



Menopause guidance and support for the workplace.

The menopause is a natural part of every woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

It can be a subject that both managers and employees find awkward and embarrassing to raise and there is often a lack of knowledge about it. There is a sound health and wellbeing, business and legal case to pro-actively manage and support women during this time.

The information in this guidance is for managers and employees. It provides general knowledge and facts about the menopause so that it is better understood, barriers are reduced, and it is not treated as a hidden subject.

The guidance also details the responsibilities of managers and employees and what support is available and can be considered.

What it is - Definition

The menopause affects all women, it is when they stop menstruating and reach the end of their natural reproductive lives. They experience hormonal changes as their oestrogen and progesterone levels decrease and these can become out of balance which can cause physical and psychological symptoms. The menopause typically occurs between the ages of 45 – 55 but can affect women either side of this age range. It can start earlier for women who have a condition called premature ovarian insufficiency or have had medical treatment such as a hysterectomy or chemotherapy.

There is a transition stage before a woman's periods finally stop when she is likely to experience changes, this is known as the perimenopause. These changes can start 2 – 3 years before the end of menstruation but for some women the changes can be for five years or more beforehand. During the perimenopause women may have menopausal symptoms and changes in their menstrual cycle. Menopausal symptoms can continue into the post-menopause period which is the time after a woman has not had a period for 12 months.

Why we should support female employees during the menopause?

Today the work force has changed considerably, more women of menopausal age are working. In 2016 nearly 70% of all women were working and many continue to do so into their late 60s. Approximately 3 women in 4 experience menopausal symptoms and 1 in 4 experience symptoms that they find difficult to deal with.

Although a normal life event the symptoms associated with the menopause are often under recognised and not taken seriously. It is a subject that is largely ignored but failing to recognise and support female employees at work during this time can affect their productivity, commitment to work and work relationships. Women often feel they cannot raise menopausal issues and rather than disclose problems they take sick leave.

Legislation

There is a duty not to discriminate under the 2010 Equalities Act and given that the menopause usually affects women of a certain age failure, to support our female employees, by making reasonable adjustments for example, could be viewed as sex, disability or age discrimination.

The Health and Safety at Work Act requires us to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our employees and by failing to consider the difficulties menopausal women may experience could be considered a breach of health and safety legislation.



Symptoms

Every woman's experience of the menopause is different, some may not notice any major changes, others experience some symptoms and 1 in 4 experience serious symptoms.

Symptoms can occur during the perimenopause; the menopause; and post-menopause stages. On average these symptoms can last for seven and half years for a woman's body to fully adjust but for some women they can last for up to 12 years.

Physical Symptoms can include:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Poor sleep
- Tiredness and lack of energy
- Urinary problems
- Heavy periods and clots
- Vaginal symptoms
- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Panic attacks
- Palpitations
- Mood Swings
- Poor memory
- Being tearful
- Weight gain
- Dry eyes and skin

Mental Health issues

Linked to the physical symptoms, female employees can experience increased levels of stress during this time because of the hormonal changes occurring within their bodies and the fact that their fertility levels are dropping off.

Heavy workloads, inflexible hours, inappropriate comments and a lack of understanding can impact on a woman's confidence and self-esteem. Headaches and insomnia can affect concentration. Insomnia can be caused by anxiety and or depression and weight gain can lead to a loss of confidence.

Other symptoms due to the change in hormone levels can include exhaustion, depression, anxiety and these can affect a female employee's ability to concentrate and remember things.

Support and Actions from Managers

Discussion with managers

This is a subject that employees and managers may find hard to discuss. Female employees may be reluctant to discuss with a male manager or with younger managers the problems they may be experiencing with their menopause. This could be due to; embarrassment; concerns that any work problems may be linked to work performance; that opportunities for promotion will be affected; and worries that their problems will not be taken seriously.



To help women who are experiencing menopausal difficulties it is important that we have an open and inclusive culture which accommodates the needs of women transitioning through menopause as well as all employee's needs. This will encourage women to talk about their issues.

