

# Meet the podcasters taking the shame out of menopause

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**SHAWNA COHEN**

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

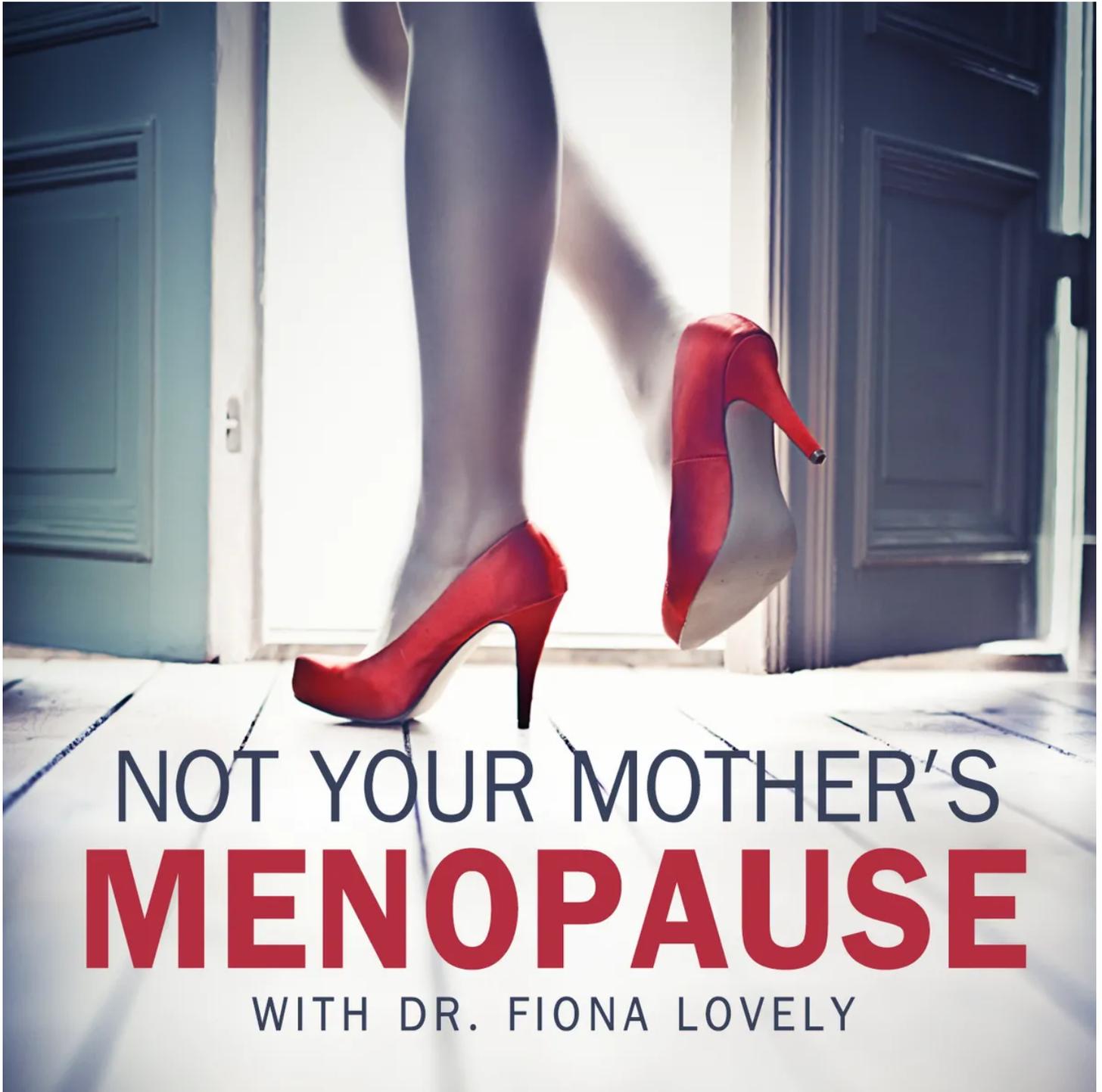
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Menopause has a bad rap. The natural transition marks the end of a woman's menstrual cycles, and yet it's still considered taboo. It's astounding when you consider that menopause affects half the population (there are more than 10 million women over the age of 40 in Canada alone, according to a recent [Statistics Canada](#) estimate). The stage of life is vastly under-researched, with many women suffering in silence. But there's good news on the horizon: A slew of smart and savvy podcasters are opening up the conversation around menopause and sparking change.

