



Menopause at work - Employees

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Toolkit: Menopause at work – Employees

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Introduction

Increasingly women are working well into their 50s and 60s and beyond with the number of older women in the workforce is expected to rise. Women are working through perimenopause, menopause and beyond and this can mean managing the demands of work and home life whilst also dealing with sometimes severe symptoms and other issues. It should be noted that for some women, the menopause can naturally occur early or for medical reasons such as surgery; hysterectomy, chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

Although it is women who experience the physical and psychological symptoms of menopause, it is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home. This can include male and female colleagues, family members, same sex partnerships, those going through gender re-assignment and disabled colleagues.

With average female life expectancy in the UK at 83.2 years, many women are living in this post-menopausal phase for half to one-third of their life and these symptoms can have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing, as well as their work and relationships.

Purpose

This toolkit is intended to raise awareness of menopause transition and provide information and support for employees both those who are directly and indirectly affected. The toolkit is to be used alongside the Guiding Principles document and the Toolkit for Managers.

What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Every experience will be different and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40 years. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

- Menopause - A biological stage in a woman's life when you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months.
- Perimenopause - The time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen.
- Premature menopause - Can happen naturally, or because of illness or surgery.
- Andropause - The Male Menopause. *(Note the Andropause is not covered in this guidance).*



The symptoms of menopause

During menopause a woman's **brain and mood** can be affected causing: depression and anxiety; sleep problems which then leads to tiredness, fatigue and/or dizziness; brain fog leading to reduced concentration, poor information retention and a reduced ability to learn; unexplained mood swings, irritability and emotional outbursts. These symptoms can impact on an individual's performance in terms of coping strategies, pressure of dealing with deadlines and priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence, anxiety or panic disorder.

Women can experience **hair** loss or hair can become thin, lacklustre and brittle. Women can have **mouth** problems such as bleeding gums and a dry mouth. This can lead to bad breath. They may also experience taste changes and strange oral sensations including a burning tongue.

A woman's **heart** can be affected, causing palpitations and an increased risk of heart disease. A woman's **lungs** can be affected as they may develop new allergies or existing allergies can become worse. For example, asthma, hay fever, dermatitis (see skin/nails below).

A woman's **abdomen** and **gut** can be affected as they may gain weight, develop bloating, abdominal cramps, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), sickness or nausea and women can experience **urogenital problems** which bring about greater urgency and/or more frequent trips to the toilet.

Women can have irregular **periods** brought about by an unpredictable pre-menstrual tension and menstrual cycle, heavy bleeding, water retention and bloating.

Women can suffer from general **skin** itchiness and formication (feels like something crawling about under the skin), allergies such as dermatitis and thinning skin. Also, nails can become dry and brittle.

Women develop problems with their **muscles, joints, nerves and bones**. This can lead to muscle pain and weakness, joint pain, osteoporosis / loss of bone density and nerve function may be affected.

Women can suffer from sudden changes to **body temperature**, which include daytime sweats and flushes; sudden heat or redness in face; night time sweats and flushes.

Other symptoms of the menopause (of which there are 34 recognised as part of the menopause) can also include loss of libido, vagina dryness and or atrophy, weight gain, incontinence, breast pain and headaches.



Need more support with your menopausal symptoms?

Some individuals may not be aware that they are going through menopause transition. GPs can arrange for blood tests to be undertaken to confirm Menopause. However, NICE guidance suggests that tests for the over 45s are unnecessary. Consult your GP for any symptoms that you are concerned about, many of them can also relate to other conditions.

The Positive Menopause

It is not all bad news; there is a positive side to menopause.

- Many women do not experience any adverse symptoms of menopause.
- Post-menopause you may be more confident, some women have gone on to create their own successful businesses and your creativity may increase.
- Freedom from some of the more annoying and painful aspects of having periods.
- No more Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMT) every month.

You may find it useful to consider

For more information on the following, please see your departmental intranet or local leads

- Researching the menopause. (See useful links below).
- Joining a network or buddying with someone.
- Discussing with your family, friends etc. and seeking support.
- Having a confidential discussion with your manager, sharing relevant information about your needs and possible impact on your work if any.
- Discussing any workplace adjustments that you might need.
- Recording your symptoms, frequency and when they occur using a Workplace Adjustment Passport.
- Requesting special leave to attend appointments
- Requesting an Occupational Health referral.
- Referring to support offered by wellbeing and/or diversity and inclusion networks
- Women are now having children later in life and it should be recognised that a woman may be responsible for children and/or teenagers whilst also caring for elderly relatives.
- Paid special leave
- Absences directly related to menopause symptoms



Adjustments that may help at work

Talk to your manager about workplace adjustments that might help you in managing your menopausal symptoms at work. Here are some ideas you could consider:

Working hours/location

- A change in working hours, or remote working.
- A reduction in travel or increased comfort breaks, dialling into meetings.
- Some possible adjustment to shift patterns.

Uniform / PPE

- A possible change to uniform requirements – avoid man-made fibres or close-fitting uniforms.
- Uniforms in various sizes to accommodate bloating / short term weight gain.
- If own clothes are worn, consider natural fibres over man-made fibres and wear layers.

Workspace

- Flexible and easy access to bathroom facilities, so may need to move to a desk nearer the toilets.
- Ensuring there is good ventilation (fan or open window or adjust air conditioning).
- Access to cold drinks.
- Regular breaks in a quiet space to be able to take a moment away from the working area.
- A desk fan.
- Using the welfare facilities to take a break (where facilities are available, following local processes).

Agreeing the process for further support

You should agree a plan with your manager which will be led by you and unique to your situation. In some departments this is known as a Workplace Adjustment Passport.

Confidentiality and disclosure

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that information is only shared where necessary (such as if the employee divulged a threat to life/suicidal thoughts) and with your consent. Disclosure without consent can be distressing for all concerned and in some instances breach:

- the Data Protection Act 2018
- the Equality Act 2010
- GDPR
- The Disability Discrimination Act 2010



Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work

Menopause affects everyone – it is not just an issue for women

Whether experiencing the menopause first hand as a woman or second hand as a colleague or partner, education and information help to break the taboo.

Supportive ‘human’ conversations make the difference

Equipping line managers to have conversations with their team members and providing an effective framework allows women to feel supported in the workplace.

A healthy environment and culture is better for everyone

Creating an open, honest environment means we can all flourish at work.

Retaining our talent

Twenty-five per cent of menopausal women have considered leaving work because of their symptoms. Providing the right support can retain experienced and knowledgeable employees, saving on recruitment costs which is beneficial to the individual and business success.

Enabling women to be their best at work

A wide-ranging physical and psychological symptoms can feel seriously inhibiting to a woman in her career. By providing the right support and communicating openly enables women – and their teams – to perform at their best.

How you can support your colleagues with the menopause

An individual may be affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, therefore it is important to have an open mind, be sensitive to the issues and not make any assumptions. When someone has spoken with you in confidence, it is important to respect that and to keep the information confidential. Traditionally, the menopause has not been widely discussed in workplaces, with some parties finding it difficult and embarrassing to raise the subject.

Managers and colleagues who want to support female colleagues going through the menopause are therefore often uncertain how to do this. Thankfully due to the increased coverage of the menopause in the media and the increased availability of online support and guidance, conversations around managing the menopause in the workplace are becoming more and more normalised. Menopause transition does not necessarily lead to reduced performance at work and may be managed with consideration, understanding and in some circumstances, with workplace adjustments or workplace adaptations.

It is important not to ignore the impact of menopausal symptoms at work or to simply regard them as “a women’s thing”. Similarly, workplace “banter” which has historically been the acceptable way menopause has been dealt with in some organisations, could be interpreted as harassment. It is upsetting for the person being mocked and critical that we act with kindness and tolerance to all of our colleagues.



Additional guidance and products

Articles: University of Leicester - [Workplace menopause study finds 'women feel they need to cope alone'](#)

Government research: [Menopause transition: effects on women's economic participation:](#)

Webpages providing more in-depth information:

[NHS website](#)

NHS Livewell – [coping with menopause](#)

NHS Livewell – [Hormone Replacement Therapy](#)

NHS Livewell – [Premature menopause:](#)

[Menopause Matters](#)

[NICE](#)

The Daisy Network – [Information on premature menopause](#)

[Women's Health Concern](#)

[Male Menopause](#)

[Faculty of Occupational Medicine:](#)

TUC – [work smart:](#)

[Newson Health-Dr Louise Newson –My Menopause Doctor – Twitter and Facebook](#)

[Henpicked](#) for Information about Menopause in the Workplace

[The Charity for Civil Servants](#) provides a wellbeing [hub](#) to support and information about [sleep](#) including 'Sleepstation' (an online sleep therapy programme), Vouchers for [4 Relate counselling sessions](#) and supportive conversations for those living with stress, anxiety and depression as well as the opportunity to refer to organisations such as Anxiety UK.

Your department may also have its own menopause network, please see your intranet site for more information on this and your Employee Assistance Programme.

The department's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to both employees and managers The EAP can advise on a range of issues and arrange counselling where required.