

The Menopause at Work

Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats

- Look at ways to cool the working environment, for example provide a fan, move a desk close to a window or adjust the air conditioning.
- Provide easy access to cold drinking water and washrooms.
- Adapt uniforms to improve comfort.
- Limit the time wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks.
- Pause to have a cold drink every hour when wearing PPE.

Heavy or irregular periods

- Provide easy access to washroom and toilet facilities.
- Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet.
- Allow someone to temporarily work from home if they have very heavy bleeding.
- Make sanitary products available in washrooms.
- Make it easy to request extra uniforms if needed.

Headaches and fatigue

- Consider a temporary adjustment to someone's work duties.
- Provide a quiet area to work.
- Provide access to a rest room.
- Offer easy access to drinking water.
- Allow regular breaks and opportunities to take medication.

Muscular aches, and bone and joint pain

- Make any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules.
- Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps.

Psychological issues (for example loss of confidence, poor concentration, anxiety, and so on)

- Encourage employees to discuss concerns at one-to-one meetings with you and/or occupational health.
- Discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
- Address work-related stress by carrying out a stress risk assessment recommended by the HSE.
- Signpost to the Trust's employee assistance programme services.
- Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the office or work area, such as a well-being champion.
- Allow time away from others when needed, to have some quiet time or undertake relaxation or mindfulness activities.
- Provide access to a quiet space to work or the opportunity to work from home.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.
- Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their GP, if they haven't already.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help people develop new techniques to tackle stress and manage anxiety. Physical symptoms such as hot flushes and trouble sleeping can also be helped by CBT – An employee can discuss this possibility with their GP.



Helping you retain valuable talent by supporting women through the menopause

If you are a line manager, chances are you'll employ or manage at least one woman. And most women will experience menopausal symptoms at some stage during their career. It's a natural stage of life experienced by half of the workforce at some point, and yet it's a taboo. With that being said, how confident do you think a member of your team would feel to talk to you about the menopause?

Why this matters to ELFT

ELFT is working towards improving the experience of staff - we believe work can and should be a force for good.

Someone experiencing menopausal symptoms should be enabled to continue performing and contributing to their full potential.

Often a few simple changes to someone's working environment or even just talking about the menopause openly can reduce the impact of someone's symptoms.

What every manager and employer needs to know about the menopause

Every manager should know what the menopause is, when it happens and how it can affect people.

What is it?

It's a natural stage of life when a woman's oestrogen levels decline and she 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.

What to expect from this guide

This guide will help you to:

- Be confident about your role in managing and supporting colleagues with menopausal symptoms
- Understand and reduce the barriers that could potentially prevent a colleague going through the menopause transition from performing and/or developing to their full potential.
- Identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support team members and help them thrive at work
- Foster an inclusive working environment in which everyone is treated fairly.

When does it happen?

The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55.

The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause, when a woman's hormone balance starts to change. For some women this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late forties.

The average age for a woman to undergo the menopause in the UK is 51, but around 1 in 100 experience it before the age of 40. This is known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), or 'premature menopause'. Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can also be as a result of surgery (for example hysterectomy, oophorectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy).

What are the symptoms?

The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of menopausal women experience symptoms,

but everyone is different. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for women as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

Some of the most typical symptoms of the menopause include:

- Psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- Hot flushes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- Sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- Night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night)
- Irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy
- Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- Skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- Reduced sex drive.

What's your role as a manager?

You 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.

The role of line managers in supporting women experiencing menopause transition is crucial. 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.

Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee health and well-being, spotting early signs of ill health or distress, and initiating early intervention.

Line managers are typically:

- The first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs a change or adjustment to their work or working hours, to enable them to perform to their full potential
- COVID-19 prompted rapid change in the way we work so supporting women to work from home if they can is now becoming the norm.
- Responsible for implementing the people management policies and practices that can help someone experiencing the menopause to feel supported, and to be effective in their role
- Responsible for managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill or because of their menopausal symptoms, as well as supporting an effective return to work.

The level of trust you build with employees will determine the extent to which female colleagues are able to discuss menopausal symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work.

If there are regular and informal one-to-ones between a manager and employee, this can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause.