## Welcome to the rebranding of menopause

Knowledge is power, they say, and they're here to educate and inform in a way that's accessible to all. Best of all, each touts the often-overlooked benefits of menopause: increased energy, confidence and clarity.



## Not Your Mother's Menopause

**The Host:** Dr. Fiona Lovely, chiropractor and founder and clinical director of Calgary Brain + Spine.

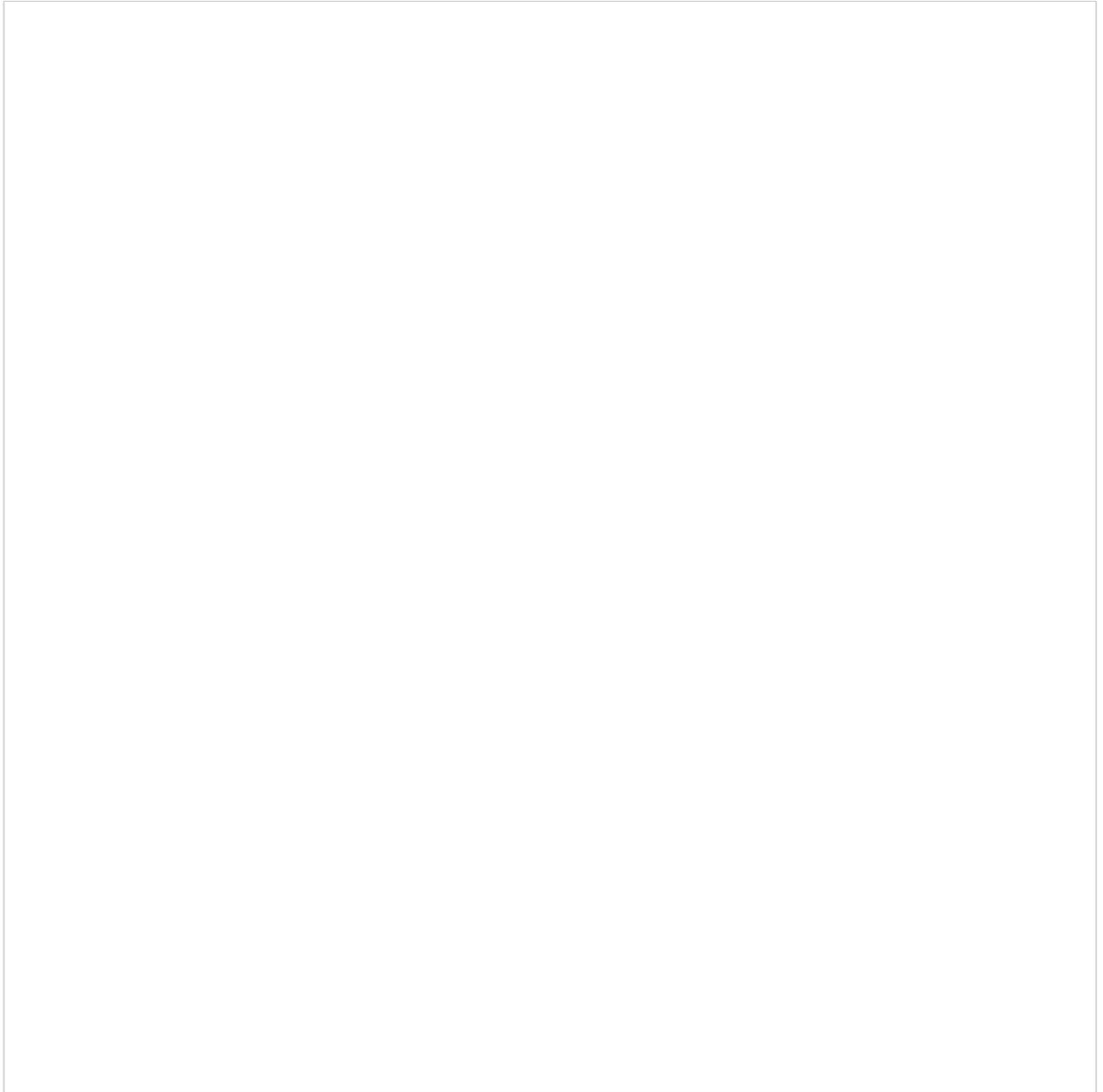
**Potential audience:** Holistic devotees

