



# Menopause at work - Employees

September 2019



# Toolkit: Menopause at work – Employees

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## Introduction

Increasingly women are working well into their 50s and 60s and beyond with the number of older women in the workforce is expected to rise. Women are working through perimenopause, menopause and beyond and this can mean managing the demands of work and home life whilst also dealing with sometimes severe symptoms and other issues. It should be noted that for some women, the menopause can naturally occur early or for medical reasons such as surgery; hysterectomy, chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

Although it is women who experience the physical and psychological symptoms of menopause, it is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home. This can include male and female colleagues, family members, same sex partnerships, those going through gender re-assignment and disabled colleagues. Likewise, some trans and non-binary colleagues experience menopause.

With average female life expectancy in the UK at 83.2 years, many women are living in this post-menopausal phase for half to one-third of their life and these symptoms can have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing, as well as their work and relationships.

## Purpose

This toolkit is intended to raise awareness of menopause transition and provide information and support for employees both those who are directly and indirectly affected. The toolkit is to be used alongside the Guiding Principles document and the Toolkit for Managers.

## What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women and some trans and non-binary people stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Every experience will be different and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40 years. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

- Menopause - A biological stage in life when you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months.
- Perimenopause - The time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen.
- Premature menopause - Can happen naturally, or because of illness or surgery.
- Andropause - The Male Menopause. *(Note the Andropause is not covered in this guidance).*



## The symptoms of menopause

During menopause a person's **brain and mood** can be affected causing: depression and anxiety; sleep problems which then leads to tiredness, fatigue and/or dizziness; brain fog leading to reduced concentration, poor information retention and a reduced ability to learn; unexplained mood swings, irritability and emotional outbursts. These symptoms can impact on an individual's performance in terms of coping strategies, pressure of dealing with deadlines and priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence, anxiety or panic disorder.

Individuals can experience **hair** loss or hair can become thin, lacklustre and brittle. Some have **mouth** problems such as bleeding gums and a dry mouth. This can lead to bad breath. They may also experience taste changes and strange oral sensations including a burning tongue.

The **heart** can be affected, causing palpitations and an increased risk of heart disease. The **lungs** can be affected as they may develop new allergies or existing allergies can become worse. For example, asthma, hay fever, dermatitis (see skin/nails below).

The **abdomen** and **gut** can be affected as people may gain weight, develop bloating, abdominal cramps, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), sickness or nausea and women can experience **urogenital problems** which bring about greater urgency and/or more frequent trips to the toilet.

Irregular **periods** can be brought about by an unpredictable pre-menstrual tension and menstrual cycle, heavy bleeding, water retention and bloating.

Individuals can suffer from general **skin** itchiness and formication (feels like something crawling about under the skin), allergies such as dermatitis and thinning skin. Also, nails can become dry and brittle.

People develop problems with their **muscles, joints, nerves and bones**. This can lead to muscle pain and weakness, joint pain, osteoporosis / loss of bone density and nerve function may be affected.

Some can suffer from sudden changes to **body temperature**, which include daytime sweats and flushes; sudden heat or redness in face; night time sweats and flushes.

Other symptoms of the menopause (of which there are 34 recognised as part of the menopause) can also include loss of libido, vagina dryness and or atrophy, weight gain, incontinence, breast pain and headaches.



## Need more support with your menopausal symptoms?

Some individuals may not be aware that they are going through menopause transition. GPs can arrange for blood tests to be undertaken to confirm Menopause. However, NICE guidance suggests that tests for the over 45s are unnecessary. Consult your GP for any symptoms that you are concerned about, many of them can also relate to other conditions.

## The Positive Menopause

It is not all bad news; there is a positive side to menopause.

- Many do not experience any adverse symptoms of menopause.
- Post-menopause you may be more confident. Some individuals have gone on to create their own successful businesses and your creativity may increase.
- Freedom from some of the more annoying and painful aspects of having periods.
- No more Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMT) every month.

