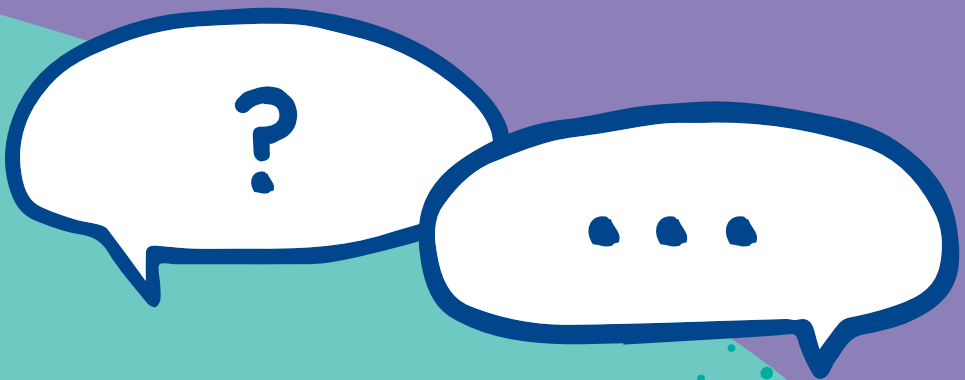


The Menopause at Work

A Guide for Managers



What is the menopause?

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. If you would like more information on the menopause, there is a menopause awareness Moodle course available to all staff.

Helping you retain valuable talent by supporting women through the menopause

If you are a line manager, chances are you'll 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 75% 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

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 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 which could potentially prevent a colleague who is going through the menopause from developing 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 45 and 55 years of age. 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. 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)
- Headaches/migraines
- 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 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 wellbeing, 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
- 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 your team 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 Tips

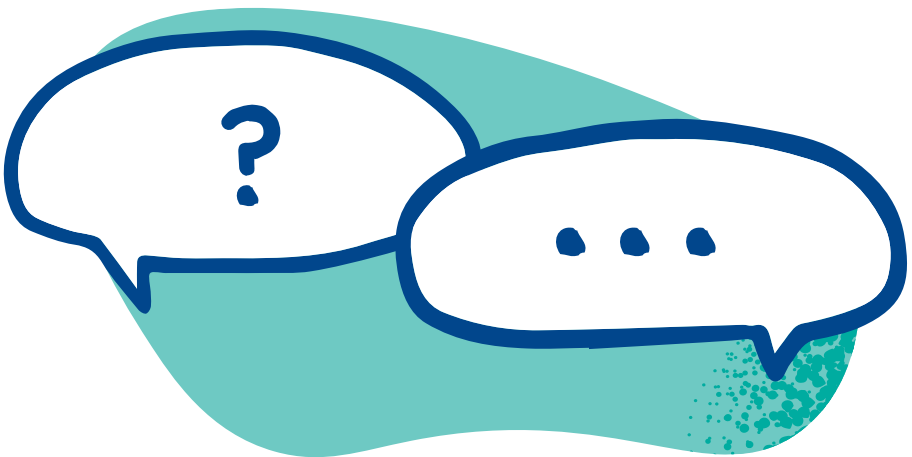
- Simple changes to your management style can make a world of difference such as:
- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your 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.

It's good to talk!

The easier you make it for someone to open up to you, the easier it will be to identify the support they need. Menopause can affect people's confidence and it can be very daunting talking to someone who has no knowledge/awareness of the menopause.

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 Tips:

- 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 wellbeing 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 that they may be experiencing.

Menopause passport

The menopause passport has been designed to give staff an opportunity to discuss how the menopause is impacting them at work. It also gives managers an opportunity to ask questions and for the correct support and adjustments to be put in place.

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.

Support that is available

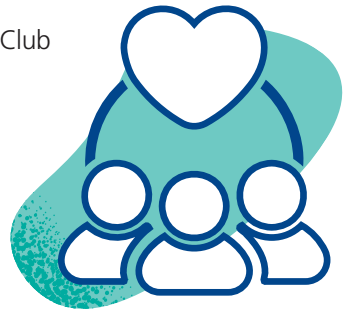
- Monthly peer-to-peer support group called M Club
- Menopause champions
- Record menopause on ESR
- Wellbeing officers
- Staff at wellbeing Hubs.

Find out more – email:

womensnetwork@uhb.nhs.uk

mclub3@uhb.nhs.uk

inclusion@uhb.nhs.uk



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 and simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help to reduce these barriers. 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 Tips

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 where possible for those affected by hot flushes – including looking at ways to cool the working environment for staff affected, for example, fans at workstations where appropriate; move desks to near windows/open windows and adjust air conditioning, temperature-controlled areas. Consider alternative/spare Trust uniforms.

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.

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 specific, measurable, achievable, realistic targets within a given time frame (SMART)

Practical tips for supporting the menopause transition

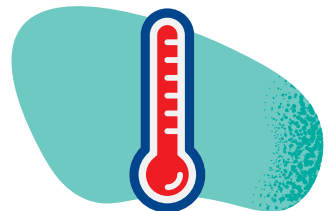
The menopause affects people in different ways, but there are some practical steps you can take to support women experiencing the menopause at work, and help to minimise some of the most common symptoms.

Sleep disruption and/or night sweats

- Recognise the signs of someone who is having difficult nights like an increase in their short-term absences.
- 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.
- If possible allow someone to work from home on an ad hoc basis if they've had a rough night.

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 toilet facilities
- Take account of peripatetic workers' schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day
- Consider alternatives to hosiery or Trust uniforms if available
- 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
- Consider a temporary adjustment to someone's work duties





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 it easy to request extra uniforms if needed

Headaches/migraines and fatigue

- 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, contact Ergonomics
- Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps.

Unable to sleep

- Consider temporary adjustment of work patterns to accommodate any difficulties.
- Consider flexible working options.
- Consider Trust Health and Wellbeing initiatives available. Search 'wellbeing' on the HR page on the intranet for more information or type 'UHB wellbeing' into any search engine.

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

- Encourage employees to discuss concerns at one-to-one meetings with you and/or occupational health.
- Discuss reasonable adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
- Provide access to counselling services if required.
- Consider Trust Health and Wellbeing initiatives available, such as mindfulness or stress management.
- Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the office or work area, such as a wellbeing officer.
- Consider Trust Health and wellbeing initiatives available, such as mindfulness or stress management.
- Provide access to a quiet space to work or the opportunity to work from home if possible.
- 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.

Consider flexible working options and the various health and wellbeing initiatives available within the Trust.