**Why to tune in:** Lovely lays out a functional approach to health, with guest experts such as scientist and neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine (author of NYT bestseller *The Upgrade: How the Female Brain Gets Stronger and Better in Midlife and Beyond*), who explore the science behind her methodology.

**Her truth:** “Don’t let others in the transition tell you they are ‘fine’ and not having symptoms (rare!). Nor should you tolerate being told that what you’re experiencing is ‘normal for your age, get used to it.’ Find a practitioner who is informed in the new science of menopause transition and familiar with treatment options.”

**Meno essentials:** “Blackout curtains, ear plugs (to drown out a noisy bed partner) and a yoga mat. Good sleep makes a world of difference, as does gentle stretching and meditation/breathwork.”

**Why the future looks bright:** Lovely says studies show people are happiest at age 57, which means the best is yet to come. As well, more research on the topic translates to an “easier and less bumpy road for our daughters and granddaughters.”



## **Black Menopause and Beyond**

**Host:** Anita Powell, community advocate/worker in Bedford, England, and founder of the Menopause Alliance support group.

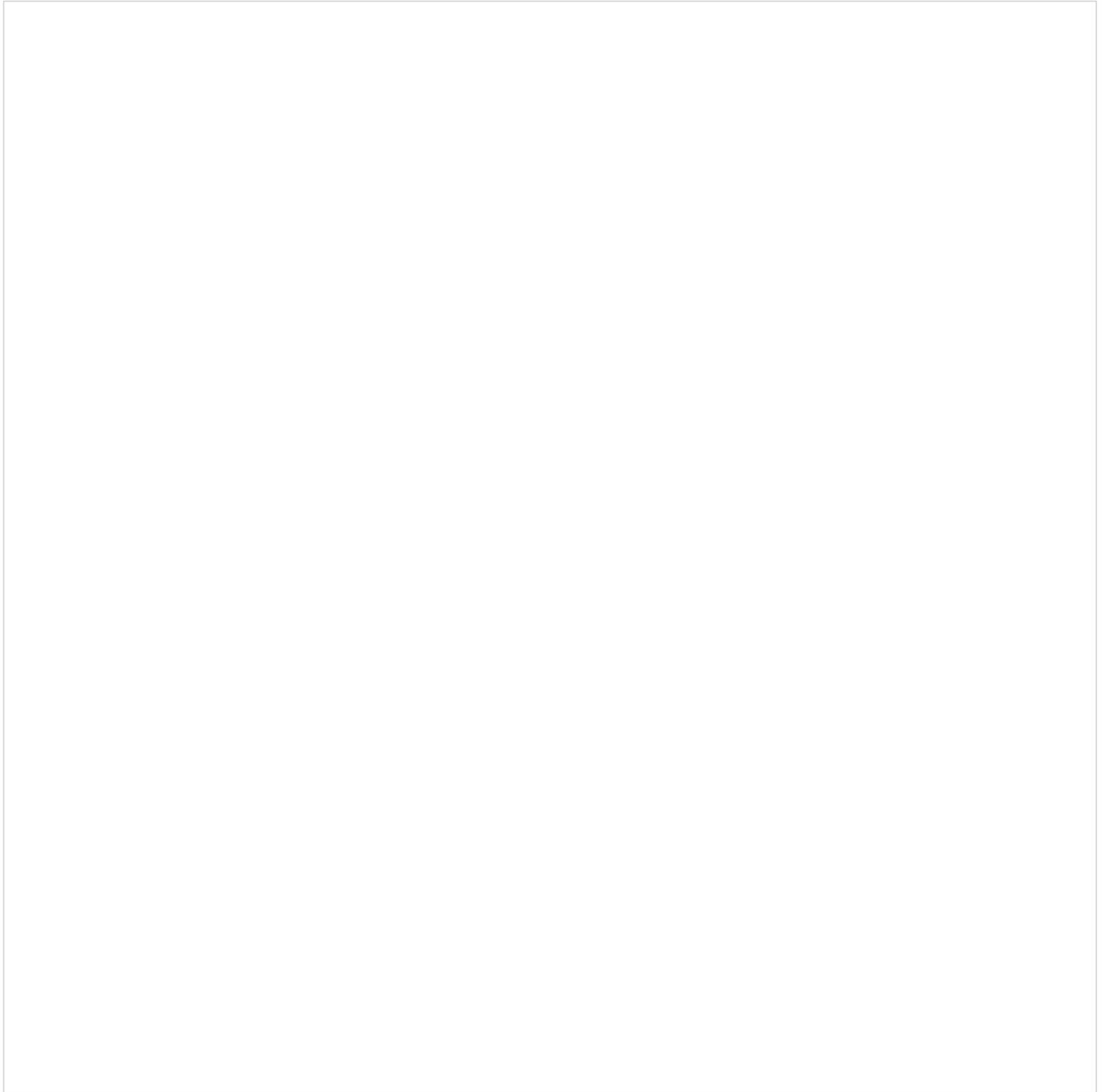
**Potential audience:** Those interested in menopause information from a Black point of view.