## You may find it useful to consider

- Researching the menopause. (See useful links below).
- Join our Menopause Network and/or find a buddy - Contact [j.mcburnie@nhs.net](mailto:j.mcburnie@nhs.net)
- Discussing with your family, friends etc. and seeking support.
- Having a confidential discussion with your manager, sharing relevant information about your needs and possible impact on your work if any.
- Discussing any workplace adjustments that you might need. Guidance is available to help you ensure adjustments happen promptly when required. See here for [NHS Improvement colleagues](#), and here for [NHS England colleagues](#). The process differs slightly depending on the arrangements of each employer, but overall the ethos is the same.
- Recording your symptoms, frequency and when they occur using a [Workplace Adjustment Passport](#). This is designed to help you capture a record of the adjustments you need and the agreements made with your line manager and other relevant parties. You can take this record with you as you move around the organisation. It's a confidential, optional record that you own. You can use it to keep all your information in one place. You can refer to it, or show it (or parts of it) to other parties if you wish, when explaining your support and access requirements. There is also an [Easy Read version if you have a learning disability](#).
- Requesting special leave to attend appointments – See [our HR policies](#)- browse for your Leave Policy depending on who your employer is. See also paid special leave to cover absences directly related to menopause symptoms.
- Requesting an [Occupational Health referral](#).
- Referring to support offered by our [diversity and inclusion networks](#). Access our friendly Disability and Wellbeing Staff Network; our Women's Network; our Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans + Network; and/or our Carers' Network. Women are now having children later in life and it should be recognised that a woman may be responsible for children and/or teenagers whilst also caring for elderly relatives.



## Adjustments that may help at work

Talk to your manager about workplace adjustments that might help you in managing your menopausal symptoms at work. Here are some ideas you could consider:

### Working hours/location

- A change in working hours, or remote working.
- A reduction in travel or increased comfort breaks, dialling into meetings.
- Some possible adjustment to shift patterns.

### Uniform / PPE

- A possible change to uniform requirements – avoids human-made fibres or close-fitting uniforms.
- Uniforms in various sizes to accommodate bloating / short term weight gain.
- If own clothes are worn, consider natural fibres over human-made fibres and wear layers.

### Workspace

- Flexible and easy access to bathroom facilities, so may need to move to a desk nearer the toilets.
- Ensuring there is good ventilation (fan or open window or adjust air conditioning).
- Access to cold drinks.
- Regular breaks in a quiet space to be able to take a moment away from the working area.
- A desk fan.
- Using the welfare facilities to take a break (where facilities are available, following local processes) including kitchens, gardens and any quiet areas.

## Agreeing the process for further support

You should agree a plan with your manager which will be led by you and unique to your situation. In our organisation this is known as a [Workplace Adjustment Passport](#).

### Confidentiality and disclosure

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that information is only shared where necessary (such as if the employee divulged a threat to life/suicidal thoughts) and with your consent. Disclosure without consent can be distressing for all concerned and in some instances breach:

- the Data Protection Act 2018
- the Equality Act 2010
- GDPR
- The Disability Discrimination Act 2010



## Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work

### **Menopause affects everyone – it is not just an issue for women**

Whether experiencing the menopause first hand, or second hand as a colleague or partner, education and information help to break the taboo.

### **Supportive ‘human’ conversations make the difference**

Equipping line managers to have conversations with their team members and providing an effective framework allows people experiencing menopause to feel supported in the workplace.

### **A healthy environment and culture is better for everyone**

Creating an open, honest environment means we can all flourish at work.

### **Retaining our talent**

Twenty-five per cent of menopausal women have considered leaving work because of their symptoms. Providing the right support can retain experienced and knowledgeable employees, saving on recruitment costs which is beneficial to the individual and business success.

### **Enabling women to be their best at work**

A wide-ranging physical and psychological symptom can feel seriously inhibiting to someone in their career. By providing the right support and communicating openly enables all people – and teams – to perform at their best.

### **Trans Inclusive culture**

In our organisation we have a trans inclusive culture, recognising that people of diverse gender expressions and identities experience menopause.

## How you can support your colleagues with the menopause

An individual may be affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, therefore it is important to have an open mind, be sensitive to the issues and not make any assumptions. When someone has spoken with you in confidence, it is important to respect that and to keep the information confidential. Traditionally, the menopause has not been widely discussed in workplaces, with some parties finding it difficult and embarrassing to raise the subject.

Managers and colleagues who want to support colleagues going through the menopause are therefore often uncertain how to do this. Thankfully due to the increased coverage of the menopause in the media and the increased availability of online support and guidance, conversations around managing the menopause in the workplace are becoming more and more normalised. Menopause transition does not necessarily lead to reduced performance at work and may be managed with consideration, understanding and in some circumstances, with workplace adjustments or workplace adaptations.

It is important not to ignore the impact of menopausal symptoms at work or to simply regard them as “a women’s thing”. Similarly, workplace “banter” which has historically been the acceptable way menopause has been dealt with in some organisations, could be interpreted as harassment. It is upsetting for the person being mocked and critical that we act with kindness and tolerance to all of our colleagues.



## Additional guidance and products

**Articles:** University of Leicester - [Workplace menopause study finds 'women feel they need to cope alone'](#)

**Government research:** [Menopause transition: effects on women's economic participation:](#)

## Webpages providing more in-depth information:

[NHS website](#)

NHS Livewell – [coping with menopause](#)

NHS Livewell – [Hormone Replacement Therapy](#)

NHS Livewell – [Premature menopause:](#)

[Menopause Matters](#)

The Daisy Network – [Information on premature menopause](#)

[Women's Health Concern](#)

[NICE](#)

[Male Menopause](#)

[Faculty of Occupational Medicine:](#)

TUC – [work smart:](#)

[Newson Health-Dr Louise Newson –My Menopause Doctor – Twitter and Facebook](#)



# Managers Toolkit: Supporting Menopause at Work

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## Introduction

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With average female life expectancy in the UK at 83.2 years, many women are living in this post-menopausal phase for half to one-third of their life and these symptoms can have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing, as well as their work and relationships.

## Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to assist managers in supporting people going through the menopause in the workplace. Although the menopause usually impacts women in their 40s to 60s; it can impact younger women, partners and families of women, those who are transitioning, and those who identify as trans and non-binary. As a manager, you have a duty of care to all your employees. The focus is on the support of anyone affected by the menopause in the workplace either directly or indirectly.



## What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women and some trans and non-binary people stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Every experience will be different and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40 years. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

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During menopause a person's **brain and mood** can be affected causing: depression and anxiety; sleep problems which then leads to tiredness, fatigue and/or dizziness; brain fog leading to reduced concentration, poor information retention and a reduced ability to learn; unexplained mood swings, irritability and emotional outbursts. These symptoms can impact on an individual's performance in terms of coping strategies, pressure of dealing with deadlines and priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence, anxiety or panic disorder.

Individuals can experience **hair** loss or hair can become thin, lacklustre and brittle. Some have **mouth** problems such as bleeding gums and a dry mouth. This can lead to bad breath. They may also experience taste changes and strange oral sensations including a burning tongue.

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The **abdomen** and **gut** can be affected as people may gain weight, develop bloating, abdominal cramps, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), sickness or nausea and women can experience **urogenital problems** which bring about greater urgency and/or more frequent trips to the toilet.

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Some can suffer from sudden changes to **body temperature**, which include daytime sweats and flushes; sudden heat or redness in face; night time sweats and flushes.

Other symptoms of the menopause (of which there are 34 recognised as part of the menopause) can also include loss of libido, vagina dryness and or atrophy, weight gain, incontinence, breast pain and headaches.

### Top workplace environments that make systems worse:

- High temperature
- Poor ventilation
- Humidity
- No (accesses to) quiet or restful space
- Noise
- Dryness and lack of natural light



## Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work

### **Menopause affects everyone – it is not just an issue for women**

Whether experiencing the menopause first hand, or second hand as a colleague or partner, education and information help to break the taboo.

### **Supportive ‘human’ conversations make the difference**

Equipping line managers to have conversations with their team members and providing an effective framework allows people experiencing menopause to feel supported in the workplace.

### **A healthy environment and culture is better for everyone**

Creating an open, honest environment means we can all flourish at work.

### **Retaining our talent**

Twenty-five per cent of menopausal women have considered leaving work because of their symptoms. Providing the right support can retain experienced and knowledgeable employees, saving on recruitment costs which is beneficial to the individual and business success.

### **Enabling women to be their best at work**

A wide-ranging physical and psychological symptoms can feel seriously inhibiting to someone in their career. By providing the right support and communicating openly enables all people – and teams – to perform at their best.

### **Trans Inclusive culture**

In our organisation we have a trans inclusive culture, recognising that people of diverse gender expressions and identities experience menopause.



## Menopause at work: for the manager

### Your role

Your role as a manager is to have a supportive conversation with your employee, and you are not expected to be an expert or of a healthcare professional/occupational health adviser when discussing the menopause. Please remember to advise employees that they can always consult occupational health/their GP for further support.

When an employee tells you about their issues with the menopause, you should gain an understanding of what the employee is likely to need from you. You can use the information provided in this toolkit as well as your own research to help you start a conversation about the menopause. Annex A is self-identification of menopausal symptoms (remember our organisation also has a general [Workplace Adjustment Passport available](#)); this is what can open discussion between manager and staff. Annex B is a list of other support available.

The employee may have chosen to speak to a colleague, a different manager or your HR department before raising the subject with you.

You should:

- Remember that every individual's issues are unique to them, do not make assumptions;
- Ensure that all information shared by the employee is treated in the strictest confidence and is not shared further without the employee's consent;
- Listen to and gain an understanding of any concerns your employee has about their issues or symptoms, avoiding assumptions;
- Discuss timescales and leave requirements if this has been raised as part of the discussion. It is worth underlining that peri-menopause and menopause symptoms do not have an indicative timeline for resolution;
- Take account of individual and business needs when dealing with requests for special/medical leave, being mindful of the importance of being supportive of attendance at appointments;
- Discuss what support could benefit the employee in your 1:1s using the [Workplace Adjustment Passport](#) if they bring up their health issues.
- Implement any reasonable adjustments required. Guidance is available for [NHS Improvement colleagues](#), and for [NHS England colleagues](#).
- Outline the support available to the employee, such as [Occupational Health](#), the [Employee Assistance Programme](#), and the [wellbeing offer](#).
- [Contact HR for advice](#) if unsure of any aspect of the policy or process.



## Agreeing the process for further support

You may find it helpful to set out, in a plan called a [Workplace Adjustment Passport](#), the adjustments you have both agreed may help at work.

### Confidentiality and disclosure

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that information is only shared where necessary (such as if the employee divulged a threat to life/suicidal thoughts) and with the consent of the employee. Disclosure without consent can be distressing for the employee concerned and in some instances breach:

- the Data Protection Act 2018
- the Equality Act 2010
- Consider GDPR

## Wellbeing and mental health

Menopause can challenge physical and mental wellbeing for many different reasons. Some examples of this can be:

- Mood swings.
- Difficulty concentrating or memory lapses.
- Anxiety or depression.
- Pain and headaches.
- Sleep disorders or fatigue.

As with all employees, the department has a duty of care and managers should watch for symptoms of mental ill health. Our [mental health support offer](#) provides a wealth of resources.

- The [5 Step Guide for Managers](#) gives a helpful overview of how to begin to support positive mental health in the workplace, and the [MHFA Line Manager Resource](#) is a more in-depth resource to equip managers to start a conversation about mental health.
- When a supportive conversation is required in respect of mental health, it's good practice for a colleague and line manager to undertake a [Wellness Action Plan](#).
- If an employee is struggling to stay at work or is absent from work due to their mental health, they can access the [Remploy Workplace Mental Health Support Service](#).



The [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to both employees and managers. The EAP can advise on a range of issues and arrange counselling where required.

Individuals may need more in-depth, specialist support and advice. It is best practice to recommend that individuals speak to their GP or other medical professionals if in any doubt.

## Workplace adjustments

Workplace adjustments are used to remove barriers or a disadvantage. This can be a change to policy, working arrangements or the equipment provided to do a job. Workplace adjustments can be helpful during menopause for agreeing and recording temporary and permanent changes.

In some instances, it may be helpful to seek medical evidence and/or occupational health advice to consider whether adjustments could add value. Any referral to occupational health requires the employee's consent and they usually do not need to show evidence that adjustments are required.

Workplace adjustments should be discussed in 1:1s, and can be recorded by the employee in our general [Workplace Adjustment Passport](#). Some background to the barriers at work may be useful, along with the impact they have but the focus with any adjustments agreed should be on the support needed rather than the reason for it.

Workplace Adjustments or Action Plans should always be stored securely by the employee. They may decide to keep a hard copy in a sealed envelope, rather than electronically.

## Handling absences

Absences that are directly related to the symptoms of menopause are treated or recorded as sickness absences which should specifically refer to symptoms of menopause. You should refer to your departmental attendance management policies for more information.



### Annex A: Self Identification of Menopausal Symptoms

Included below is a template (guide) to assist with understanding how to support staff experiencing issues through the menopause. This list is of symptoms employees may experience when going through the menopause, and how these may impact on their ability to undertake their current role. This list may prompt very personal and private considerations, so it is completely within the employee’s discretion if/when to discuss any content with their line manager. Line managers must not pressure staff to disclose private medical information.

Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom						Adjustments you feel may assist (Examples included)	
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Hourly	Constant		
Hot flushes														Fan/ extra uniform/ close to a window/ access to showers if applicable
Night Sweats														Flexible shift times
Irregular Periods														Procedures allowing for flexibility without drawing attention (Panel meetings etc.)
Loss of Libido														
Vaginal Dryness														
Mood Swings														Inform the team/colleagues to be mindful. Quiet/ Private breakout room.
Fatigue														Flexible shift times.
Hair Loss														Flexibility and sensitivity
Sleep Disorders														
Difficulty Concentrating														Flexibility in breaks.
Memory Lapses														Aide memoirs
Dizziness														Access to fresh drinking water and quiet areas
Weight Gain														Access to food preparation facilities to allow healthy eating options
Incontinence														Procedures allowing for flexibility without drawing attention (Panel meetings etc.) Access to showers/extra uniform if applicable
Bloating														
Allergies														



Civil Service HR



Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom					Adjustments you feel may assist (Examples included)	
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Less than monthly	Monthly	weekly	Daily	Hourly		Constant
Brittle Nails													
Changes in Odour													Access to showers/lockers to store toiletries/extra uniform if applicable

Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom					Adjustments you feel may assist. (Examples included)	
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Less than monthly	Monthly	weekly	Daily	Hourly		Constant
Irregular Heartbeat													
Depression													
Anxiety													
Irritability													
Panic Disorder / Attacks													
Breast Pain													
Headache													Access to a private room
Joint Pain													
Burning Tongue													
Electric Shocks													
Digestive Problems													
Gum Problems													
Muscle Tension													
Itchy Skin													
Tingling Extremities													
Osteoporosis													





## Annex B: Support available regarding Menopause

[Menopause matters](#)

[The British Menopause Society](#)

[NHS menopause pages](#)

[NHS information on HRT](#)

[NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management](#)

[Healthtalk.org](#)

[Women's Health Concerns](#)

[The Menopause Exchange](#)

[Menopause Support UK](#)

[Guidance from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians:](#)

[British Occupational Health Research Foundation – research on women's experiences working through the menopause](#)

[The Daisy Network: For women with POI \(Premature Ovarian Insufficiency\)](#)