

Managing the menopause at work

The menopause and the local
government workforce



Local government is constantly dealing with changing demands and as such is required to respond quickly to the evolving business landscape. It is important for councils to continue to have the right people with the right skills at the right time.

For the workforce to be able to meet these demands, it's equally important that the needs of that workforce are also effectively met by the employer.

Local government is a female dominated workforce (75 per cent) and is an older workforce with an average age of 40 (Office for National Statistics 2015). This means a significant portion of our workforce will be affected by the symptoms of the menopause in the course of their daily duties.

Not all women suffer the symptoms of the menopause, however, others can suffer from extreme physical and psychological symptoms that can have a negative impact on their performance and attendance at work and also on their relationships with colleagues. It is estimated that for around 10 per cent of women, the symptoms are so bad that they feel unable to continue working, which is worrying when you consider that 78 per cent of local authorities report having recruitment and retention difficulties and a labour turnover rate of 14 per cent (Local Government Association Workforce Survey 2018).¹

As an employer you have a duty to look after the health and safety of your workers, and it is also increasingly clear that there are good business reasons for you to take steps to support your female workers and their managers to talk and think about what adjustments could be made to the working environment to mitigate the impact of the menopause at work.

The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) and YouGov surveyed 1,409 women experiencing menopause symptoms (March 2019). Of those who were negatively affected by the symptoms at work, they reported the following issues:

- nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) said they were less able to concentrate
- more than half (58 per cent) said they experienced more stress
- more than half (52 per cent) said they felt less patient with clients and colleagues
- nearly a third (30 per cent) said they had taken sick leave but had not felt able to say the real reason for their absence.

Councils strive to be diverse and inclusive employers and so must not forget that trans and non-binary employees may also go through the menopause (often with little support available) and should equally be treated with dignity and respect. The recommendations for support suggested in this guide may also be useful for these staff but for the purposes of the guide we will refer to the symptoms of the menopause in relation to women.

So we can begin to understand that by supporting women and other groups through the menopause, your authority:

- will benefit from increased engagement and loyalty, as well as lower sickness absence and employee turnover
- supports an age and gender-inclusive workplace to help in the recruitment and retention of skilled and talented workers
- ensures that you meet your legal duty in creating a working environment and conditions that supports good health and wellbeing and protects against workplace discrimination
- could remove barriers to progression for women that could help you to reduce your gender pay gap.

¹ www.local.gov.uk/local-government-workforce-survey-201617

The aim of this guide is to assist you to look at the different things you can do to ensure your organisation is 'menopause friendly' and that talking about and managing the menopause at work is as normal as managing any other health condition.

This will encourage women to not suffer in silence and to be able to talk about what they need, to be able to have the knowledge, support confidence and environment to thrive and do their jobs well.

We hope this guide will support you as a local government employer in your on-going efforts to be a good employer, offering great places to work for people in all stages of life who want to make a difference in their communities.

Being a 'menopause friendly' employer

Everyone's experience of the symptoms of the menopause is unique and you should take care as an employer not to make assumptions – but to listen to your member of staff and support their individual needs sensitively.

Experience has shown that there are three main elements to managing the menopause at work:

- **Workplace culture** – creating conditions for staff and managers to feel comfortable talking about the menopause.
- **Workplace policies** – creating frameworks for staff and managers to manage the menopause.
- **Workplace environment** – creating work locations that can better alleviate the symptoms of the menopause.

Workplace culture

The first step is to start the conversation. You need to create workplaces where employees can talk about the menopause openly and without embarrassment. It is a natural phase in every woman's life that needs to be normalised. This is a superficially simple but actually very difficult thing to do but there are some straightforward things you as an employer can do to bring this taboo subject into the open.

Steps to consider:

Providing information on the menopause in the workplace

There are many external organisations that can provide posters or leaflets to help promote awareness of the typical symptoms of the menopause or ways to alleviate the symptoms or information on places to go for additional support. These are designed to be read by male employees too to help them get on board, and it is important to get the tone of this information correct – you should aim to communicate a positive attitude towards the menopause and be clear that you as the employer is supportive of the issue.