**Why to tune in:** Powell encourages mid-lifers – especially Black women, who are often overlooked when it comes to menopause care – to seek help and engage in self-care.

**Why her viewpoint matters:** Recent research finds that Black women reach menopause 8.5 months earlier than white women; they have worse symptoms yet are less likely to receive support such as hormone therapy or access to mental-health services. Powell says listeners tell her they've returned to their doctors for further advice, while allies in the profession say the podcast has given them further understanding of the Black female experience in menopause.

**Greatest myth:** That Black women do not suffer from menopause. “The taboo and anti-menopause struggle is so strong in some Black communities that women internalize the message and struggle in silence.”

**Sage advice:** “Seek out your menopause tribe – women who share your struggle and understand your journey.”



## Hit Play Not Pause

**Host:** Selene Yeager, health and fitness writer, personal trainer, nutrition coach and athlete based in Emmaus, Penn.

**Potential audience:** Performance-minded athletes.

**Why to tune in:** Yeager's no-nonsense attitude helps women optimize their physiology and maintain fitness during menopause.

**The motive:** "Menopause blindsided me in unexpected ways. Fear of riding down rocky trails I used to send at full speed. Body composition changes. Waking up in the middle of the night, in a panic, with rivers of sweat running down my spine. All while my periods were coming like clockwork and I was still competing at an elite level." When Yeager searched for menopause advice, there was nothing out there for women already living active lives.

**In her survival kit:** "A big hammer to smash the stereotypes of menopausal, midlife women."

**Silver lining:** "Women in their 40s, 50s, 60s and beyond are rock climbing, mountain biking, running ultras, competing in Olympic lifting and so much more. There's lots of living proof."

**Why things are looking up:** "When you see an ad [Astellas Pharma] talking about menopause during the Super Bowl, you know the tides are turning ... we're a huge market, you'll see more products and services directed at us, some of them predatory. But you'll also see more research and genuine help. That's progress."



## Body Stuff

**Host:** Dr. Jen Gunter, OB/GYN and pain-medicine physician who advocates for evidence-based medicine. Author of *The Vagina Bible* and *The Menopause Manifesto*. Winnipeg-born, San Francisco-based.

