

Supporting our people through the menopause

A guide for managers

January 2023

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Introduction

This guide supports our Supporting our people through the menopause policy and is designed to help you assist your team members who are experiencing the perimenopause or menopause. It includes information about the internal and external support available and offers practical advice on what you can do to assist colleagues going through the menopause.

What to expect from this guide.

This guide aims to help you to:

- Be confident about your role in managing and supporting people with menopausal symptoms.
- Understand and reduce the barriers that could potentially prevent a team member 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.

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

The menopause is a natural stage of life when a person's oestrogen levels decline and they stop having periods. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a transition rather than a one-off event.

The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55. The perimenopause is the phase leading up to the menopause when a person's hormone balance starts to change. For some, this can start as early as their twenties and for others, as late as their forties.

Some people will experience relatively few symptoms, but many people will experience several symptoms, and they may have a big impact on their lives both inside and outside of work.

There is often still a stigma around the menopause and consequently people going through it will often try to hide their symptoms or be uncomfortable talking about them. We want everyone to understand what menopause is and to be able to talk about it openly, without fear or embarrassment and so it is an important issue for us all, not just those experiencing the symptoms of it.

Your role as a people 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 condition.

The role of managers in supporting people experiencing menopause transition is crucial. Effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms that are impacting on their work will help you to retain valuable skills and talent and reduce sickness absence.

Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee health and wellbeing, spotting early signs of ill health and initiating early intervention.

As a people manager you are typically:

- The first point of contact if a team member 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.
- 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 team members will determine the extent to which they are able to discuss topics such as menopausal symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work.

If there are regular and informal one-to-ones between you and your team members, this can provide an opportunity for a conversation about any changes to their health situation, including the menopause.

It is important to understand that each person's situation is unique, and their experience and symptoms of the menopause will differ. Asking team members how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open culture and encourage someone to raise any concerns.

As a manager you can start by making yourself familiar with the Supporting our people through the menopause policy. Remember that many people going through the menopause may choose not to tell their managers about their symptoms and may be reluctant to disclose the real reason for any sickness absence. Sometimes performance and behaviour may change without any clear explanation. If you have concerns about a team member's wellbeing or performance, ask general questions such as 'How are you?' or 'I have noticed that you have been late to work recently, and I wondered if you are ok?'.

The menopause is not a one-off event in someone's life and symptoms last an average of four years, although for some people, can last much longer. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. It is important to keep up regular conversations with your team members.

Approaching a sensitive conversation

Menopause can affect people's confidence and it can be really daunting talking to someone who has no knowledge of the menopause, so the more open, supportive and knowledgeable you are, the less embarrassed they are likely to be to talk about how the menopause is affecting their health and work.

Awareness about the symptoms and range of support available in the organisation will increase your own confidence in discussing the issue.

Approach conversations with empathy and try not to be embarrassed. It is important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issues. Here are some tips to consider:

- Make sure you are in a private space and avoid interruptions.
- Allow enough time.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Actively listen and give team members space to open up.
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Focus on the person and not the issue.
- Ensure team members know they can trust you.

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.

You may find the [Wellness Action Plan](#) a useful tool to help you think about what kind of questions to ask team members when you are speaking to them about the menopause.

Practical things you can do to help.

Often, a few changes to a team member's work environment can make a big difference and a discussion with them should be useful in identifying what would help. The following table is not an exhaustive list but aims to provide some examples of adjustments which may be helpful for varying symptoms of the menopause.

Symptom	Possible adjustments
Psychological symptoms: • Memory difficulties • Difficulty concentrating	• Encourage team members to discuss concerns with you. • Carry out a wellness action plan. • Reduce demands if workload is identified as an issue. Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed or consider substituting with different tasks. • Offer alternative methods of communicating tasks and planning of work to assist memory. • Discuss whether an occupational health referral would be useful.
Psychological symptoms: • Anxiety • Depression • Panic attached • Loss of confidence • Mood changes	• Carry out a wellness action plan. • Support Flexible Working where possible. • Raise general awareness of issues around the menopause within the team so colleagues are more likely to be supportive (do not disclose confidential information unless you have explicit consent to do so). • Signpost internally to wellbeing resources.
Fatigue	• Consider temporary adjustments to shift patterns or hours when doing the rota, particularly if fatigue is related to sleep disturbance. • Reduce physical tasks if possible. • Ensure regular breaks.
Daytime sweats, hot flushes	• Ensure easy access to cold drinking water and toilet facilities. • Look at ways to cool the working environment e.g. provide fans at workstations if possible and open windows. • Allow time out and access to fresh air. • Ability to order more uniform to be able to change more frequently if needed. • Limit the time wearing PPE where possible.
Night-time sweats and hot flushes Insomnia or sleep disturbance	• Consider temporary adjustments to shift patterns or hours when doing the rota. • Support flexible working where possible.
Irregular and / or heavy periods	• Ensure easy access to toilet facilities. • Allow for enough breaks to use the facilities. • Ensure cover is available so team members can leave their post if needed. • Make it easy to request extra uniform if needed.
Skin irritation, dryness or itching	• Ensure comfortable working temperature.

Symptom	Possible adjustments
	• Provide alternative PPE if possible.
Muscular aches and bone and joint pain	• Undertake a risk assessment and keep it under review. • Consider providing alternative tasks.
Dry eyes	• Carry out a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment. • Allow extra breaks from screen-based work.

In some instances, it can be useful to seek occupational health advice to consider what adjustments could support a team member.

Legal considerations

Treating team members going through the menopause in the wrong way can increase the risk of claims of victimisation, harassment, direct discrimination and indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex, age and / or disability.

Where a team member is experiencing severe symptoms of the menopause, such that their ability to perform day-to-day activities is substantially impacted, this may amount to a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act. This means that we have a legal duty to make all reasonable adjustments for the team member.

It is really important for us to treat the menopause sensitively and take it seriously.

Things to avoid:

- Inappropriate comments about people of a certain age and hot flushes could be harassment on the grounds of age, sex and disability.
- Issuing a performance warning to a team member where the reason for the performance issues is connected to experiencing menopausal symptoms could be indirect sex, age and / or disability discrimination.
- Issuing an absence warning to a colleague whose absence is connected to menopause symptoms could be indirect age, sex and / or disability discrimination.
- Failing to enable a menopausal team member experiencing heavy periods to take additional toilet breaks could be disability discrimination, and also possible indirect age and sex discrimination.

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 Policies.

Useful resources

As well as a variety of internal resources referred to in this guide and the associated policy, there are a number of links below that may be useful to consider and to signpost colleagues to.

- NHS guidance on menopause <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/late-years-around-50-years-and-over/menopause-and-post-menopause-health/menopause>
- NHS guidance on early menopause <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/late-years-around-50-years-and-over/menopause-and-post-menopause-health/early-and-premature-menopause/>
- Henpicked, Menopause in the Workplace www.henpicked.net
- British Menopause Society www.thebms.org.uk
- Menopause cafes <https://www.menopausecafe.net/>
- Menopause Matters <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- The Daisy Network <https://www.daisynetwork.org/>
- Queer / LGBTQIA+ Menopause <https://www.queermenopause.com/>
- FREE Menopause Experts Training [Browse All Menopause Experts Training](#)