

Menopause Policy

This policy is also available in Welsh

Information sheet

For further advice contact: People Team

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Equality impact assessment

An equality impact assessment has been carried out and this policy is not deemed to adversely impact on any people on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership or Welsh language.

Contents

Policy Purpose.....	1
Overview	1
Definitions	2
What is the Menopause	2
Symptoms of the Menopause	2
Roles and Responsibilities	3
The Role of the Manager	3
The Role of the Employee	3
Supporting Employees	4
Workplace Adjustments	4
Types of Workplace Adjustments	4
Menopause and Supporting Attendance	6
Menopause and Managing Performance	6
GDPR and Data Protection.....	6
Further information.....	7

Policy Purpose

This policy is intended to raise awareness of the menopause amongst all employees and managers, helping to promote and create a fully inclusive and supporting working environment that for all employees impacted by the menopause.

We recognise that women experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments. We want colleagues to feel comfortable to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for workplace adjustments.

Whilst we may refer to women or use female pronouns throughout this policy, we understand that there may be other people that also experience menopausal-type symptoms, including transgender people, non-binary, and intersex employees. The support referred to in this guidance is intended for all employees affected by the menopause.

Overview

As an employer we have a duty of care to provide a safe working environment for all employees experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Menopause can impact all colleagues directly or indirectly, and it should therefore be considered as an organisational issue. Predominantly this will impact women, and many women do experience symptoms of some kind. For some women, symptoms can be quite severe, and they can affect an individual both physically and psychologically.

It is also important to be aware of the indirect effects of the menopause on other people such as work colleagues, partners and close family members / friends of individuals going through the menopause. The transition can put additional pressures and challenges on relationships.

Providing appropriate support and information to managers and employees who are impacted by the menopause transition will improve their experience in the workplace.

By providing support and information we can:

- raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about the effects of the menopause at work
- help managers understand how the menopause can affect colleagues, and how they can support those experiencing the menopause at work
- assist managers to create a workplace culture that supports employees to feel comfortable to discuss the menopause, raise issues about their symptoms and ask for adjustments

Definitions

This policy uses the following key terms:

- **Perimenopause:** this is typically the phase leading up to the menopause when a woman's hormone balance starts to change, and when menopausal symptoms may begin. These are typically experienced for several years.
- **Menopause:** the point at which a woman's oestrogen and progesterone levels decline enough to stop menstruation, and periods stop.
- **Post menopause:** the time after the menopause transition has been completed.

What is the Menopause

Menopause is a stage in a women's life during which they stop having periods and experience hormonal changes as a result of decreasing oestrogen and progesterone levels. The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55.

The menopause mostly occurs naturally, but some women might also experience early menopause. This can happen naturally or for medical reasons (for example, surgery to remove the ovaries, some breast cancer treatments, chemotherapy or radiotherapy) and can affect women of a younger age.

It is recognised that for many reasons, individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly, it is therefore important that each person is treated as an individual, with support tailored to the specific symptoms they experience and the impact these have on their daily life and work..

Symptoms of the Menopause

Symptoms of the menopause (including perimenopause and post menopause) are wide ranging. Symptoms can be both physical and psychological, with some women experiencing some or all symptoms to varying degrees, whilst others may have no symptoms.

Common symptoms include:

- clumsiness and loss of confidence
- dizziness, headaches, fatigue and difficulty sleeping
- genitourinary syndrome of menopause
- heavy or irregular periods, vaginal dryness, recurrent urinary tract infections and loss of bladder control
- hot flushes, night sweats, irritability and mood swings
- joint stiffness, aches and pains
- memory loss, brain fog and reduced concentration

- palpitations, anxiety and depression
- skin issues such as dry skin, acne, rashes, itchiness and dry eyes.

Each of these symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work. Women with pre-existing health conditions may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing health conditions or even trigger new ones.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Manager

Managers have an important role to play in ensuring that employees affected by menopausal symptoms receive the right support, as they would with any other health condition.

Managers are not expected to be an expert when discussing the menopause, but they should have an understanding of what support their employee is likely to need.

Managers should:

- promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues, helping create an environment where employees feel able to discuss their experience of the menopause
- respect an employee's right not to discuss personal issues. Your employee may be more comfortable talking to a colleague, another manager or trade union representative
- encourage employees to discuss (or ensure they feel able to) the impact of their menopausal symptoms on their mental health and wellbeing and work life balance
- listen carefully to what your employee is saying: it can be a very emotional discussion for them and appreciate the personal nature of the conversation and treat the discussion with sensitivity
- encourage individuals to access appropriate healthcare support and workplace adjustments if required
- discuss and be supportive of any upcoming healthcare appointments or leave requirements
- not make assumptions about older employees because of their age or symptoms

The Role of the Employee

It is important that employees take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. If an individual is experiencing menopausal symptoms and feel they may need support at work, they should ask to have a conversation with their manager. Early discussions can help determine the most appropriate course of action, how to overcome any barriers and agree what support is needed.