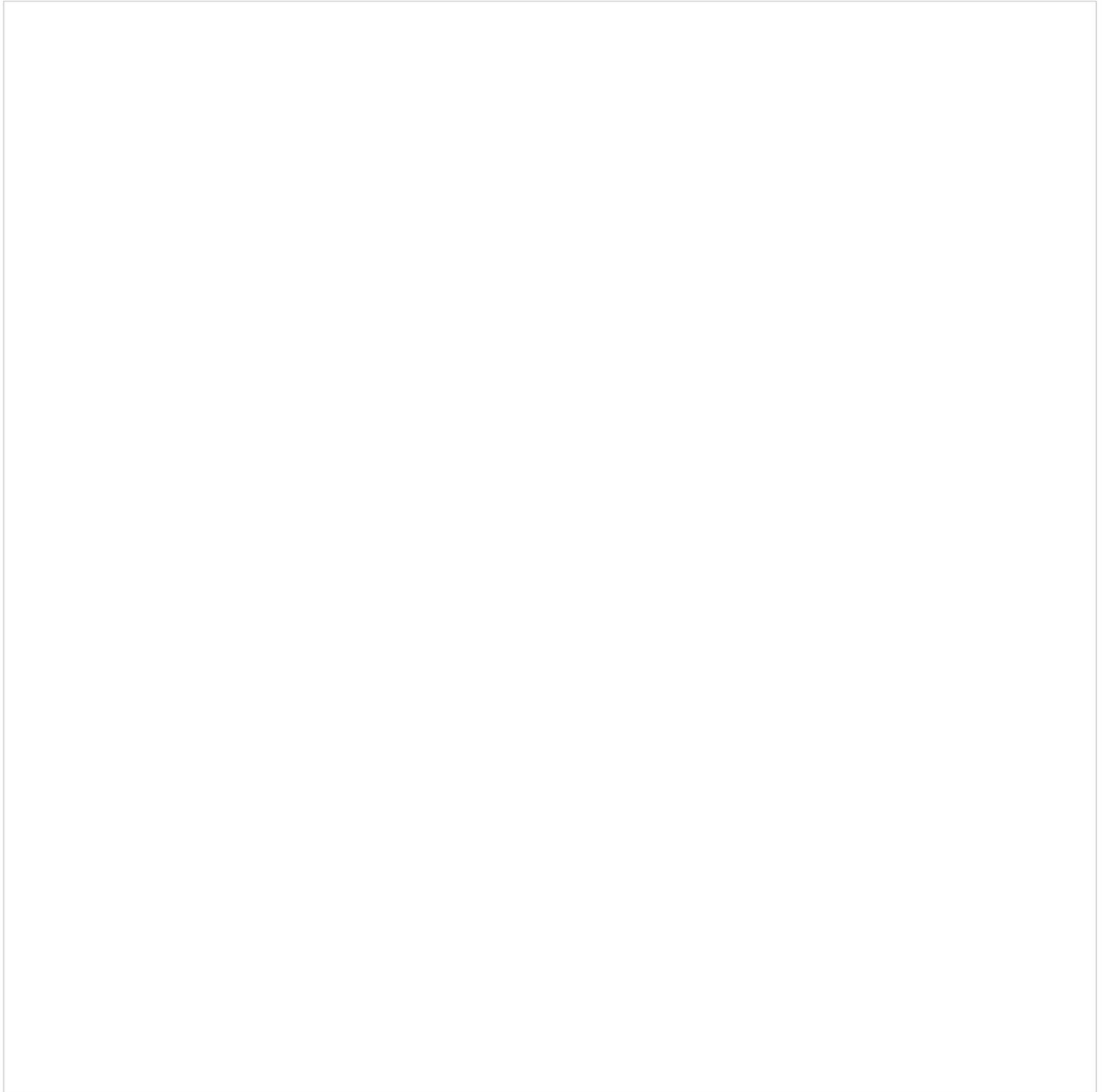
**Potential audience:** Those interested in how the body *really* works – from a medical standpoint.

