

## Guidance on Menopause and the Workplace

### 1. Introduction

It is important to be aware that the menopause is a natural stage in women's lives and that not all women experience significant symptoms. The menopause has been regarded as a taboo subject. But this is changing as employers gradually acknowledge the potential impact of the menopause on women and become aware of the simple steps they can take to be supportive.

The Trust wants to support our colleagues through this time, and it is recognised that the menopause can be a health issue.

The aim is to create an environment where staff can talk about it openly, to provide information to women experiencing symptoms at work and to guide managers on appropriate support for their staff.

### 2. Overview

The medical definition of the menopause is when a woman has had her last period and is a natural part of the female ageing process. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur any time up to a woman's mid-60s. A premature menopause can occur, with periods stopping before the age of 40, either naturally or as an effect of a medical condition or its treatment. Around 1 in 100 women will experience a premature menopause and this of course can be at a time when still planning to conceive (The Faculty of Occupational Medicine's (FOM) [Guidance on menopause and the workplace](#)).

Around 30-60% of women experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause (<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause/>). These are associated with a decrease in the body's production of the hormone oestrogen (<http://www.bridgewater.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Menopause-Briefing.pdf>). For some, symptoms include hot flushes, night sweats and related symptoms such as sleep disruption, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Hot flushes are short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make the skin red and sweaty. Severe flushes can cause sweat to soak through clothing. Mood disturbances, anxiety and depression are also reported. Symptoms on average continue for four years from the last period, and 1 in 10 women experience symptoms for up to 12 years (<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>).

These symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life (Annual report of the Chief Medical Officer 2014, Chapter 9, Psychosocial risk factors and the menopause: the impact of the menopause on personal and working life). At work, they can cause embarrassment, diminish confidence and can be stressful to deal with. The menopause may be compounded by the development of other health conditions, as well as coinciding with caring responsibilities for ageing parents and relatives. Some women may also still have children living at home ([http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/Work\\_and\\_the\\_Menopause-A\\_Guide\\_for\\_Managers.pdf](http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/Work_and_the_Menopause-A_Guide_for_Managers.pdf)).

There is good reason to consider the needs of this group of workers. In 2016, the employment rate for women in the UK of nearly 70% was among the highest since records began in 1971. Over the last four years the number of women over the age of 50 has also increased: a trend predicted to continue (ONS labour market statistics Jan-Mar 2014 and ONS Labour Market Statistics 2016). Employers have responsibilities for the health and safety of all their employees, but there are also clear business reasons for proactively managing an age-diverse workforce. Some employers have been slow to recognise that women of menopausal age may need specific considerations (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461>) and many employers do not yet have clear processes to support women coping with menopausal symptoms. These practical guidelines aim to help women experiencing troublesome menopausal symptoms, and to support them and their colleagues and managers in tackling the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms.

### **3. What are the symptoms of menopause?**

Menopause can cause a range of physical, psychological and emotional symptoms. Not all women will experience the same symptoms, but the most common are:

- Hot flushes affecting the face and neck
- Night sweats
- Weight gain
- General irritability
- Heavier and more irregular periods
- Headaches

Women may also experience other symptoms such as:

- Short-term memory loss
- Need to urinate frequently
- Aches and pains
- Mood swings
- Dry skin and eyes
- Dizziness
- Tiredness / difficulty sleeping
- Lack of energy
- Depression and / or anxiety

Women will also experience physical changes to their bodies particularly in their reproductive organs. Many symptoms and physical changes to women's bodies after menopause result from the loss of oestrogen. After the menopause women may be more prone to heart attacks and strokes, acceleration of loss of bone bulk and osteoporosis and bladder trouble.

### **4. Guidance for managers / employers**

The majority of women are unwilling to disclose menopause-related health problems to their line manager, who may be male or younger than them.

This video provides a helpful guide for managers about supporting employees experiencing the menopause:

[Guide for Managers Video](#)

Therefore, regular, informal conversations between manager and employee may enable discussion of changes in health, including issues relating to the menopause. It may be valuable simply to acknowledge this is a normal stage of life and that adjustments can easily be made. Such conversations can identify support at work that can help women remain fully productive and encourage them to discuss any relevant health concerns with their GP. Employees should be able to expect respectful behaviours at work including those that relate to their gender and age. However, employers need to recognise that some women may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience of the menopause with their manager and an occupational health professional can be very useful.

