

DRAFT:

GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS – SUPPORTING STAFF THROUGH THE PERIMENOPAUSE & MENOPAUSE AT WORK

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What is the menopause?

The menopause is a change in the balance of hormone levels – principally Oestrogen but also Progesterone and Testosterone. The [NHS](#) defines the menopause as when ‘a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally’. Once 12 months has passed without a menstrual period, the menopause has officially been reached. The first sign of the menopause is usually a change in the normal pattern of a woman’s periods.

When the menopause happens

The menopause is a natural stage of life and normally occurs in women between the ages of 45 and 55. In the UK, the average age to reach menopause is 51.

Some women will experience symptoms much earlier, around 1% of women will experience the menopause before the age of 40. This is called premature menopause. It is called “early menopause” if it occurs between 40 and 45.

It is important to note that whilst this guidance predominantly talks about women in relation to the menopause, we recognise that the menopause can impact trans, inter sex, non-binary

people and those who have had surgical interventions, illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy)

Although unusual, menopause can still be experienced by a few trans masculine and non-binary identified people whose female characteristics may persist at this stage of their lives. They require the same support and flexibility in the workplace as others with similar symptoms.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually start a few months or years before a woman's periods stop. This phase leading up to the menopause is when a woman's hormone balance starts to change and is known as perimenopause. Menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years and can fluctuate and be felt in varying degrees, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

The menopause can cause a wide range of physical or psychological symptoms (there are more than 30 recognised symptoms). Most women experience symptoms but everyone is different.

Symptoms can include:

- psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- hot flushes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night)
- irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- headaches
- weight gain
- palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- reduced sex drive

A quarter of menopausal women will experience debilitating symptoms, and this can have a significant impact on their day to day lives, including at work.

Why is the awareness of the menopause important to us at work?

According to the Office of National Statistics, the population of the UK in mid-2020 was, 67,081,234 and of that total, 5,001,387 were women aged 45-55 (7% of the total population).

However, it's much more than demographics. The onus of responsibility for looking after employees' wellbeing and fostering a culture of inclusivity is clear. However, there are compelling commercial benefits reasons too. These include but are not limited to:

- reduced sickness absence
- higher retention rate for talent
- improved performance
- boosted employee morale and loyalty.

Engaging with menopause at work enables people to continue thrive in their career without letting the menopause become a block. Women aged 50+ are the fastest growing commercially active group in the UK workforce so it is essential that awareness and support are in place.

Whatever the driver to raising menopause awareness, education, and support, it's the right thing to do for inclusion, diversity and equality. And it's something that both men and women need to know about.

Your role as a manager

The role of line managers in supporting a member of their team experiencing menopause transition is crucial. Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee health and wellbeing, spotting early signs of ill health or distress, and initiating early intervention. This will help you to improve your team's morale, retain valuable skills and talent, and reduce sickness absence.

Line managers are typically:

- the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs a change or adjustment to their work or working hours.
- responsible for implementing the policies and practices that can help someone experiencing the menopause to feel supported, and to be effective in their role.
- responsible for managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill or due to their menopausal symptoms, as well as supporting an effective return to work.

The level of trust you build with employees will determine the extent to which colleagues are able to discuss menopausal symptoms or just to talk about how they are feeling and any support or adjustments they need at work. Simple changes to your management style can really make a difference:

- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your team can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause.
- Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture and encourage someone to raise any concerns.

Don't make assumptions – everyone's experience is different, so take your lead from the individual. Remember that someone may also wish to speak to you about a family member that they are supporting,

Knowledge, Policies and Procedures

It can be daunting for both you and your staff if you have limited knowledge/awareness of the menopause. The more supportive and knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms, the more comfortable you will both feel in having discussions and the less likely that people will feel embarrassed or awkward in discussing how the menopause is affecting their health, well-being and their work.

Policies and support that you should be familiar with are:

- [Our Ways of Working Policy](#)
- [Managing Sickness Absence Policy](#)

- [Care First](#) (Employee Assistance Programme)

Open and honest conversations

While any health condition can understandably be a sensitive and personal issue for many, some of the symptoms associated with the menopause can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate, even visible way. It's therefore understandable why many women could feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss the impact of their symptoms. However, most people would prefer a concerned and genuine enquiry about how they are as opposed to silence. The easier you make it for someone to open up to you, the easier it will identify the support they need before the impact on their health and well-being at work becomes more severe.

If you have concerns about someone's wellbeing or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' or 'I've noticed you've been arriving late recently, and I wondered if you're okay?' Listen, don't make assumptions or ask them a direct question as to whether they have menopause symptoms.

Starting the Conversation

Regular catchups or one-to-ones are an opportunity to start the conversation, which should always be in a private, confidential setting where the employee feels at ease. However, it's up to the individual to disclose any symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.

Approach conversations with empathy and sensitivity, try not to be embarrassed by the issue and how the individual is feeling.

Use your knowledge of the person, and your emotional intelligence skills, to enable you to set the right tone when opening a conversation about menopause.

The following tips may be beneficial to you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation.
- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- Speak calmly.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Listen actively and carefully.
- Encourage the employee to talk openly and honestly.
- Give the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.

If someone tells you about their health condition, including menopausal symptoms, this must be treated as confidential. If they want information about their condition to be shared, consent

must be explicit. You should discuss with them who will be told and by who, as well as the information they do or don't want shared with colleagues. Keep a record of the conversation, ensuring that this is treated as confidential. You could agree to a Record of Confidential Discussion and discuss why and whether this will need to be retained and, if so, for how long.

Risk Assessments

Employers have a legal duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees. This includes making reasonable adjustments for women who are experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Contributing to fulfilling the legal responsibility for health and safety will help ensure an employee's menopause symptoms are not being exacerbated by their job.