**Why to tune in:** Gunter is known for calling out people and companies exploiting what she calls “pseudoscience” for financial gain. Notably, in one episode she says, “I think a lot of the fear and silence around menopause is just misogyny combined with the fear of aging.”

**Top tip:** “Hormones can help a lot with some symptoms, but they are not a cure-all. Also, exercise – that is the number one tip for a healthy menopause.”

**Her hot topic:** “The value of a woman is still based on her potential as a breeder. That is why those who push hormones inappropriately advertise them as being the key to youth, which they are not. We need to talk about menopause as a phase of life, because that is what it is, like puberty. And we need to support people who have symptoms and health concerns, like we should do in puberty and in pregnancy.”

**Words of wisdom:** “Not having a period is great. Many women, myself included, report a certain clarity in menopause. Whether that is cumulative from life experience or due to the fact that all the neurons required for reproduction have been pruned by the brain, I don’t know. I wrote two bestselling books in menopause and met the love of my life. Menopause isn’t the end, it’s the start of a new chapter.”



## The Merry Menopause Bookclub

**Host:** Brighton, England-based Jo Fuller. Educator, accredited coach and founder of the Merry Menopause online community.

**Potential audience:** Book nerds.

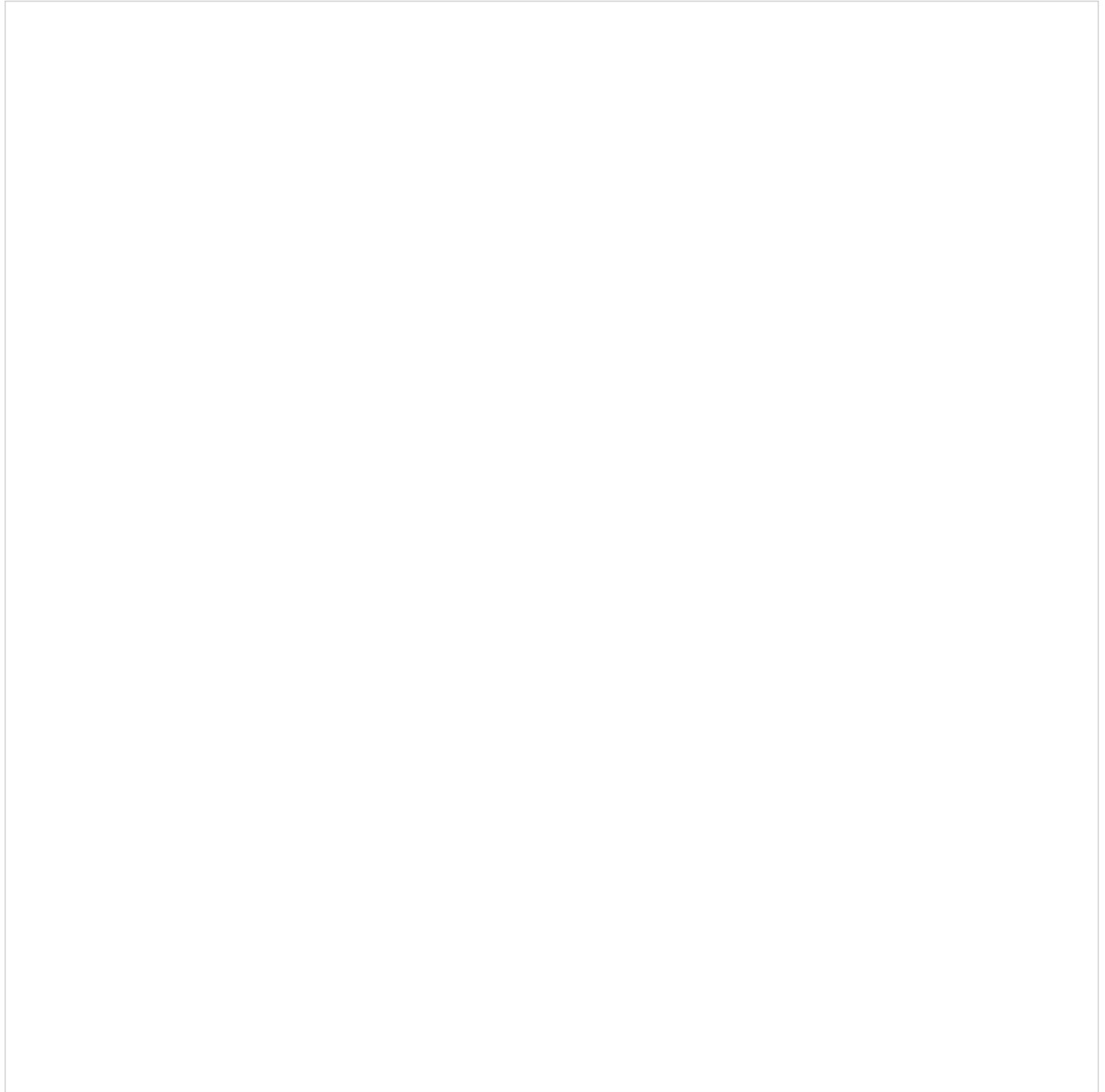
**Why to tune in:** Fuller has created an inclusive book club for the midlife set. Authors such as Tracey Cox (*Great Sex Starts at 50*) and Charlotte Bauer (*How to Get Over Being Young*) share expert advice and personal tales that make us feel as if we're hanging out in our living room.

**She doesn't believe:** "That menopause starts in your 50s. Perimenopause starts in late 30s/early 40s, when we are still having regular periods. Also, that menopause is an illness and HRT is a cure."

**Recipe for success:** "A healthy, balanced diet, regular low-impact exercise and stress management."

**Embracing the change:** "Menopause is being pathologized. It's not an illness and it can't be cured. Why are we treating it like there is something wrong with us? Menopause is a change of life – we deserve it to be life-changing, not something to be afraid or ashamed of."

**Real talk:** "Sex becomes more liberating without the risk of pregnancy ... many women become free from the shackles of people-pleasing and start to carve out a life for themselves. It's a rebirth!"



## Menopause Reimagined

**Host:** Andrea Donsky, Toronto-based nutritionist, menopause educator and researcher. Co-founder of [wearemorphus.com](https://www.wearemorphus.com) (a website for managing

menopausal symptoms).

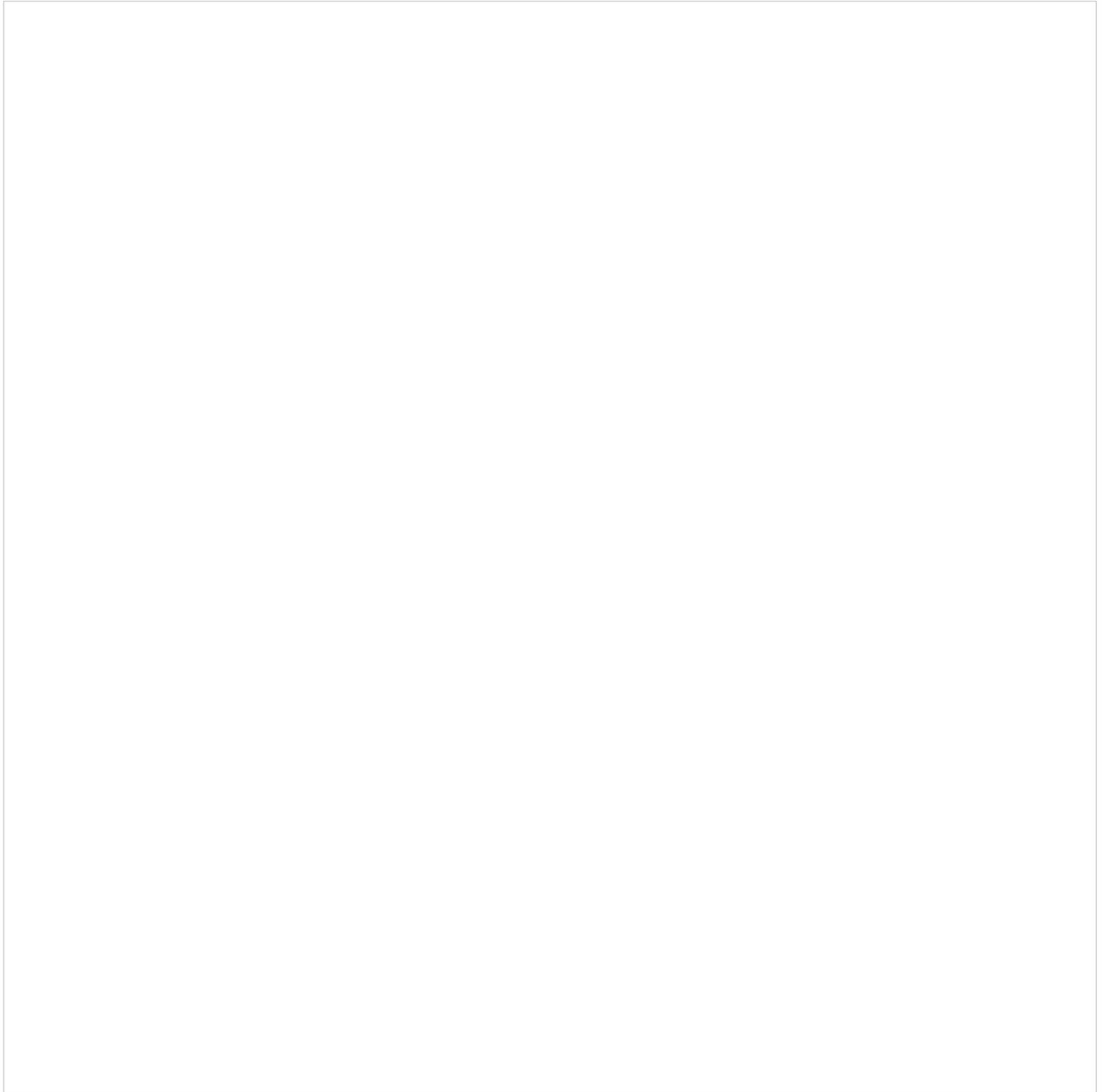
**Potential audience:** Healthy-living enthusiasts.

**Why to tune in:** Donsky dishes on menopause candidly and simplifies complex topics, such as bio-identical hormones and phytoestrogens, often with a dose of humour. Check out her TikTok account (@andreadonsky) for laugh-out-loud videos about herself and her symptoms, often with cameos by her bewildered husband.

**It's personal:** "I joke that I went from an A-type personality to an F- in perimenopause because I had no motivation and I couldn't focus or concentrate much of the time."