Workplace support

You could introduce informal voluntary workplace support networks that may include a support community that empowers women experiencing (or feel they might be experiencing) menopause to self-manage and share knowledge with others. This can be an empowering measure as it can help women to use shared knowledge to get the best medical and employer support available and be able to gain support from colleagues in an informal setting. But don't assume that everyone wants to talk about the menopause – some women may prefer to keep it private, so make sure you have formal and informal ways of accessing support. For example, you could include menopause awareness as part of your induction programme.

Training

Organising training and workshops to demystify the symptoms and challenges of the menopause. Training can equip managers to be able to normalise the menopause at work and to provide them with tools and the vision to be able to consider the wider picture on flexibility and how those flexibilities could benefit their team or organisation. You or your managers don't need to be menopause experts but the training should focus on giving managers the confidence to start the conversation with their member of staff and to know where to go to get advice on what support is available in the organisation.

Get your senior leadership team on board

You should make support for the menopause a key part of your strategy to attract, retain and develop female talent. Show what you can achieve at no cost before seeking further investment. Present a persuasive vision for change and a strong case for future-proofing your business.

Workplace policies

A workplace wellbeing policy that recognises the menopause is a good starting point to raising awareness of the impact of the symptoms of the menopause and an opportunity to offer support. In addition you should review policies and processes to ensure that they include recognition of the symptoms experienced during the menopause and provide simple guidance for managers to follow and to be more proactive and consistent in their approach.

For example:

Absence management

Sickness absences that are related to the menopause should be recorded as an ongoing health issue instead of individual short-term absences to ensure that organisational sickness absence procedures will not necessarily be implemented and will provide assurance to your employees when they discuss their health needs. Your policy should highlight the menopause as a potential long-term and fluctuating health condition to help managers take the right approach to suit individual circumstances.

Performance management

Your policy should allow your managers to take a proactive and positive approach to performance management that takes on board any health issues and focusses on the support needed to help everyone to perform to the best of their ability.

Occupational health

Integral to workplace support should be appropriate referral to occupational health if both parties feel it appropriate and to ensure that managers are aware of and will implement reasonable workplace adjustments.

Employee assistance

You should ensure that your employee assistance can offer an appropriate service that female employees might find useful, such as telephone counselling, anxiety and depression screeners, self-help programmes and mindfulness tools, body fat / BMI / heart rate calculators, and articles on health and wellbeing.

The workplace environment

There are many steps you as the employer can take to ensure that you have an inclusive environment for women experiencing symptoms of the menopause. For example, providing desk fans, ensuring access to cold drinking water, the ability to easily adjust the temperature as well as the availability of natural light, providing natural fabric choices for uniforms, a reduction in noise exposure, and providing accessible and appropriate rest areas.

Flexible working

It is appreciated that many councils now have flexible working policies. However, there may be some roles where by the nature of the work it is less available and for this it may need you to consider some creative solutions to make suitable adjustments. These could include flexible working hours, reduced hours, home working, additional breaks, and short notice leave where necessary to help with the more debilitating symptoms, such as exhaustion, anxiety and depression because of sudden or fluctuating changes in hormone levels.

Reasonable adjustments

Someone with menopausal symptoms should be supported in the same way as an employee with any ongoing health conditions. Small adjustments to someone's job or working pattern can help people manage their symptoms and continue to perform well in their role. The individual is usually best placed to recognise what might help them, so encourage managers to have open conversations with members of their teams.

Risk assessments

It's also your responsibility to ensure all employees undergo a risk assessment. You have a legal duty to ensure working conditions don't exacerbate a person's symptoms, but this approach could also identify adjustments that could help an employee perform to their full potential.

Further help information and signposting for employers

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development – Managing the menopause at work²

Menopause in the Workplace³

Trade Union Congress – The Menopause in the Workplace (toolkit for trade unionists)⁴

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2 www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause/people-professionals-guidance?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=menopauseatwork&utm_content=MAW_PPC_BMM&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI9oiOipaK5QIVh6ztCh32Gwa5EAAYASAAEgJnn_D_BwE

3 <https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/menopause-at-work/menopause-and-work-its-important/>

4 www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Menopause%20toolkit%20Eng%20FINAL.pdf



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