A risk assessment (with a [workplace adjustment passport](#) to record any agreed adjustments) is a useful tool to look at issues such as:

- temperature and ventilation
- the materials used in any uniform or corporate clothing
- access to toilet facilities and access to cold water.
- working time and arrangements

Information on health and safety and risk assessments can be found via [service desk](#).

Reasonable Adjustments

Certain aspects of a job or the workplace can represent a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. As a manager, you have a responsibility to consider and put in place reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove any barriers, so that women experiencing symptoms can carry on performing in their role.

Start by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the employee, to identify the specific issues that they are experiencing. Consider involving relevant experts where appropriate, such as HR and an occupational health practitioner, who could help to identify appropriate adjustments to ease the impact of their symptoms on their work. Seek advice from HR before agreeing any actions/adjustments that could fall outside what you could accommodate without changing terms and conditions.

A referral to occupational health can be made by managers by completing the [referral form](#).

Record any specific needs (and agreed adjustments) on a [workplace adjustment passport](#) and review these regularly. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so make sure you continue the conversation with the person concerned (in your catch ups etc) to ensure that the support still meets their needs. Adjustments should always be tailored to an individual's specific needs.

Here are some suggestions on practical steps you can take to make adjustments for some of the most common symptoms:

Sleep disruption and/or night sweats

- Recognise someone may take more short-term absence if they've had a difficult night.
- Consider a change to shift patterns or the ability to swap shifts on a temporary basis
- Offer a flexible working arrangement, for example a later start and finish time.
- Where home working is feasible within their role, ensure employees know they can work from home on an ad hoc basis if they've had a bad night or consider a hybrid working pattern if one is not already in place.

Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats

- Look at ways to cool the working environment, for example provide a fan, move a desk close to a window or adjust the air conditioning.
- Provide easy access to cold drinking water and washrooms.
- Adapt uniforms to improve comfort or provide additional uniform supplies.
 - Have access to a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.
- Limit the time wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks (subject to any COVID-secure measures required).

Heavy or irregular periods

- Provide easy access to washroom and toilet facilities.
- Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet.
- Make sanitary products available in washrooms in case of emergencies or allow employees to bring in own sanitary items to store them within the toilets if necessary.
- Make it easy to request extra uniforms if needed.

Headaches and fatigue

- Consider a temporary adjustment to someone's work duties.
- Provide a quiet area to work, noise reducing headphones may be considered in an open office.
- Provide access to a rest room.
- Offer easy access to drinking water.
- Allow regular breaks and opportunities to take medication.

Muscular aches, and bone and joint pain

- Make any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules.
- Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps.

Psychological issues (for example loss of confidence, poor concentration, anxiety, etc)

- Encourage employees to discuss concerns at one-to-one meetings with you and/or occupational health, and ensure that you allocate appropriate time to follow up any conversations.

- Discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
- Address work-related stress by carrying out a stress risk assessment (can be found via [service desk](#))
- Signpost the employee to our Employee Assistance Programme (Care First).
- Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the office or work area, such as a [wellbeing champion](#).
- Allow time when needed, to have some quiet time or undertake relaxation or mindfulness activities.
- Provide access to a quiet space to work, noise cancelling headphones or the opportunity to work from home.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.
 - Provide resources for task based lists, action boards, or other memory assisting equipment.
- Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their GP, if they haven't already. It may be helpful to discuss with HR at this point if an Occupational Health referral is required.

Other examples of adjustments include:

- Provide private areas for women to rest, recover or make a telephone call to access personal or professional support.
- Ensure working time arrangements are flexible enough to meet the needs of menopausal women. For example, they may also need more breaks during the day, or may need to leave work suddenly if their symptoms become severe.

Facilitate a comfortable working environment wherever possible – including adequate drinking water supplies, temperature-controlled areas, and access to toilets and showers or washing facilities.

Remember that menopause symptoms can fluctuate, so take a flexible approach and check in regularly with the individual.

Remember – everyone's experience and specific needs will vary – adjustments need to be tailored to individual and the role they undertake. Ask the employee to tell you what would help them and consider their ideas fully.

Manage performance proactively and positively

If someone's performance is suffering, it's important to help them address the root cause. In some cases, menopausal symptoms can be so serious that they affect a person's performance at work.

In this situation, it's in everyone's interest to discuss potential adjustments that could help the individual perform to their full potential. Where there are suspected or known health issues, these should be explored, prior to any formal processes for underperformance and seek HR advice.

Performance management should not just be a one-off annual appraisal meeting. It is most effective when it's proactive, informal and based on regular and constructive feedback and discussion.

This helps to build trust-based relationships and two-way dialogue, making it easier to address any underlying health issues. If you don't address the root causes of poor performance, any solutions are unlikely to fully resolve the issue and problems can spiral into sickness absence and someone leaving the organisation.

How to manage health issues affecting performance:

- Have regular, informal catchups with employees.
- Approach performance conversations supportively and positively.
- Take any health issues fully into account where there is underperformance on the part of an individual.
- Identify any extra support or coaching the person may benefit from.
- Where appropriate, signpost to advice and support such as Medway Council's Employee Guidance, their GP, EAP and support organisations and resources.
- Set reasonable timescales for improvements.

RESOURCES

LINKS TO SUPPORT

Introductions to links to be added e.g. the Balance one below

[NHS guidance on the Menopause](#)

[ACAS – Menopause at Work](#)

[British Menopause Society](#)

[Daisy Network](#)

[Talking Menopause](#)

[Balance \(Dr Louise Newson\)](#) - The balance website and app are unrivalled platforms that educate and empower people across the globe. The world's biggest menopause library, filled with medically-approved content.

LINKS TO FORMS

Flexible working request

Change to hours etc