**Meno mantra:** "Be gentle with yourself since there is so much going on during this phase of life and it's very easy to be hard on ourselves, or to speak to ourselves with anger and disrespect."

**Fact-finding mission:** "[People say] there are only 34 symptoms of menopause. Fact: There are 85+ signs and symptoms of menopause. I've been personally tracking them for the last six years and they are all listed on my website." Including everything from itchy skin to bladder spasms.



## Showy Ovaries

**Host:** Auckland, New Zealand-based comedian Penny Ashton.

**Best for:** Those seeking humour with their out-of-whack hormones.

**Why to tune in:** Hearing Ashton chat with guests feels like an intimate dinner party. Guests run the gamut, from George Fowler (a.k.a. Hugo Grrrl) – the first trans man to compete in a drag reality show – to reproductive rights advocate Dr. Margaret Sparrow.

**Meno must-haves:** “A neck fan: a wee headphone-like gadget that hangs around your neck and blows so that you can pretend you’re Beyonce in a music video.”

**Double standard:** “The average age [of menopause] is 52 and for decades, women have been deemed invisible from that age onwards. Dick Van Dyke is dancing on stage in his 90s but a 55-year-old woman is ancient?”

**The upside:** Caring less about what anyone thinks. Also, “Hopefully brushing off imposter syndrome once and for all. And I hear that once you’re through the change, there’s a new burst of energy. That sounds nice.”

**Parting words:** “A spoonful of sugar helps the HRT go down.”

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