Some employees may wish to seek advice from their GP or healthcare professional. They can provide advice on treatments for the menopause, which may include Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), lifestyle changes and other ways to manage symptoms, but some may need more in-depth, specialist support and advice.

All employees have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand that colleagues may need adjustments to manage their menopausal symptoms.

Supporting Employees

Menopause in itself is not an illness but some of the symptoms could be. There may be times when an individual will experience severe symptoms, which may mean they need adjustments to support them in attending work or are unwell and need to take a period of sickness absence. Employees should be supported as much as possible. Managers should make all reasonable efforts to ensure an employee is able to share information confidentially to help manage their symptoms whilst at work.

Workplace Adjustments

The purpose of workplace adjustments is to provide a supportive work environment by removing barriers wherever possible. Managers should be flexible, making adjustments where possible, because very small adjustments can make a huge difference to the quality of working life for women experiencing the menopause.

Managers should consider what practical steps they can implement to support an employee and lessen the impact of menopausal symptoms at work and ensure that working conditions do not exacerbate symptoms.

Managers and employees are encouraged to capture any agreed adjustments into a [workplace adjustment passport](#) which will support ongoing discussions.

Types of Workplace Adjustments

Workplace Environment

Managers should consider environmental factors, including temperature, ventilation, lighting and provision of changing facilities, when discussing the menopause with their employees and agree what practical steps they could take to reduce issues within the workplace.

For colleagues who regularly work away from their base, such as inspectors, managers should consider factors such as travel schedules and access to suitable rest areas. Where possible, practical adjustments should be agreed to help reduce discomfort and manage symptoms.

Flexible Working

Managers can consider requests to change working hours/patterns from employees experiencing difficult menopausal symptoms. Flexible working allows an employee the opportunity to manage their symptoms by altering their working hours/pattern either on a temporary or permanent basis.

Requests for flexible working could include:

- a change to the pattern of hours worked, for example, managers could consider agreeing to a later start time where an employee is experiencing sleepless nights. This could help them feel less tired at work
- a change of working hours, moving to part-time working or allowing earlier start times / later finish times to avoid peak travel times when travelling into the office may also be considered.

Employees should discuss their requests with their manager. Depending on the circumstances, requests may be approved on a temporary or permanent basis. Please see the [flexible working policy](#) for further details.

Other Adjustments

Managers may be required to consider other adjustments including the following; this list is non-exhaustive:

- frequent toilet breaks, especially during longer meetings and allow time for breaks so the employee can get up and walk about, particularly if stiffness and joint pain is an issue
- flexibility to remain allocated to one task or switch to different tasks on days when an employee is struggling with difficult symptoms

Employee Assistance Programme

Managers and employees can access support and advice through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) which can advise on a range of issues, provide emotional support through qualified counsellors and general mental health advice and guidance.

Occupational Health

Managers and employees should consider whether an occupational health assessment would be appropriate. Occupational Health can make recommendations for workplace adjustments and support both manager and employee with practical advice or onward referral to primary care for wider healthcare support. Please speak with a member of the People Team to arrange an Occupational Health referral.

Menopause and Supporting Attendance

Sickness due to menopause is dealt with in the usual manner (please see the [supporting attendance policy](#)).

In some cases the menopause, depending on its effects and the severity of the symptoms, could be considered a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Managers should consider making workplace adjustments to reduce or remove any disadvantages an employee may experience because of it. Managers can review and increase trigger points, taking into account:

- the employee's absence record – the past level of absence is a good indicator of the likely level of absence in the future
- the stability of the condition – the likely level of absence will be affected by whether or not the condition is stable
- the level of absence the business can support – they will need to consider factors such as impact on the organisation.

Menopause and Managing Performance

The menopause could have a negative effect on an employee's ability to perform at work, due to tiredness from a difficulty in sleeping, mood changes or problems with memory and concentration.

Managers should take into account the impact of menopause on an employee's performance and be as flexible as possible when considering what adjustments can be made to a role or working conditions to help an employee maintain performance levels. Menopause symptoms can last for a considerable and undefined period of time. Managers and employees should consider this when looking at both workplace adjustments and performance.

GDPR and Data Protection

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that managers ensure that all information shared by the employee is treated in the strictest confidence and is only shared with others where necessary and with the consent of the employee.

It is good practice to discuss with the employee how they wish any questions from their peers/colleagues to be managed. Confidentiality must be respected unless the employee indicates that they approve of their team being informed on their behalf in a tactful and respectful way.

Further information

Further practical information and support can be found in the [Menopause Toolkit and Guiding Principles for Employees and Managers](#).

[National Health Service \(NHS\)](#) - guidance on menopause symptoms and treatment.

[Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(ACAS\)](#) - Guidance on supporting staff through the menopause at work.

[Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#) - resources on the menopause at work – for HR, for line managers.

[Daisy Network](#) - support for premature menopause or ‘premature ovarian insufficiency’.

[Menopause Café](#) - Menopause Discussion Group.

[Menopause Matters](#) - ‘an independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options’.

[Women's Health Concern](#) - the patient arm of the British Menopause Society.