



My Wellbeing

Menopause:

A support guide for everyone



Throughout this guide we sometimes use the terms 'women', 'female' and 'her'. However, we want to be clear that this is inclusive of everyone who goes through the menopause or menopausal symptoms as a result of hormonal changes, for example trans men. The language used is purely for the flow of the guide.

Menopause: A support guide for everyone

Introduction

Menopause is a phase of life and everyone's experience of menopause is different. While some may sail through it with barely a symptom, it isn't an easy transition for all. But by increasing awareness of the menopause, encouraging open conversations and with the right support we can help improve their experience at work and in their personal lives.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 8 in 10 menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, or ask for the support or adjustments they may need. At AXA, we want to help everyone feel comfortable to have open and honest conversations about menopause, never feeling that the subject is taboo or off limits. We want to make sure everyone knows what support is available.

Ultimately, the goal is to talk about the menopause more openly in the workplace and give individuals the confidence and knowledge to seek or offer support.

Using this guide

The aim of this guide is not only to support those who may be experiencing menopause, but also to equip and support those around them – whether that's colleagues and managers at work, or partners and family members at home.

Everyone's experience of menopause is different. We experience different symptoms, have different views or philosophies around how we'd manage them and different medical histories. For those experiencing menopause symptoms this guide aims to help you work out what's right for you and plan your next steps. For those supporting others, this guide aims to offer you the knowledge and understanding around menopause and where to signpost support and help.

If it would be helpful to download and send this guide to your personal email address to read in your own time or to support someone at home, then please do so.

Menopause: A support guide for everyone

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Committed to being a
menopause friendly
employer



1. All about menopause

The facts: What is menopause?

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. The average menopause age is 51, however it can be earlier naturally or due to surgery, illness or other reasons. There are three defined stages of menopause:

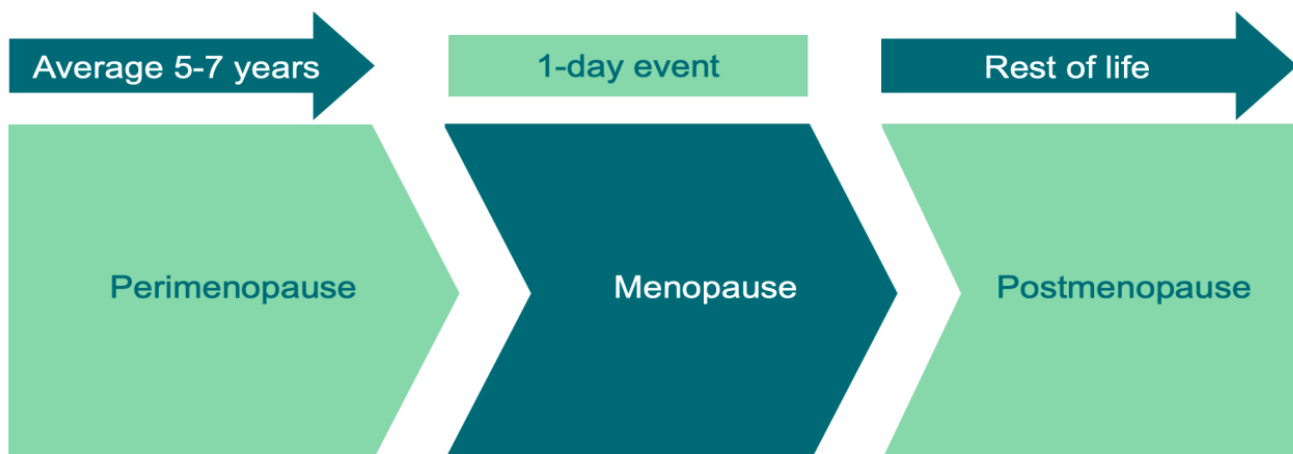
Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when they may experience changes and menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.

Menopause is usually defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The following day is classed as menopause.

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months and for the rest of her life.

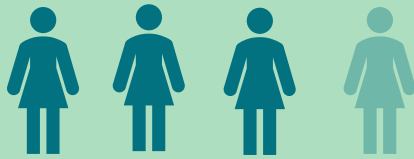
When we talk about menopause in this guide, we are referring to any of these stages.

The menopause transition



1. All about menopause

The facts



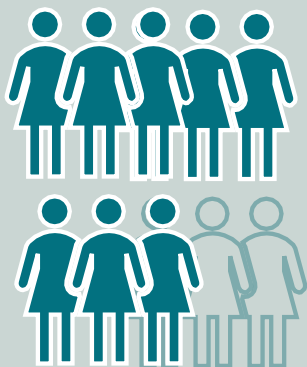
3 in 4

experience menopause symptoms, 1 in 4 experience serious symptoms.¹



51

is the average age of menopause. It usually occurs between 45 – 55 but can be earlier due to surgery, illness or other reasons.¹



8 in 10

women of menopausal age are in work.²



4 – 8

years is how long symptoms may be experienced for.²

Sources:

¹ British Menopause Society

² Faculty of Occupational Medicine

1. All about menopause

Menopause symptoms

Our hormone levels change throughout our lives e.g. during puberty, pregnancy, as a result of certain health conditions or treatment, gender transitioning, and as we get older. The main ones changing during menopause are:

Oestrogen has hundreds of functions including nourishing the tissues of the body, regulating bone turnover as well as keeping our liver, brain and heart healthy.

Progesterone which boosts feelings of calmness and aids sleep and can help to improve mood.

Testosterone which increases motivation and optimism, helps improve energy levels, supports bone health and boosts sex drive.

During menopause, these hormones can be out of balance. Oestrogen levels fluctuate and progesterone declines, which is when someone may start noticing symptoms.

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological. 3 out of 4 women will experience some kind of symptoms when going through the menopause and these could last between 4 and 8 years. Others may not notice any major changes. Everyone is individual and therefore your experience may be very different to colleagues or friends.

Here are some of the more common signs and symptoms of the menopause. It is very unlikely you will experience all of these symptoms or at the same time.

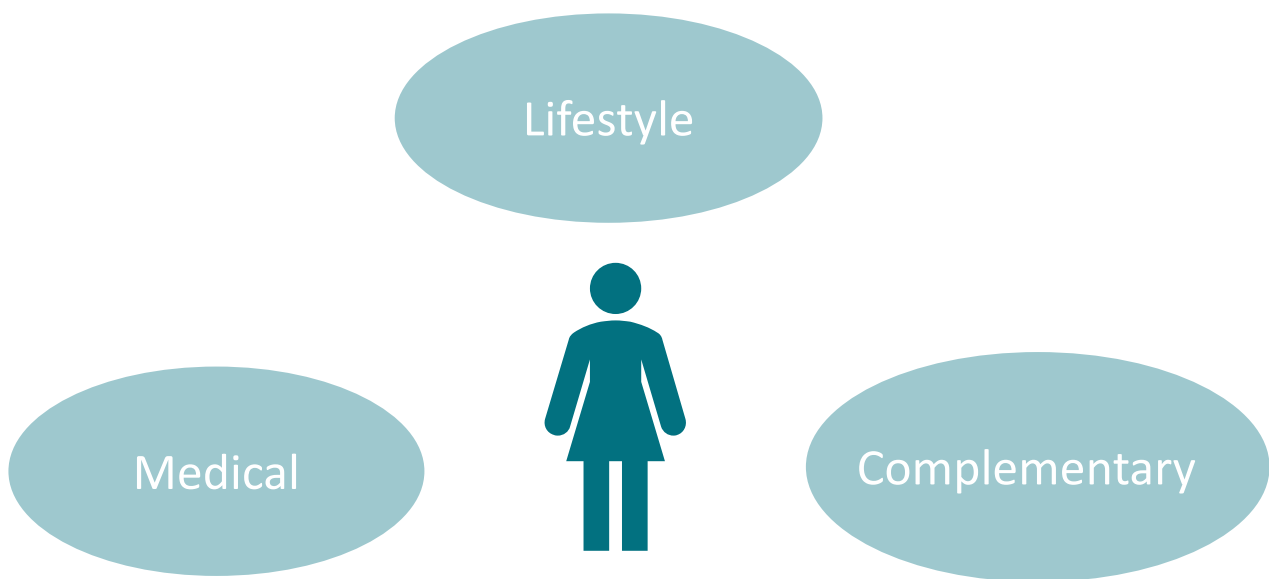
Physical symptoms	Psychological symptoms
Hot Flushes	Emotional/ mood swings
Trouble sleeping	Brain fog
Fatigue	Problems with memory recall
Hair/ skin changes/ irritation	Feeling low
Headaches or migraines	Lack of libido
Change in periods (irregular or heavy)	Tearful
Weight gain	Nervousness, worry or anxiety
Aches and pains	Poor concentration
Urinary issues, e.g. increased frequency	Irritability

Remember, your symptoms do not have to be really bad or even unbearable before help is available to you.

1. All about menopause

Managing menopause symptoms and long-term health

Just as everyone's menopause is different, so is their personal choice about how to manage symptoms and long-term health. Considerations around benefits and risks need to be taken into account, alongside their individual medical history. Some may prefer the medical approach e.g. hormone replacement therapy (HRT), while others prefer a complementary approach or to make lifestyle changes.



Treatment options: Medical

Your GP will be able to discuss medical options with you, including HRT. There are many myths about HRT, so the best thing to do is research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites before your meeting with the GP.

A little preparation will help you get the best from your appointment. You could record your symptoms, detail your menstrual cycle history, and research how you'd like to manage symptoms and long-term health. See [Section 2](#) of this guide for tips on talking to your GP about menopause.

1. All about menopause

Treatment options: Lifestyle changes and self-care

A healthy lifestyle can have a positive impact on both menopausal symptoms and long-term health, so it's important to consider lifestyle changes during and after the menopause.



Be informed. Take time to read up on what to expect and what will happen but most of all take control and make positive lifestyle changes. There are some useful links at the end of this guide.

Commit to quit

It's the advice that appears in every health feature – and with good reason. Smokers tend to have an earlier menopause, and smoking can also worsen hot flushes – possibly due to the effects of nicotine.



Get active

Taking regular exercise may hold the key to keeping your weight in check, as well as regulating your mood. Activities such as regular yoga can reduce hot flushes and improve concentration, sleep and pain levels. Finding an activity you enjoy will help make it easier to stick to.

Think before you drink

In fact, if you can, it's a good idea to cut out alcohol completely. Alcohol is a common trigger for hot flushes and can encourage other symptoms, such as headaches and mood swings. It's also 'empty calories'. Being overweight can exacerbate many menopause symptoms, as well as put you at increased risk of serious illness.



Sleep well

Aim to go to bed at the same time each night; switch off the TV and all electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime; keep your bedroom cool, use cotton sheets and wear lighter clothes in bed to prevent night sweats.

1. All about menopause

Treatment options: Lifestyle changes and self-care (Continued)



Eat well

Enjoying a varied healthy diet is important for everyone, and particularly during and post menopause. A healthy, well-balanced diet means eating food from a variety of food groups to get the energy and nutrients that your body needs.

Cut down on caffeine

Caffeine can trigger and worsen hot flushes and night sweats, and because it's a stimulant, it can also contribute to insomnia, irritability and mood swings. Aim to limit your intake of caffeine throughout the day, and steer clear of caffeinated drinks completely in the evenings.



Connect with friends

Emotional closeness between friends boosts levels of the hormone progesterone, which reduces anxiety and stress. It's good to talk about what you're experiencing, and they may be going through the same issues.

Reach out for help

Don't just ignore your symptoms and hope it'll go away. If you're finding it difficult to cope with any aspect of menopause speak to your GP as soon as possible. There are medical options (HRT) as well as non-medical options (CBT, Acupuncture, Aromatherapy, Reflexology, and Herbal Remedies)



Remember, the sooner you start to implement small lifestyle changes to address the symptoms you're experiencing, the sooner you'll get it under control.

1. All about menopause

Treatment options: Herbal and complementary treatments

Some people choose to take herbal remedies, such as black cohosh, soya-based foods and red clover for hot flushes. There is little research or evidence to say how effective these are and they can have side-effects or interact with other drugs.

It's best to talk to your GP or a qualified medical herbalist before you choose these. You can find a qualified [one in your area here](#).

Remember, just as everyone's menopause is different, so is their personal choice about how to manage symptoms and long-term health.

2. Talking about menopause

Talking to your GP

It's always recommended that you go to your GP if you're experiencing menopausal symptoms.

They can discuss options with you, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and advise on any lifestyle changes which could help. They should also be able to advise you on complementary treatments, including herbal remedies.

Getting what's right for you from an appointment with your GP is very important. So a little preparation will go a long way in helping you make the most of it.

Making your appointment

- A good place to start is to ask who's the best GP in the practice to talk to about the menopause.
- Consider asking for a longer appointment, explaining to the receptionist can help them allocate the appropriate time.

Preparing for your appointment

- Record your symptoms (frequency and duration) and detail your menstrual cycle history.
- Make notes of how your symptoms are affecting you and how you're attempting to manage them
- Review the NICE guidelines – GPs use these to help women manage their menopause – so it's a good idea to have a read through these. You can find a link to these in section 5 of this guide.
- Research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites, and think about ways you would like to manage not just your menopause symptoms but your long-term health. You'll find some suggested resources in section 5 of this guide.

During your appointment

- Take your partner or a close friend with you. They will know how the symptoms are affecting you and could support you at the appointment, they can also find out how to continue supporting you.
- Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. If there is and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling and how it's affecting you.

2. Talking about menopause

Talking to your Manager

We know it might be hard to talk to your manager about how menopause is affecting you. But, your manager is there to help you be at your best at work. To help you both, it's a good idea to prepare for your conversation, this will result in a much better conversation and outcome for both of you.

Use the **five** steps below to help you prepare for your conversation with your manager and get the most out of it.

1

Prepare for your meeting

- Review [AXA's menopause policy](#) so you understand what support might be available to you.
- Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you at work.
- Think about what practical, reasonable adjustments might help address these symptoms at work, being flexible and ideally coming up with some different options. These may well only be needed for a short period of time while you work with your medical professional to alleviate your symptoms.

2

Book a meeting

- This means you'll have the time you need and, if you're in the office, a private space to talk and will be more likely to get your points across without feeling pressured or overheard.

Continued...

2. Talking about menopause

Talking to your Manager (Continued)

3

Explain your situation clearly

- Talk about how menopause is affecting you at work, what you're doing to manage your menopause and what your line manager could do to help.
- Discuss what the support you would like e.g. reasonable adjustments and timescales. Or sometimes just knowing someone understands and is there to listen can help.

4

Agree next steps with your manager on what you can both do

- They may need time to think about the best support. Remember, this may have been on your mind for a long time, but it may be the first time your manager has heard about it. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary.
- Talk to your line manager about whether you want the conversation to be kept confidential or if you're happy to discuss it with colleagues. It's your choice.

5

Follow up

- At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update. Menopause symptoms can change over time.

Above all, it's in both your best interests to find a good solution. All anyone wants is for you to be fit and well and do your job to the best of your ability. Menopause can be isolating if you don't talk to someone but remember all women go through menopause at some point, so you most certainly are not alone.

3. A managers guide to menopause

Some people can find it hard to talk to their manager about how menopause is affecting them. However, your role as their manager is to help them be at their best at work. Talking with your team about menopause and the support available within your organisation can be a great way to demonstrate you want to support anyone experiencing symptoms.

It can be hard when you suspect someone is experiencing menopause symptoms but they haven't talked to you. Wait for your team member to share what they're experiencing. Bringing it up yourself could be viewed as confrontational or offensive. And, as managers, we are not here to diagnose, but to support.

If you observe a team member or colleague struggling or not seeming themselves, ask how they are or if there is anything you can help with. Knowing you care and want to support can provide great reassurance and encourage them to take the conversation further.

Remember that support is available to you as well, you can contact People Services to talk through any situation you might be facing with a team member.

Tips for having a supportive conversation about menopause

If someone in your team does want to talk with you about their menopause symptoms, there are some ways you can prepare for the conversation to help you both get the best out of it.

Prepare for the conversation

The first step is to make sure you fully understand AXA's approach to supporting those experiencing menopause. Review [AXA's menopause policy](#) and make sure you're familiar with the suggestions for reasonable adjustments outlined in the policy.

Time and location

Make sure you have the time and space for a confidential discussion that allows the opportunity to raise concerns, worries and steps forward. Remember it can be difficult for some people to talk about their experience so not feeling rushed will help put them at ease.

Opening up the conversation

Focus on the positive. A positive mindset and approach are essential for managers to ensure conversations are supportive experiences for you and your colleagues. When a colleague talks about menopause, make sure you communicate that it's not a problem for you or for the organisation.

3. A managers guide to menopause

Tips for having a supportive conversation about menopause (Continued)

Offer support

Support can come in a number of different forms: some employees may just want an empathic ear, while others may want something more formal. It's also okay not to have all the answers during your first conversation, you can offer reassurance that you will find answers for your next conversation.

Develop a working plan

Menopause is a unique experience, and each person may need different support. Ask your team member what they feel might improve their symptoms at work. Review regularly.

Keep talking

At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update. The effects of menopausal transition can change over time, so support may need to change to accommodate this. Reflect back what you are seeing.

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do your research and understand the factsDo talk about menopauseDo follow guidance in our menopause policyDo keep an open mind and be flexibleDo provide support and focus on solutionsDo contact People Services and refer to Occupational Health if appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Don't make assumptions about menopauseDon't shy away from talking about menopauseDon't share personal information without consentDon't address performance issues without checking about health concerns

Don't give medical advice but do suggest relevant support

Above all, it's in both your best interests to find a good solution. All anyone wants is for your team to be fit and well so they can do their job to the best of their ability.

4. Supporting someone close to you

Supporting a partner or family member

Talking openly about the menopause to your partner or someone you're close to is often the best way to support them. Finding out how they are feeling and talking honestly about how you might be feeling can make a big difference. If you are finding it difficult to start that conversation, you could consider using this guide as a conversation opener.

Simply showing you care and being patient and supportive is often the best thing that you can do, but you could also use the tips below to help you be the support your partner or family member needs during their experience of menopause.

Educate yourself

The more you know about what your partner or family member is experiencing, the better you can support them. Whilst you might not be able to understand how it feels, it doesn't mean you can't try to empathise through a deeper understanding of what it might be like.

Talk. And more importantly, listen!

Even if communication doesn't come naturally to you giving them a safe space to talk openly about how they are feeling will help make their experience better. You could simply try asking "What's the best thing I can do to help you get through this?"

Be patient

This can be a really trying time and the person experiencing menopause needs to work through it in their own time and their own way. Remember that the menopause can make someone feel fragile, overwhelmed and like they hardly know themselves during these years. Your love and support is more important than ever.

Continued....

4. Supporting someone close to you

Supporting a partner or family member (Continued)

Offer to help

Do what you can to keep them from feeling overwhelmed. You might not be able to take away their symptoms, but there are other things you can do to help ease pressures they might be feeling. It doesn't always have to be something big - a cup of tea or running a nice relaxing bath can be enough. Simple things can make a huge difference when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Support their interests

Hobbies and exercise will help improve their personal wellbeing. Encourage them to pursue things that make them feel good. If they want to take a night class or join the gym, do what you can to make it easy for them.

Support their health

Encourage them to seek help and consult their doctor about their symptoms, you could even offer to go with them. For some people, just making the appointment can be a major hurdle, anxiety during menopause can be crippling and self-confidence can simply disappear. Having someone with them to support at appointments could be a huge relief.

Remember, supporting someone through menopause doesn't have to be complicated, simple human traits like kindness, honesty and empathy can make a difference to you both during this time. You may even find that supporting each other through the experience strengthens your relationship in the long term.

4. Supporting someone close to you

Supporting a colleague

Menopause is a phase of life. We all need to feel comfortable talking about it, and feel able to ask for help and support if needed. Simply by being willing and open to talking about it can make a big difference to someone.

It can be hard when you suspect someone is experiencing menopause symptoms but they haven't talked to you. If you observe a colleague struggling or not seeming themselves, ask how they are or if there is anything you can help with. Knowing you care and want to support can provide great reassurance and encourage them to take the conversation further.

Here are some tips on supporting a colleague that you know or suspect might be experiencing menopause:

Don't make assumptions

It's important to appreciate that everyone is different, so don't make assumptions. Whether that's about symptoms (some don't have any), how we manage them or how much we want to talk about it.

Just ask 'How are you?'

The human approach is powerful, it shows you care, understand and want to support. A simple 'How are you?' or 'What can I do to help?' is often enough. Small gestures can make a big difference. Even being able to be open about it is a relief for many.

Read up on the facts

The detail in this guide may well be enough to give you a basic understanding of what someone might be experiencing. But you may choose to do further research, if so use only reputable organisations offering factual information. There are some suggestions in [Section 5](#) of this guide.

5. Further support

There are many sources of support available to both those experiencing menopause and those supporting them. Always make sure that you access reputable and reliable sources of information and support.

Internal Sources

Relevant policies	Menopause policy
	Flexible working policy
	Health and safety policy
Wellbeing support and information	Be Supported
	My Wellbeing Hub
	Mental Health First Aiders
	Women's Wellbeing SharePoint site

External Sources

About menopause and signs and symptoms	Menopause signs and symptoms	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/symptoms/
	Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists	https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patient-s/menopause/
	Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause:	https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk
	Information on hysterectomy	https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patient-s/menopause/hysterectomy/
	Henpicked menopause hub	https://henpicked.net/menopause
Menopause treatments	NICE guidelines on menopause treatment:	https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/Aboutthis-information
	Women's health concern:	https://www.womens-healthconcern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/hrt/
	Find a BMS-recognised specialist	Find a BMS-recognised Menopause Specialist British Menopause Society (thebms.org.uk)
	Find a qualified herbalists in your area	https://nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/