

Supporting Employees during the Menopause

Purpose

1. The Council is committed to the wellbeing of its employees and aims to create an environment where employees who are experiencing the menopause, feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support at work.
2. The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness of menopause related symptoms and to provide advice to managers on how best to support employees to help reduce the effect of these symptoms at work.

What is the menopause?

3. The menopause is a natural stage of life when a person's oestrogen, testosterone and progesterone levels decline and the person stops having periods. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event. As well as women, people from non-binary, transgender and intersex communities may also experience menopause/menopausal symptoms.
4. The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55 with the average age being 51, although some may experience this at a younger age and their periods can stop before the age of 40.
5. The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause when the person's hormone balance starts to change. For some people this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late forties.

Symptoms of the menopause

6. The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of those going through the menopause experience symptoms, but everyone is different. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees.
7. Symptoms may start a few months or years before the person's periods stop (known as the perimenopause), and on average, last around four to eight years from the last period. However, for some, these symptoms can continue for a longer period.

8. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for people as they go about their daily lives, including at work. In severe cases, the symptoms may have such an adverse impact that they may meet the legal definition of a disability.
9. Early signs of the menopause usually include a change in the normal pattern of the person's periods, either by them becoming lighter, heavier and/or less frequent. Other common symptoms include:
 - Hot flushes - short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make your skin red and sweaty
 - Night sweats - hot flushes that occur at night
 - Problems with memory and concentration
 - Panic attacks
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Headaches
 - Weight gain
 - Mood changes, such as low mood, anxiety or depression
 - Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), such as cystitis
 - Palpitations - heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable
 - Skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
 - Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
 - Vaginal discomfort

The above is not an exhaustive list and people may experience other symptoms to those shown.

10. Employees may find it helpful to keep a record of their symptoms including the relevant dates, frequency and the impact they are having. If the symptoms are troubling or are being experienced under the age of 45 then advice should be sought from a GP.

How is the menopause diagnosed?

11. A GP is usually able to confirm whether a person is menopausal based on their symptoms. However, where an individual is under the age of 45 then a blood test to measure hormone levels may also be required. NICE guidelines state that for those age 45 and over, blood tests are not needed, and menopause should be diagnosed based on symptoms alone (though a GP may wish to rule out other possible causes).

12. The following table sets out what should and should not happen during a consultation with a GP regarding the menopause:

They should	They should not
✓ Talk about lifestyle, how to manage symptoms and long-term health	✗ Put it down to ‘that time of life’
✓ Provide advice on HRT and non-medical options and their safety and effectiveness	✗ Say that they don’t prescribe HRT or impose unnecessary restrictions on how long it can be taken

13. To ensure that an employee gets the most out of their GP appointment, they may want to consider:

- Asking which GP at their surgery is the best to talk to about the menopause
- Asking for a longer appointment to allow them time to discuss the issue
- Making themselves aware of the [NICE guidelines](#)
- Taking along a record of their symptoms including changes to and frequency of their menstrual cycle
- Asking for a second opinion if they’re not happy with the support provided by their GP

How can menopause symptoms be managed?

14. Not everyone will require assistance to help alleviate their symptoms, however where this is not the case there are a number of treatment options available including:

- Medical options such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) - tablets, skin patches, gels and implants that relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing oestrogen and progesterone (combined HRT) or just taking oestrogen (oestrogen-only HRT). NHS guidelines advise that oestrogen-only HRT is usually only recommended if the person has had their uterus removed during a hysterectomy. If HRT isn't suitable, other medications may be prescribed
- Lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy, balanced diet, exercising regularly, stopping smoking, reducing alcohol and caffeine consumption, managing stress and having sufficient calcium and vitamin D. Employees should consider how their actions may be impacting on their symptoms (e.g., drinking alcohol may increase the likelihood of hot sweats and disturbed sleep, etc.)
- Complementary and herbal remedies such as St John’s Wort, Milk Thistle, Sage and Red Clover. Advice should be sought from a [medical herbalist](#) before trying any of these remedies

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - a talking therapy that can help with low mood and anxiety
- Self-help measures such as getting plenty of rest, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, talking to others about what they are experiencing, and practising relaxation techniques such as yoga, tai chi, or mindfulness

15. GP's can refer individuals to a menopause specialist/specialist service if their symptoms don't improve after trying treatment or if the individual is unable to take HRT. Oxfordshire County has a Community Gynaecology Service which the GP can refer persons to – this aims to assess patients needing support for menopause and other gynaecological issues.

How managers can support an employee during the menopause

16. Managers have an important role to play in ensuring that anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health issue. Effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms that are impacting on their work will help you to improve your team's morale, retain valuable skills and talent, and reduce sickness absence.

There are a number of steps that managers can take to support employees to reduce the impact of menopausal symptoms at work:

- Start by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the employee, to identify the specific issues that person is experiencing
- Consider how the symptoms listed in this guidance may be impacting on the employee, treating every employee as an individual, because menopause symptoms can vary a lot from person to person
- Keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about someone's condition or how it may be affecting their ability to do their job
- Undertake a risk assessment to ensure that all factors have been considered and any potential support measures have been identified
- Identify and agree possible reasonable adjustments and ensure these are implemented without delay. Appendix A includes a list of the most common symptoms, how they impact at work and possible adjustments that could be considered
- Consider a referral to [Occupational Health](#) and discuss with the employee whether they feel this would be beneficial
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed and by whom
- If appropriate, undertake a [stress risk assessment](#)
- Signpost to other sources of support (e.g., GP, [Employee Assistance Service](#), support groups, etc.). Please see Appendix B for more information.
- As symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, have regular discussions with the employee to ensure that the support still meets their needs

Discuss appropriate adjustments

17. Simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance. Managers have a responsibility to consider and put in place reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible, so that those experiencing symptoms can carry on performing in their role.
18. Adjustments can be physical, such as providing a fan, but they can also involve changes such as offering a more flexible working arrangement. Examples of potential reasonable adjustments can be found in Annex A.

Review of guidance

We check our guidance and policies regularly to make sure they are up to date; the latest version can be accessed from the intranet.

If you have any questions about this guidance, contact the [HR team](#).

Reviewed and Published: March 2023

Other related policies

Other related policies - [click here](#)

- Flexible Working Time Policy

Annex A – Potential Reasonable adjustments

The following is a list of possible adjustments that may help employees to manage their symptoms in the workplace. It is not an exhaustive list so consideration should be given to any other adjustments that are identified.

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
Daytime sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less tolerant of temperatures in the workplace • Work clothes / uniform may become uncomfortable • Personal protective equipment (PPE) may be uncomfortable if worn for long periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site • Ensure easy access to washroom/changing facilities, particularly when working off site • Access to shower facilities, if required • Allow for more frequent breaks to manage symptoms, change clothes, etc • Avoid close fitting or non-breathable clothing • Allow flexibility with uniforms (e.g., no jacket required) • Consider providing additional uniforms • Look at ways of cooling the work environment (e.g., desk fan, moving to a desk near a window that opens, adjusting the air conditioning) • Limit the time spent wearing PPE
Night-time sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness (due to lack of sleep) • Concentration issues (due to lack of sleep) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for flexible working (e.g., working at home, temporary adjustment to start time, alternative shift pattern)
Sleep difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness (due to lack of sleep) • Concentration issues (due to lack of sleep) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for flexible working (e.g., working at home, temporary adjustment to start time, alternative shift pattern)

<p>Irregular and/or heavy periods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to access toilet facilities on a frequent basis • Certain tasks may be unfeasible (e.g., a teacher supporting swimming may not be able to be in the pool) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities particularly when working off site • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet • Access to shower facilities, if required • Temporary adjustment to duties, if required
<p>Poor concentration / loss of confidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance may be affected • Difficulty making decisions • Work-related stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider if concentration is better or worse at particular times of the day and adjust working pattern / work tasks accordingly • Review task allocation and workload • Have regular one-to-one meetings so that any issues can be discussed • Provide books for lists or other memory-assisting equipment • Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions • Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices • Identify and address work-related stress through risk assessment
<p>Low mood / anxiety / panic attacks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance may be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the Employee Assistance Service for advice and support • Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk • Identify a 'buddy' for the individual to talk to (this could be within or outside of their team) • Allow for more frequent breaks to undertake relaxation techniques or to

		have time out from others (without needing to ask for permission)
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of concentration / performance may be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site • Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions • Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices
Urinary problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to access toilet facilities more frequently • May need to drink more fluids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities particularly when working off site • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet
Joint stiffness, aches and pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Static postures may be more uncomfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For desk-based employees, undertake a workstation risk assessment • Allow for more frequent breaks so that the employee can stretch

Appendix B - Sources of Further Support and Information

NHS guidance on menopause – www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/

Menopause at Work: A guide for People Managers (CIPD guidance):

<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause/people-manager-guidance>

The Daisy Network - provides support and information for those who have experienced a premature menopause: *Email:* info@daisynetwork.org.uk *Website:* www.daisynetwork.org.uk

Talking Menopause – www.talkingmenopause.co.uk

Menopause Matters – www.menopausematters.co.uk

The Hysterectomy Association - provides well-explained, impartial information about hysterectomy and its long-term health implications:

Tel: 0843 289 2142 *Email:* info@hysterectomy-association.org.uk *Website:* <https://healthyhappywoman.co.uk/hysterectomy-information/>

Manage My Menopause - *Website:* www.managemymenopause.co.uk

National Osteoporosis Society (NOS) – provides support and advice on bone health: www.nos.org.uk *Freephone helpline:* 0808 800 0035 *Email:* nurses@nos.org.uk

Women's Health Concern (WHC) - provides an independent service to advise, reassure and educate women of all ages about their gynecological and sexual health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns: www.womens-health-concern.org/

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines - explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>.

Menopause information. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists - offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>.

Menopause Support –Meg's Menopause – <https://megsmenopause.com/>