



Supporting employees through menopause.

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Workplace
Health and Wellbeing **Academy**

The menopause is a natural stage of life.

In an ideal world, it's one that we would all feel able to open up about. Yet many women continue to experience difficult menopause symptoms in silence, especially in the work environment.

Six in every ten women feel their menopausal symptoms have had a negative impact on their work.¹ Yet almost half of women who needed a day off due to menopause symptoms say they wouldn't tell their employer the real reason.²

Here we provide guidance to help you support any team members experiencing menopausal symptoms, encourage open conversations and create a better working environment for women at this time of life.



¹Let's talk menopause, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, published March 2019.

²A woman's relationship with the menopause is complicated. British Menopause Society fact sheet. Women's Health Concern. www.womens-health-concern.org, published September 2020

Know the facts

Some women may find it daunting to discuss the menopause with someone who knows little about it. So the first step to providing support is to understand how the menopause affects women's lives. This will help to make you more approachable and give you the confidence to discuss any issues with your staff. It's also worth considering that many women

who start to experience menopausal symptoms may still be learning about the menopause themselves. So providing information and raising awareness within your workplace could make a difference for everyone; whether they are experiencing the menopause themselves, or in a position where they could support colleagues who are.

1-to-1 menopause support for your team

For businesses with Bupa health cover, we have menopause-trained nurses on hand to offer personalised, clinical support and advice to your employees.

They can reach our Menopause HealthLine on

0345 608 9984

*Lines are open from 8am to 8pm, 365 days a year. Calls may be recorded and to maintain the quality of our service we may monitor some of our calls, always respecting the confidentiality of the call.



Call us
for **FREE**
advice

What is the menopause?

At the menopause, a woman's oestrogen levels fall and she stops having periods. During the time leading up to the menopause – the perimenopause – hormonal changes can cause several physical and psychological symptoms. Some women have mild or no symptoms, but others may have severe symptoms and find it hard to cope. The perimenopause can last for several years, affecting a woman's performance and attendance at work.

The menopause can also affect people from transgender, non-binary and intersex communities, and its symptoms and impact can vary among different ethnic groups.

In the UK, most women go through the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55, with the average age being 51, younger women can be affected too, by early menopause (aged 40 to 45) or premature menopause (before the age of 40).

Premature menopause may happen due to surgery (eg a hysterectomy) or medical treatments (eg for cancer). The menopause can also affect people from transgender, non-binary and intersex communities, and its symptoms and impact can vary among different ethnic groups.

6 in 10

menopausal women say their symptoms have had a negative impact on their work.

Let's talk menopause. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, published March 2019.

Understand the symptoms

Every woman experiences the perimenopause differently, and her symptoms may flare up and down and change over time. Some people treat their symptoms with hormone replacement therapy (HRT), while all women will benefit from looking at their lifestyle and making helpful changes to ease menopause symptoms. Common menopausal symptoms include:

- hot flushes (a sudden feeling of heat in the face, neck and chest)
- aches and pains
- an urgent or regular need to urinate
- irregular or very heavy periods
- poor sleep and night sweats
- poor concentration, memory issues and an inability to think clearly – often called 'brain fog'.

Many women also experience mood changes, feeling low or anxious, and increased stress at work can make this worse. Without treatment or support, menopausal symptoms can make it harder for women to cope at work, lowering their confidence and interfering with relationships with colleagues and at home. This may affect their morale and performance and lead to days off, or they may continue to work through due to worries about being seen to 'keep up' with colleagues and at home. The menopause comes at a time when women may be going through other stressful life events, such as bereavement, divorce or dealing with elderly parents.

They may also have childcare responsibilities, either for younger children or adapting to a change in the household with older children returning to live at home.

Hot flushes and night sweats affect up to 75% of menopausal women – and can last for 7 years or more.

Menopause. Background information. Prevalence of symptoms. NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries, last revised September 2022.

How can you help employees?

Treat the menopause with the same support and understanding as you would treat any other ongoing health concerns affecting your employees.

The menopause can be a particularly sensitive and personal issue, and some women may be worried that they could be stigmatised by colleagues. So it needs to be handled with care. Normalising the menopause in your workplace shows it's being taken seriously and women shouldn't be embarrassed to bring up the topic.

Make a statement

The menopause is a recognised occupational health issue and also a gender and age equality issue. Use workplace guidance to show that your business is committed to supporting your staff during all stages of a woman's life.

Review or update existing health and safety policies or frameworks, or create new ones, to take into account the needs of workers of all ages.

If you don't have specific menopause policies in place, create a general wellbeing policy that recognises the menopause as a key health issue.

Check that flexible working and sickness absence policies cover women going through the menopause.

Make sure staff know who they can speak to if they're experiencing any menopausal symptoms that do, or could, affect their work in any way.

One way to make sure menopause symptoms aren't being made worse by the work environment, or by working practices, is to carry out a workplace assessment. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website has templates you can use which cover both physical and mental wellbeing risks, including for home workers.

Have regular, informal one-to-one chats with your team members to encourage conversations about any issues (including health) that may be affecting their work.

1 in 4


menopausal women say they don't get the support they need from their manager.

Let's talk menopause. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, published March 2019

Open up conversations

If team members are struggling with menopausal symptoms, they need to know that help and support is readily available. There's no 'one size fits all' approach though, and some women may find it easier than others to discuss the menopause with their colleagues or managers.

- Give staff the option of speaking to someone other than their manager, especially if their manager is younger or male. Some people may feel more comfortable speaking to a colleague they work with more closely, while others may feel more able to talk openly with someone from a completely different part of the organisation who has no influence over their role. Staff may appreciate, for example, the chance to have a female mentor who has been through similar life experiences, or equally sympathetic male mentors who have a partner or family member they supported through the menopause.
- Treat each team member as an individual, as the menopause affects everyone differently.



Around one in every three women has either experienced or is currently going through the menopause. Around eight in every ten women will experience noticeable symptoms, and of these 45% will find their symptoms hard to deal with.

The menopause at work: a practical guide for people managers. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. www.cipd.co.uk, published May 2021

- The menopause is a sensitive topic, so any conversations should be held in a private area where there won't be any interruptions.
- Don't offer medical advice, but do offer support. Suggest employees see their GP if their symptoms are affecting their daily life. Signpost your staff to an employee assistance programme (EAP) or counselling service, if these are available.
- Reassure your staff that discussions about their health, including the menopause, will always remain confidential. Information will only be shared if they consent to this.

The symptoms (and impact) of the menopause can vary over time.

So you'll need to have regular discussions to make sure your team member's needs continue to be met.

The menopause at work: a practical guide for people managers. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Find practical solutions

Managers, or the person responsible for occupational health, may need to put specific measures in place that will help staff cope with troublesome menopausal symptoms. Even simple changes to a working environment can make a big difference, enabling a woman to continue to perform at her full potential. Some changes may be physical ones, such as providing new equipment, while others may involve being more flexible with certain procedures.

For some staff, many of the practical steps below will be easier to do when working from home than in the workplace. But this very much depends on their home environment. For other staff, being at their workplace may be much better. It's important to support staff in working from the most comfortable environment for them, when work duties allow some flexibility.

- Can they sit by an opening window for some fresh air or a breeze?
- Can they adjust the air conditioning or heating?
- Do they need a desk fan for when they have a hot flush?
- Can they change their uniform for something more comfortable, or remove layers? Nylon or close-fitting materials may worsen hot flushes or cause skin irritation.
- Do they have easy access to toilets and washing facilities? Bladder leakage (stress incontinence) may get worse at the menopause.
- Is cold drinking water readily available – at desks and workstations, during meetings or when travelling?
- Is there somewhere they can rest or take a quiet break if they need to? Hot flushes can be very uncomfortable, embarrassing and distressing, and some menopausal women get very tired. Mindfulness, meditation and other relaxation techniques may help to reduce stress levels.
- Is their desk or workstation set up properly to reduce aches and pains? This can be an especially important consideration when people are working from home.
- If their work involves long periods of sitting or standing, can they move around freely, or take regular breaks?
- Can they take time off for healthcare appointments or leave early if their symptoms flare up?
- Can they start and finish work later than usual, or change their shift if they have a restless night's sleep?
- If they aren't working from home already, do they have the option to do so on a day when it would help them to manage symptoms?



Supporting all of your team

Check how much your staff know about the menopause, and address any gaps in their knowledge. Challenge any negative attitudes and discrimination.

Remember that this isn't just an issue for women. Men may want to learn more about the menopause too, to support their colleagues, family and friends. And remember that trans men and non-binary people may also go through the menopause.

Train managers to be confident about having sensitive conversations with their staff, showing empathy and understanding.

Direct your employees to suitable evidence-based resources on the menopause. This may help women self-manage their symptoms and be able to share their knowledge with others.



Julie's story

“In the past six months, I've struggled with brain fog, tiredness due to waking multiple times each night (caused by sweats), and hot flushes during the day too. The brain fog is the most frustrating when you're used to clear, sharp thinking – you can't even remember what you've just said to someone.

I'm now medicated, which helps. But what has helped most has been the understanding of my manager. He performed a risk assessment for me and put things into place that will help. If I've struggled with sleep and can't function properly, I can call in and slide my shift if necessary. I can take time out if mood swings get to me – just a quick walk around the building can help.

I've extra support if I need it to do my job. I've now got a fan, paid for by the company, and I do feel supported. If all management were this understanding, it would massively help women who are going through the menopause.”



Champion the menopause

Identify a supportive colleague and create a dedicated 'menopause champion' role in your business. Make it clear who this is and how they can be contacted. This person could be responsible for:

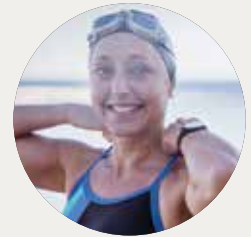
- organising menopause training and workshops
- using posters to let staff know support is readily available
- overseeing health and safety risk assessments
- creating an informal support network for menopausal staff



Sally's story

“I went into a relatively early menopause at around the age of 43. I had a whole myriad of symptoms, including feeling as though my core temperature had just risen overall, resulting in never feeling the cold and always being hot (dreading the summer).”

I made a point of educating myself on all things menopause to help myself and allay any fears that try to creep in. I'm able to provide understanding and reassurance to other people. On a few occasions, I've had colleagues say things like, 'Thank goodness, it's good to know that this or that is normal and not something to worry about.' I try to get them to talk about it and not suffer in silence or in fear.”



Five tips to take away

Normalise the menopause

Dispel any taboos by making sure your whole team knows about key menopausal symptoms and how these can affect women at work.

Update policies

Check that your business's health and safety, wellbeing and staff absence policies and frameworks recognise the menopause as a health issue.

Be open

Raise awareness of the menopause at work, and encourage conversations, so team members know they can ask for support if they need it.

Be practical

Conduct a workplace assessment, and make any necessary changes that could help to ease employees' menopausal symptoms while they're at work.

Be flexible

If a team member's work performance or attendance dips suddenly, check whether there are any underlying health issues, including the menopause.

Further information

For information resources and personal stories about the menopause, you can visit bupa.co.uk/womens-health

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