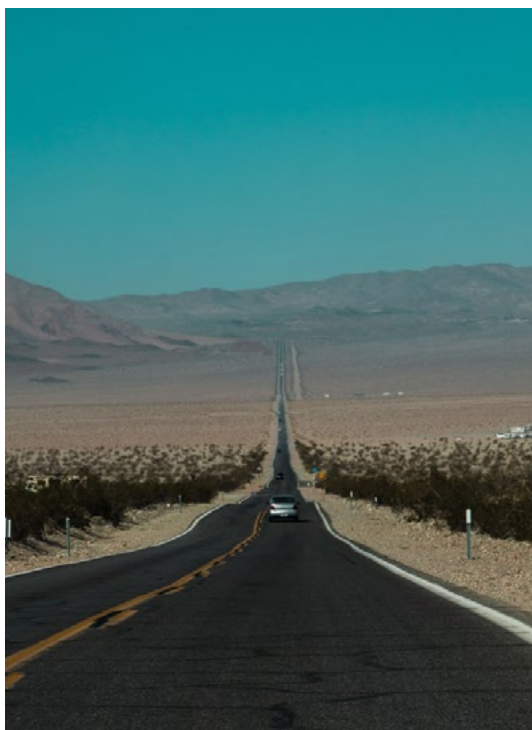
Are We There Yet?

By Jessica Perry

The first long car trip I remember taking with my parents was a particularly twisty drive up the NorCal Coast to Sonoma County. We were on our way to Sea Ranch, and right around the time the curves were really starting to get to me, my dad put the album *Rubber Soul* on the car stereo. Before we reached our destination we also listened to *Revolver*. I remember three things about that trip: I had my own bedroom, we had a hot tub, and that car ride sparked my lifelong love affair with the music of the Beatles. That same music still carries me through many long car rides with my own kids more than 25 years later.

My husband and I have taken more road trips with our kids than my parents ever did with me when I was small. Singing together as a family is one of the things I enjoy most about these trips. We've driven to Tahoe most years since our oldest was a baby (she's now 7). We've driven to Disneyland twice and around Israel at least three times since the kids have been born. While we have probably heard the *Frozen 2*, *Moana*, and *Sing* soundtracks more than I'd like to admit, children's soundtracks are not the only music that we listen to together. My husband made a playlist when our oldest was a baby and it still makes regular appearances on some of our longer trips in addition to my many Spotify playlists.

While I can't say that we don't give in to the whims of the kids' musical interests on longer car rides, I do insist on listening to my music in the car most of the time when I'm driving them around town. This has resulted in some really interesting philosophical conversations with my older daughter. On a drive to pick up her sister at preschool, while listening to Kidz Bop sing Can't Buy Me Love, my older daughter asked me, "Why is that lady always trying to buy



love? Why doesn't she just ask for it?" I told my daughter that I thought that was a really good question and that paying for friendship doesn't usually end very well.

Last month when we were listening to Blackbird in the car (another Beatles song that I used to sing to my kids as a lullaby), my oldest asked me, "Mama, why are all lullabies so depressing?" I realized that most of the songs that I sang to her as a baby were mostly either Beatles songs or '90s folk songs that were all beautiful but a bit melancholy. The more we talked about it, we realized that many typical American kids' songs are actually fairly morbid. For example, why is the baby falling out of a tree (Rock-A-Bye Baby)? Why are bridges falling down

(London Bridge Is Falling Down)?

You might ask what kind of musical taste my kids have developed after a steady diet of classic rock, folk music,

Israeli classics, and a strong dose of Disney. More often than not, they request that I put on Rocket Man, Octopus's Garden, or—more recently—esoteric Russian dance music discovered by my husband that has a song all about tacos and burritos.

Some people I know have complained about how their

kids will only listen to kids' music and I'm wondering if they have ever really had the chance to develop a taste for anything else.

I look forward to endless road trips through exotic locations once this pandemic is a distant memory. Until then, I'm grateful for our impassioned sing-alongs and philosophical discussions on our drives to the beach.

Jessica is a copy editor, writer, and mom to two aspiring singers, ages 5 and 7. They look forward to giving the Von Trapp family a run for their money on many future road trips and jaunts about town.

"Some people I know have complained about how their kids will only listen to kids' music and I'm wondering if they have ever really had the chance to develop a taste for anything else."