

## Draft: Supporting someone during the menopause

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## How to support someone during the menopause

The menopause has many possible physical and emotional symptoms, and this can make it a complex and challenging time. Around 8 in every 10 women will have noticeable menopause symptoms and for 1 in 4, they will be severe. It's not surprising that over a third of their partners say they struggle to know how best to offer support.

If you know someone who might be going through menopause or perimenopause, it's useful for you to find out more about how you can support them. Perhaps your partner, wife, mum, friend or colleague is affected by the menopause, and you'd like to be there for them but aren't sure where to start. Here are some tips that might help.

### Find out about the menopause

Getting yourself and others informed is a really important step and it will give you an idea of what your partner, family member, friend or colleague might be going through. You can support them best if you understand what the menopause is, how much it can vary, and what the effects can be:

- 'Menopause' refers to the last ever period you have
- The average age of menopause is 51, but it usually happens between the ages of 45-55
- For 1 in 100 women, menopause will start under the age of 40
- And for 1 in 1,000 women, menopause will start under the age of 30
- 'Perimenopause' is the time around menopause, when the body is preparing for menopause and the first year afterwards – it can last months or even years
- Nearly three quarters of people experiencing menopause will have symptoms
- Symptoms can include:
  - hot flushes,
  - sweats,
  - tiredness,
  - poor memory and concentration problems,
  - vaginal dryness and bladder issues,
  - plus, symptoms of anxiety, low mood and insomnia.
- A good first step is learning about all the various symptoms of the menopause, the impact these symptoms may have on your and others, then you may want to find out more about potential treatments and support available if you are supporting a partner, friend or relative.

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Want to learn more?

Women's Health Concern is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society. Easy to understand resources are available to download, all for free ([www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)).

You can also check out:

[BUPA Women's health Hub: Menopause Support](#),  
[NHS](#), and  
[Balance – My Menopause Doctor](#).

Useful books to read include: 'Menopause: The One Stop Guide' by Kathy Abernethy and 'Men, it's time to talk about Menopause' by Ruth Devlin.

### Listen to their menopause experience

Simply being a sympathetic listener can be a real source of comfort and support. Since every experience of menopause is different, it can be tough to deal with something that's very personal. So, if you (or someone you know) had a different menopause experience, it may not be helpful to say so.

Many people struggle with menopause symptoms at work, or they may grieve the end of their ability to have children. Some find it hard to accept a new phase of life that makes them feel older (although others feel a new sense of liberation and certainty).

### How to support colleagues

#### Know the signs

Make yourself aware of the symptoms that your colleagues who are going through menopause are experiencing. Your awareness will help you foster a culture of openness.

#### Be flexible

Changing someone's experience of menopause at work could be as simple as moving their place of work (whether that's to near a window or to a desk near the toilet). Be open-minded and try to work together to find the best solution.

#### Be kind

Be kind and considerate towards your colleagues if you know they're going through menopause, or even if you think they might be. Let them know that your door is always open to talk.

#### Know the support available

As an employee and particularly as a manager, it's so important that you understand the pathway of support available in your organisation. Do you offer a menopause café? Do you have a menopause guidance? Are there any upcoming events you can suggest to your team members?

Suggestions on other support that Medway could introduce can be put forward via the [HR advice portal](#) on service desk or by calling 01634 334499.

## How to support friends and family

### Ask them!

Sometimes, it's as simple as just asking. If you're not sure how to start the conversation, try asking "What can I do to help?" or "How can I make this easier?"

### Don't make fun.

With friends and family, it can be tempting to make their hot flushes the butt of a joke. Try not to – a lot of people won't see their menopause symptoms as a laughing matter.

### Stay in touch

Stay connected. Drop them a text, a call or an email – about anything, not just menopause! Keep lines of communication open, and they'll be more likely to let you know if they're struggling.

## How to support partners

### Be there for them.

Sit with your partner, let them tell you how they're feeling and discuss their treatment options together. Help them make the choice that's right for them.

There's a common misconception that the menopause is over and done with in a couple of years. However, symptoms can start several years before periods stop and continue long afterwards. Being prepared for the long haul can help you and your partner plan strategies that will be beneficial to both of you.

### Don't take things personally

If the person going through menopause has changes in mood, they may seem unfairly annoyed or impatient with you. It isn't deliberate, so try to be understanding. It might also be frustrating if she can't think straight or keeps forgetting things, but this sort of 'brain fog' is a genuine menopause symptom.

If you know that something's out of the ordinary, then try to see it as what they're experiencing rather than who they are. Instead of thinking 'They're being irritable with me,' it's more helpful to think 'They wouldn't normally be like this.' Even so, always weigh up whether you might actually have done something to upset them. In other words, it would be equally unfair to put everything down to the menopause.

Menopause is a journey of highs and lows. If they need to vent, let them vent! But remember, this time will pass.

### Build on your strengths

Focus on your strengths as a couple and make time for the activities that make you happiest together. Menopause is a time of huge change, but you can also choose to see it as the start of an exciting chapter of your life together.

- Stress that you're in this together and ask how you can help.
- Reinforce the reasons why you're together and remind them of other challenges you've dealt with as a team.
- For more than half of women, the menopause causes changes to their sexual relationships. It's important to find ways to work through this together.
- Think about getting professional help if you experience serious conflict during this time, perhaps from a relationship counsellor.

Often, just being there for someone is the best way to offer your support and show that you care.

### Be encouraging

The person you care for may be struggling with physical and psychological menopause symptoms. They may feel exhausted, anxious and less confident. So, when they look great, tell them – but if they're looking tired, they don't need to know.

They may like to be reminded of how much you appreciate them and enjoy their company. Most people feel a little lift when they get an unexpected treat or surprise, or when you draw attention to their achievements.

### Help out with their menopause symptoms

Try to find ways to make the person you care for feel better both physically and emotionally. They will probably appreciate the kindness and support, and if they're feeling stressed then you may have a clearer head for creative ideas or looking for helpful tips online.

[Insomnia](#) is a common menopause symptom, so do what you can to help them get enough sleep. If you're both woken by their night sweats, you could get them a glass of cold water or a cool damp towel or help them change the sheets. Taking light exercise is good for body and mind, and it's something you can do together – perhaps walking or bike riding. You could join them in adopting a [healthy eating plan](#) too, because women often put on weight during the menopause and can also find it harder to lose weight.

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The menopause isn't just a women's issue. Women and men alike can feel confused and unprepared by this life transition, which for too long has remained a taboo subject masked by myth and metaphor.

It requires patience

Some men report how distressing it is for them to see their partner changing. It can be difficult to know how to act when someone you love is going through a myriad of physical and emotional changes. Be patient, ask your partner what she needs and remember that small acts of kindness can go a long way. Make time to ask your partner how she's feeling and talk about what she's going through, so that you understand her individual situation.

### **In summary: Communication is key**

Exploring solutions together helps couples see the menopause as an issue to work through as a team. And sometimes the best solution is simply to listen, support and reassure your partner, relative or colleague.