Discussions could take place with:

- Line managers in their regular 1 to 1's with employees which should include discussions about health and wellbeing as an ongoing concern and if there are any health issues that are affecting an employee's ability to work effectively. For female employee's menopausal issues can be raised which can be valuable in acknowledging that this is a normal stage of life.
- Alternatively, a female employee may prefer to talk to a female manager within their service.
- Discussions should include looking at the suggested adjustments and support detailed below.
- The discussions should be ongoing with regular reviews arranged. Any actions implemented such as reasonable adjustments, a referral to Occupational Health should be noted including any other advice or information provided such as suggesting they should see their GP.

Reasonable adjustments and practical actions

Reasonable adjustments can be considered, where reasonably practical, on a temporary or permanent basis and can include:

- Flexible Working (where practicable) such as:
 - reduction in working hours
 - change in start and finishing times
 - change in working pattern (e.g. compressed hours, term-time working, part-time working)
 - change of work location
 - working more from home/another hub/ or another Council facility
- Looking at the employee's duties and whether these can be adjusted such as assigning lighter duties or removing some.
- Are there times of the day that are better or worse for the employee and consider if adjustments can be made to accommodate these.
- Would having some quiet time so that the employee is not disturbed whilst working help?
- If a uniform or protective clothing is worn to help women cope with flushes and sweating are they:
 - made of natural fibres?
 - is loose clothing available or can the uniforms be changed/ adapted?
 - can jackets be removed?
 - is a spare uniform available?



- Chilled water – is there access to chilled drinking water nearby?
- Are cloakrooms and washroom facilities close by?
- Access to natural light
- Ventilation/fans - is the ventilation satisfactory?
 - Is there air conditioning?
 - Are there windows that open?
 - Are portable fans available if necessary and safe to assign (USB fans are permitted)?
- Breaks - many women suffer from dizziness; fatigue and an increased need to use the toilet so:
 - Make sure breaks are taken
 - Make sure breaks from working on DSE's are taken

 - Consider allowing extra breaks as and when necessary
 - Is there a rest area nearby or quiet area to work?

Discuss a referral to Occupational Health

Employee's responsibilities

- Always seek medical advice from your GP in the first instance rather than suffer in silence and discuss possible options such as lifestyle changes, HRT, complementary & herbal treatments, vitamins supplements etc.
- Take personal responsibility to look after your own health.
- Raise menopausal issues affecting your work with your manager or ask to talk to another manager.
- Be open and honest in any discussions with your manager, Occupational Health or HR.
- Consider and discuss possible flexible working arrangements.
- Talk with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing menopausal symptoms, about symptoms and solutions.
- Consider your lifestyle – diet, exercise, sleep.
- Seek a referral to Occupational Health.
- Take precautions at work such as wearing layers of clothes and having a change of clothes available.
- Look at relaxation techniques such as mindfulness, tai chi, yoga or take gentle exercise such as walking.
- If you are having problems in accessing support speak to HR or your union
- It is the duty of all employees to support and be respectful to their colleagues.

Manager's responsibilities

- Read and be aware of this guidance and use it.
- If this is a difficult area for you to raise and discuss with your employees please to the Chief Officer to consider attending a 'having difficult conversations' course.
- Hold regular discussions and 1 to 1's with your employees and include asking about their wellbeing and if they have any issues with their health.
- Arrange follow-up reviews.
- Discuss reasonable adjustments and where practicable put in place.
- Suggest they make an appointment to see their GP.
- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health.
- Put in place recommendations from Occupational Health where practicable.



Support provided by Occupational Health (OH) in relation to menopause can include:

- Referrals to OH
- Employee well-being risk assessment
- Access to general well-being support programs including Active Health, healthy eating, exercise and stopping smoking
- Access to counselling

Other sources of help/ reference

- NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) guidance <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance>
- Let's talk menopause <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause>
- Talking Menopause – www.talkingmenopause.co.uk
- The Menopause Exchange – www.menopause-exchange.co.uk
- Menopause Matters – www.menopausematters.co.uk
- Menopause Support – <https://menopausesupport.co.uk/>
- Meg's Menopause – <https://megsmenopause.com/menopause>
- Menopause Café – 'gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss menopause' – www.menopausecafe.net

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