There are recommendations about working conditions for menopausal women produced by the European Menopause and Andropause Society (EMAS). These are adapted below:

- Facilitate discussion about troublesome symptoms. Employers can help by communicating that health-related problems such as those experienced during the menopause are normal.
- Review control of workplace temperature and ventilation and see how they might be adapted to meet the needs of individuals. This might include having a desktop fan in an office, or locating a workstation near an opening window or away from a heat source.
- Consider flexible working hours or shift changes. If sleep is disturbed, later start times might be helpful.
- Provide access to cold drinking water in all work situations, including off site venues.
- Ensure access to wash room facilities and toilets, including when travelling or working in temporary locations.
- Assessing how work is allocated and whether the employee is affected at particular points of the day.
- Agreed protected time to discuss work issues to help with loss of confidence.
- Considering additional rest breaks.

Additional considerations and adjustments may be required for specific occupations or locations. For example:

- Where uniforms are worn, flexibility is helpful. This could include wearing uniform of lightweight fabric, providing additional sets of uniform as well as the provision of changing facilities during the shift if required.
- Where work requires constant standing or prolonged sitting, having access to a rest room (e.g. to sit during work breaks) would be helpful, as would space to move about for those women in sedentary roles.
- In customer-focused or public-facing roles, it may help to have identified a quiet space for a short break so as to manage a severe hot flush.

Where adjustments are agreed, they must be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure they are having the required impact.

Severe menopausal symptoms and their consequences may combine to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day to day activities – potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010. When advised that symptoms could be considered as a disability, such as following Occupational Health

advice, reasonable adjustments should be considered for example triggers for absence managements.

## **5. Guidance for employees experiencing the menopause**

This video provides a helpful guide for employees who are experiencing the menopause:

[Guide for Employees Video](#)

For women who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and their capacity to work:

- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at the end of this guidance).
- See your GP for advice on available treatment options.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager you feel comfortable talking to.
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- Ask for a referral to the Trust's occupational health service to discuss support and possible work adjustments.
- If those you work with are supportive, this can make a big difference. Talk about your symptoms and solutions with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing symptoms, use humour to deflect embarrassment, and work out your preferred coping strategies and working patterns.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks) especially before presentations or meetings.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and other potentially helpful techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy, as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as weight reduction, smoking cessation and exercise.

Severe menopausal symptoms and their consequences may combine to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day to day activities – potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

## **6. Guidance for employees whose colleagues may be experiencing the menopause**

If a colleague is experiencing the menopause you can help by:

- Not making assumptions about their symptoms and the impact they are having
- Talking about the menopause – it can help reduce symptoms
- Keep an open mind and be flexible
- Consider what adjustments can be made to the working environment that may support your colleague
- Be mindful of the possible symptoms and be supportive

## **7. Trust Resources and Support**

- Occupational Health – ask your manager for a referral
- Insight Wellbeing at Work
- Your line manager or a manager you feel comfortable talking to

- Human Resources
- Trade Union representatives
- Women's Health page on the Trust Intranet: <http://intranet/womens-health/>
- Trust Policies that may be helpful to consider:
  - Sickness Absence
  - Annual Leave
  - Employment Break
  - Flexible Working
  - Retirement

## 8. External Resources and Support

- NHS – [www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)
- Menopause Matters - <http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- The Daisy Network – <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>
- LiveBetterWith – [https://menopause.livebetterwith.com/?mc\\_cid=4e9b63864a&mc\\_eid=8cc2fee500](https://menopause.livebetterwith.com/?mc_cid=4e9b63864a&mc_eid=8cc2fee500)
- Henpicked – <https://henpicked.net/>
- BBC – <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cxwvx729dx2t/menopause>
- CIPD – <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause>
- Healthtalk.org – <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/late-life/menopause/topics>
- Women's Health Concerns – <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/focus-series/menopause/>
- The Menopause Exchange – <http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/>
- NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management – <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>