

Supporting our people through the menopause

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Introduction

Here at Orkney Islands Council, we want to support our colleagues' wellbeing at every stage in life. We know that the changing face of the UK workforce means that between 75% - 80% of people going through the menopause are in work. Whilst not every person will notice menopausal symptoms, many will be working through the perimenopause and menopause and managing the symptoms at work.

Six out of every 10 people [experiencing menopausal symptoms](#) say it has a negative impact on their work. With the right support, no-one needs to press pause, struggle through or leave their careers during this natural transition. We know that many people feel uncomfortable talking about the perimenopause and menopause, which means that some will suffer in silence whilst experiencing a wide range of symptoms that can affect their physical and mental health.

Looking after our people and supporting them is a priority. We need to ensure that Orkney Islands Council is the best possible place to work where we can all fulfil our potential. This policy and associated guidance are key to the delivery of The People Plan and align to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda, including work to reduce the pay gap and occupational segregation within our organisation.

Good menopause care has both direct and indirect impacts on retaining our workforce. It can impact productivity, absenteeism and ensures that our people get the support they need which is an important part of retaining experienced, talented and skilled staff.

The aims of this policy are:

- To encourage us to talk more about the perimenopause and menopause.
- For those experiencing symptoms to feel you can ask for the support you need.
- For managers to have the knowledge and confidence to know what to do if you need to provide support to a team member through this time.
- To give all colleagues information about where to access further guidance and support.

We are committed to ensuring the health and wellbeing of all employees and that we are all treated fairly and with dignity and respect at work.

We are committed to taking all reasonable steps to make sure that we:

- Listen to you if you tell us about your perimenopause or menopause symptoms.
- Keep information about your health confidential.
- Support you if you are experiencing menopausal symptoms, making reasonable adjustments where needed.
- Treat you with respect, not making judgements or assumptions about you based on your age or because you have told us that you are in menopause transition.
- Treat any issues of bullying and harassment in relation to health issues associated with the menopause seriously. See our Dignity at Work Policy for more information.

How menopause symptoms can impact work

The body can be affected by menopause in numerous ways. The perimenopause is the period when hormone levels begin to change, you may start to notice new physical and / or mental health symptoms but are still experiencing periods. The perimenopause can last for several years and typically affects people between the ages of 45 and 55 although the age can vary from person to person.

A person is described as in menopause when they have not had a period for one full calendar year or more. Menopause occurs when a person's ovaries no longer produce eggs and as a result the levels of three hormones, oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone, fall.

The average age for someone to undergo menopause transition is 51, but 1 in 100 people will experience it before the age of 40. This can be as a result of surgery, illness or treatment for other conditions such as chemotherapy, or it can be for no reason at all. Perimenopause can start as early as in your twenties or as late as your fifties. We won't make any assumptions about what you may or may not be experiencing based on your age.

The duration and severity of any symptoms will vary across individuals, with some likely to experience severe symptoms that impact their day-to-day activities. The impacts of these symptoms on self-confidence, mental health and relationships with others can affect life outside of work as well as in work. It is important for us all to be aware of these symptoms so that we can appreciate the full extent of how some of us experience the menopause and its impact on work.

Common symptoms include:

- Change in periods – irregular periods, lighter or heavier periods.
- Headaches and migraine that are worse than usual.
- Muscle aches and joint pains.
- Hot flushes – short, sudden feelings of heat or cold, usually in the face, neck and chest.
- Night sweats.
- Mood changes / swings.
- Difficulty sleeping which can make you feel tired and irritable during the day.
- Anxiety, depression, panic attacks and loss of confidence.
- Problems with memory or concentration (often referred to as brain fog).

The law and menopause

While menopause is not a specific protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010), in accordance with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), 'if an employee is disadvantaged and treated less favourably in any way because of their menopause

symptoms this could be viewed as discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, for example, age, disability, gender reassignment or sex’.

Disability and the menopause

People with a disability and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. For example the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the potential risk of osteoporosis. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the person’s impairment or health condition.

Transgender, non-binary and intersex employees and the menopause

We recognise and value the diversity of our employees and the importance of an inclusive culture. We are aware people of diverse gender expressions and identities experience menopause, and it is therefore not just an issue for female colleagues.

Transgender, non-binary and intersex employees may experience the menopause either due to age-related hormonal changes or hormone treatments and surgeries. It is important to acknowledge some trans, non-binary and intersex colleagues may not wish to disclose their trans or intersex status. It can therefore be particularly difficult for these employees to access support and / or ask for adjustments. Within each of these groups, people’s needs will be different and so it is crucial to listen to people on an individual basis and enable them to take the lead in their own conversations and required adjustments.

Supporting people experiencing symptoms of perimenopause or menopause transitions means understanding that not everyone experiences menopause in the same way. Like any other health condition, colleagues will have different symptoms and need different support at different times.