TOP TIP

- Simple changes to your management style can make a world of difference
- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your team can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause.
- Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture, and encourage someone to raise any concerns.
- Don't make assumptions – everyone is different, so take your lead from the individual.



Confidentiality!

If someone tells you about their health condition, including menopausal symptoms, this should be treated as confidential. If they want information about their condition to be shared, consent must be explicit. You should discuss with them who will be told and by whom, as well as the information they do or don't want shared with colleagues.

The more supportive and knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms, the less likely that women will feel embarrassed to approach you and discuss how the menopause is affecting their health and their work. Awareness about the symptoms and range of support available in the organisation will also increase your own confidence in discussing the issue.

How to approach a sensitive conversation

It's important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issue. But try not to worry too much – being over-sensitive will stop you from doing or saying anything. Review the below checklist before approaching a sensitive conversation and you won't go far wrong.

TOP TIP

- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- Speak calmly.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Listen actively and carefully.
- Encourage the employee to talk.
- Give the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.

While any health condition can understandably be a sensitive and personal issue for many, some of the symptoms associated with the menopause can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate, even visible, way. It's therefore understandable why many women could feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss the impact of their symptoms. However, most people would prefer a concerned and genuine enquiry about how they are as opposed to silence.

Don't make assumptions about someone's health condition or ask them a direct question as to whether they have menopause symptoms. If you have concerns about someone's well-being or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' or 'I've noticed you've been arriving late recently, and I wondered if you're okay?' It's up to the individual to

disclose any particular symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.

Adjustment should always be tailored to an individual's specific needs.

Carry out a risk assessment

Fulfilling your legal responsibility for health and safety will help ensure an employee's symptoms are not being made worse by their job.

Employers have a legal duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees. Risk assessments should consider the specific needs of menopausal women and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. Often, making simple changes to the working environment can help to alleviate the impact of some symptoms.

TOP TIP

A risk assessment should look at issues such as:

- Temperature and ventilation
- Access to toilet facilities and access to cold water.
- Check out the Health and Safety Executive's tools and templates for carrying out risk assessments.
- The Trust also has tools to help you carry out a stress risk assessment, these can be found on the intranet.

Discuss appropriate adjustments

Simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance.

Certain aspects of a job or the workplace can represent a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. As a manager, you have a responsibility to consider and put in place reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible, so that women experiencing symptoms can carry on performing in their role.

Start by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the individual concerned, to identify the specific issues that person is experiencing. Consider involving relevant experts where appropriate, such as an occupational health practitioner, to help identify appropriate adjustments that could be put in place to help ease the impact of their symptoms on their work. Record any specific needs (and agreed adjustments) and review these at least annually. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so make sure you have regular discussions with the person concerned to ensure that the support still meets their needs.



TOP TIP

How to help someone with menopause symptoms to carry on doing their job:

- Keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about someone's condition or how it may be affecting their ability to do their job.
- Treat every employee as an individual, because menopause symptoms can vary a lot from person to person.
- Adjustments can be physical, such as providing a fan, but they can also involve changes such as offering a more flexible working arrangement.
- Remember that menopause symptoms can fluctuate, so take a flexible approach and check in regularly with the individual.

What kind of adjustments could help?

Examples of adjustments that could be made to support women experiencing menopausal symptoms include:

- Providing private areas for women to rest, recover or make a telephone call to access personal or professional support.
- Ensuring working time arrangements are flexible enough to meet the needs of menopausal women. For example, they may also need more breaks during the day, or may need to leave work suddenly if their symptoms become severe.
- Facilitating a comfortable working environment wherever possible – including adequate drinking water supplies, temperature-controlled areas, and access to toilets and showers or washing facilities.

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's and the employee's) 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.

TOP TIP

How to manage health issues and 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.



Practical tips for supporting the menopause transition

The menopause affects people in different ways, but there are some practical steps you can take to support women experiencing the menopause at work, and help to minimise some of the most common symptoms.

Sleep disruption and/or night sweats

- Recognise someone may take more short-term absence if they've had a difficult night.
- Consider a change to shift patterns or the ability to swap shifts on a temporary basis.
- Offer a flexible working arrangement, for example a later start and finish time.
- Allow someone to work from home on an ad hoc basis if they've had a rough night.