

Let's  
talk about the  
menopause



# Menopause

A guide for managers

## Why is supporting women with menopause important to us?

At Occupational Health we're passionate about the health and wellbeing of all of our staff. As part of this, we want to raise awareness of menopause and specifically how we can help our colleagues that are in this natural phase of their life, but who may need support at work due to the impact upon their physical, mental and cognitive functioning.

A start point is to create a culture in which menopause can be talked about openly and without embarrassment. In our Trust of the 2,141 women employed, 998 of these are within the 45-60 age group i.e: likely to be peri/post-menopausal.

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life and it isn't always an easy transition for all, but with the right support it can be much better. While every woman does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work and in their personal lives.

In 2019 Dr's Louise Newson and Rebecca Lewis carried out a survey on the impact of the menopause upon working women, there were 1132 respondents.

*"Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life and it isn't always an easy transition for all, but with the right support it can be much better."*

**90%**

said that their peri/menopausal symptoms were having a negative impact upon their work



**25% reported these as severe**

**50%**

had taken sickness absence

**19%**

took over 8 weeks

**52%**

had anxiety and stress cited on the fit note

**ONLY 7%**

had menopause cited on the fit note



**32% has considered leaving their job**

**9%**

had been through a disciplinary procedure

([www.mymenopausedoctor.co.uk](http://www.mymenopausedoctor.co.uk), 'Menopause at Work: Survey Results Published!')

The changing age of the workforce means that more menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, or ask for the support or any adjustments that they may need. We want to change that.

Menopause isn't just an issue for women, men need to know about it too, so they can support colleagues, friends and family.

This guide is to explain more about menopause to help you understand what support we can offer to our staff and have open conversations about it.

## Menopause what is it?

**Menopause** is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51 but it can be earlier or later than this, either naturally or due to surgery or illness.

**Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, e.g. irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can start years before menopause.

**Postmenopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

## What are the symptoms?

Every woman is different. Not every woman will experience every symptom and some may not notice any at all. However, three out of four will, and one in four could experience severe symptoms. Symptoms can be both physical and psychological, including hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbance, headaches or worsening migraines, poor concentration or memory problems, depression, anxiety, panic attacks and mood changes, weight and skin changes, urinary infections, and joint pain.

## Managing symptoms

There are a number of ways to manage any symptoms, from the medical approach to natural approaches including dietary and lifestyle changes and there are many resources available for women to read about this subject, some of which are listed at the end of this leaflet.

If anyone in your team asks you for advice, you may direct them towards this list and to our leaflet 'Let's Talk About Menopause-a guide for staff'.

## Talking to your team members

**If a member of your team wants to talk about menopause – or to just talk about how they are feeling, as they may not know if they have menopausal symptoms – please make sure you:**

- Arrange an appropriate time to meet, allowing enough time for the conversation
- Find a room that will keep your conversation confidential
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly
- Explore the best ways they can be supported (see reasonable adjustments)
- Agree on any actions or adjustments and how to implement them
- Arrange a follow-up meeting if needed.

Never assume that because a woman is of menopausal age that this will be affecting her at work. If you feel a member of your team needs support then you can have a conversation about what they're experiencing and what could be done in the workplace to help. If in the longer term you feel they

need further help or support, you could consider encouraging them to talk to their GP and/or referring them to the Occupational Health team.

## Assessing an reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments will be made on a case-by-case basis. Many will be simple and won't involve any cost, and may vary in the time they are needed.

During your meeting, discuss with your team member what their symptoms are, how it's affecting them at work, what they're doing to manage their symptoms and how you can help.

Try not to make any assumptions in advance, be prepared to listen and open to ideas, with a clear understanding of how this will work for the business as well as for the individual.

Remember that symptoms vary both in their nature and how long they last for.

## Here are some ideas of the changes/reasonable adjustments that you may want to consider to help your team member:

<b>Hot flushes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperature control for their work area. This could include offering a desk fan.</li> <li>• Permanent access to fresh drinking water.</li> <li>• Access to a quiet room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.</li> </ul>
<b>Heavy Periods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent access to washroom facilities.</li> <li>• Make sure sanitary protection is available in toilets.</li> </ul>
<b>Headaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have access to fresh drinking water.</li> <li>• Consider if there's a quieter space to work.</li> <li>• Have time out to take medication if needed..</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty Sleeping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider our flexible working policy or informal arrangements to arrive later for work.</li> <li>• Consider if working from home is an option.</li> </ul>
<b>Low Mood, Anxiety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss with them their most appropriate sources of help, which could include their GP, 'Let's Talk'/ Emotional Wellbeing Service, Occupational Health and/or the staff counselling service.</li> </ul>
<b>Loss of Confidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular one-to-one discussions.</li> <li>• Have protected time to catch up with work.</li> </ul>
<b>Poor Concentration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust working hours to fit times of the day when concentration is better.</li> <li>• Review task allocation and workload.</li> <li>• Provide list books, a note board or other memory-assisting equipment.</li> <li>• Offer quieter space to work.</li> <li>• Reduce interruptions if possible.</li> <li>• Have protected time to catch up with work.</li> </ul>

## 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 (yours, your employer and the employee) 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. 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.

How to manage health issues affecting performance

- Have regular, informal catch-ups 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.
- Set reasonable timescales for improvements.

(Source: 'A Guide to Managing Menopause at Work – Guidance for Line Managers'.www.cipd.co.uk)

Check out the CIPD's resources on performance management for more information.

## Review how the adjustments are working and if they're still

After the adjustments have been agreed and put into place, it's important to monitor their effectiveness and agree a time for a follow-up meeting to discuss. It may be necessary to change the adjustments, or they may only be needed in the short term.

Keep notes of all your discussions, including what you've both agreed to do as a result and any necessary follow-ups. Keep these conversations and agreements confidential unless the colleague involved chooses to disclose them to other colleagues.

## Further information

### For managers

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<a href="http://www.cipd.co.uk">www.cipd.co.uk</a>	An excellent, downloadable guide to managing menopause at work
<a href="http://www.menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk">www.menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk</a>	For interesting articles on employment law

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### About the menopause

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<a href="http://www.henpicked.co.uk">www.henpicked.co.uk</a>	An informative website for women over 40 with an extensive menopause hub
<a href="http://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk">www.menopausedoctor.co.uk</a>	Developed by Specialist GP Louise Newson, this website covers all aspects of the menopause and hosts over 100 podcast and videos
<a href="http://www.menopausematters.co.uk">www.menopausematters.co.uk</a>	an award-winning site that also caters for men with 'The Man Shed'

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Also, check out our dedicated menopause intranet page  
<https://intranet.humber.nhs.uk/understanding-menopause.htm>

### Contact us

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