This policy isn’t about creating a one-size fits all approach, it is about highlighting all of the different ways that we can support you, so you can decide what works best for you.

Making reasonable adjustments

There might be reasonable adjustments we can make at work to help you manage your menopausal symptoms. There are likely to be temporary changes whilst you go through menopause transition.

Your manager may do a risk assessment to understand more about how your menopausal symptoms might affect you at work and the adjustments you need.

Wellness Action Plan

You can use a Wellness Action Plan to identify how your menopausal symptoms are impacting you at work and use this to discuss any changes you might need with your manager.

The reasonable adjustments we can make will depend on your circumstances, but the types of changes that might help could be:

- Changing your start time or other changes to your working hours if you are experiencing disturbed sleep
- Providing more breaks.
- Working from another location including from home.
- Making sure you have got access to cold water while you are working.
- Making sure you have got easy access to toilet facilities.
- Making sure the temperature is comfortable, providing a fan or access to fresh air.
- Adjusting your uniform requirements or providing more items of uniform.
- Giving you somewhere to store extra clothes or change clothes during the day.
- Giving you time off to attend medical appointments.

If you think you might need a change to your working pattern to help you manage your menopausal transition, talk to your manager about this when you are creating your [Wellness Action Plan](#). In some circumstances, this request may be considered as a reasonable adjustment rather than requiring an application through the Flexible Working Policy.

Your manager may suggest an occupational health referral. This is so that we can get more information about how your menopause symptoms are likely to affect you at work and what adjustments can be put in place to support you.

Implementation of existing Policies

The Council has a policy on Sickness Absence management which includes absence triggers based on duration or frequency of sickness absences. Absence that is specifically recorded as due to symptoms of the menopause will be excluded from assessing whether an employee has breached absence triggers.

It is acknowledged that menopausal symptoms may in some circumstances impact a person's performance at work, and therefore this should be taken into account when applying the Council's Disciplinary or Capability Policy.

Wellness Action Plan

Wellness Action Plans can be used to identify what helps you to manage your menopausal symptoms at work, what causes you to become unwell and the support you would like to receive to improve your wellbeing.

By creating a Wellness Action Plan, you can identify what works and what doesn't work for you in managing your menopausal transition. It can help identify what support you might need from your manager and what you can do to support your own health and wellbeing.

There are templates you can use to create your Wellness Action Plan; one for [hybrid working](#) and one for the [workplace](#). You can either do this on your own and then share it with your manager or discuss it with them to put it together. Once you have shared this with your manager, they will keep it confidential and won't share it with anyone else without your permission.

It is good to meet regularly with your line manager to discuss your Wellness Action Plan and how you feel things are going. You can use your usual one-to-one, or just ask them if you want a catch up.

Other sources of support

There are lots of charities and other support groups who offer information and support about the menopause. Here are some that you may find useful:

- Menopause Matters – www.menopausematters.co.uk – independent website providing information about symptoms and treatment options.
- Balance - <https://www.balance-menopause.com/> provides evidence-based information and knowledge about the perimenopause and menopause.
- Daisy Network – www.daisynetwork.org support for women experiencing early menopause.
- Women's Health Concern – www.womens-health-concern.org – the patient arm of the British Menopause Society.
- Gen-M – everything you need to know about the menopause all in one place [Gen M | The Very Best Of The Menopause | We've Got This.](#)
- Queer / LGBTQIA+ Menopause <https://www.queermenopause.com/>.

Glossary

Knowing how to talk about the menopause is important for both people experiencing menopausal symptoms and those who need to provide support to a team member or colleague during this time.

Having a shared understanding of the terms and terminology that are frequently used in discussions about the menopause is key to ensuring we are all clear on what we mean and helps to reduce any potential confusion or embarrassment.

You aren't expected to be an expert on the menopause. Having an awareness of the common terms used when discussing the menopause means that conversations are more likely to be supportive and better provide the right guidance and signposting where needed.

The table below provides a short guide to some of the terms and definitions that are used regarding the menopause.

Term	Definition
Early menopause	Menopause happening between the ages of 40 and up to 45.
Menopause	Menopause is when periods stop due to lower hormone levels. This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55 but for some it can be earlier or later. Family history, surgery and medical conditions can affect the age menopause occurs. Menopause is reached when there has not been a period for 12 consecutive months.
Perimenopause	The time leading up to menopause when ovulation cycles and periods can be irregular, continuing until 12 months after the final period. Perimenopause usually begins during the mid-40s, although it can start earlier and extends until 12 months after the final period.
Post menopause	This is the time after menopause (12 consecutive months without a period). Symptoms of menopause may continue and may require ongoing support.
Premature menopause	When menopause occurs under the age of 40, it is termed premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI)
Menopause transition	Refers to the stages: perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause.