



Menopause guidance for managers and staff



Health & well-being



Introduction

This guidance is intended to help managers support staff who may be experiencing the symptoms of menopause and perimenopause. This guidance will support them to signpost staff towards help (both from within the organisation and outside of the organisation) in dealing with and managing the symptoms, both physical and emotional.

This guidance is also intended to support members of our workforce who are experiencing the symptoms of menopause and perimenopause, by signposting them to various sources of support.

The aim in developing this menopause guidance is to create an environment where staff can talk about menopause openly, to provide information to people who are experiencing symptoms at work, and to guide managers on appropriate support for their staff.

We recognise that the majority of people who experience the menopause are cisgender women (women who were assigned female at birth). However, we wish to be inclusive of those who are not women but may still experience symptoms of menopause, including transgender men, non-binary and intersex people, and so this guidance is also intended to support those groups of people. Throughout this document therefore, the word 'people' refers to 'women, and other people with ovaries'.

This guide is not intended to offer clinical advice, and individuals are encouraged to seek advice from their GP if they have concerns about any of their symptoms.

Workforce context

We know that around 78% of our workforce is female, and of that, 28% are in the age bracket whereby they may be experiencing menopausal symptoms. So there are approximately 1000 people who may be affected by menopausal symptoms at any one time. (Figures as at October 2020)

Nationally, 1 in 10 women consider leaving work due to menopause and there are 280m less productive work days per year in the UK. (www.nuffieldhealth.com)

Additionally, people in this age bracket are often part of the 'sandwich generation' balancing the pressures of looking after elderly parents, as well as supporting children through education and beyond. This can often lead to an increase in stress outside of work, which inevitably impacts upon work life and performance.

What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural stage in most women's lives, as well as other people with ovaries, during which they stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. Not everyone will experience significant symptoms, but for those who do, the effect can often be debilitating.

Perimenopause begins several years before menopause. People may start to experience menopausal symptoms during the final two years of perimenopause.

The menopause usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although menopausal symptoms can occasionally begin before the age of 40. Very occasionally people will experience the menopause before the age of 40.

Whilst menopause is generally a natural process involving gradual change, it can be sudden and acute following medical or surgical intervention (e.g. surgical hysterectomy, chemotherapy or radiotherapy).

What are the symptoms of menopause?

The CIPD tell us that *“some women go through the menopause with little impact on their daily life. But others experience symptoms that can last for several years and have a negative impact on their performance and attendance at work. A bad night’s sleep can affect concentration, while heavy periods or hot flushes can be physically distressing and embarrassing. The psychological effects can also impact relationships at work. For some, the symptoms are so severe that women are forced to leave their job altogether”*

While symptoms vary greatly, they commonly include (but are not limited to):

- hot flushes
- night sweats/ sleep disturbance
- anxiety / low mood/ depression
- headaches
- recurrent urinary tract infections
- heavy/ irregular periods

For more information on these symptoms, please see **Appendix 1**.

Each of these symptoms can affect an employee’s comfort and performance at work, and managers are urged to support people who are experiencing some or all of these symptoms compassionately.

What support is available?

Line managers – People are encouraged to inform their line manager that they experiencing menopausal symptoms at an early stage to ensure that **symptoms are treated as an ongoing health issue rather than individual instances of ill health**. Early notification will also help line managers to determine the most appropriate way in which to support their team member’s individual needs.

([Policy PP11](#), Supporting and Managing Sickness Absence may be helpful at this point).

People who do not wish to discuss this matter with their line manager in the first instance may find it helpful to speak to a trusted colleague, another manager, or a member of the Occupational Health Team.

Menopause Support Group – This is a peer support group of people who have experienced or are experiencing symptoms of the menopause. The group meets in person or virtually to offer a friendly community which provides a safe space to discuss the physical and emotional aspects of going through the menopause. The group also offers support to the partners of people who are experiencing menopause.

To join the group, e-mail kerry.gowland@nhs.net

Occupational Health / Counselling – Some people find that discussing the emotional impact of menopause with a professional can help them to discover coping strategies. Click [here](#) to find out how to access counselling.

GP – Your GP can offer a range of support to help with the physical and emotional aspects of the menopause.

On-line resources – there are a range of web pages and social media accounts that are dedicated to improving knowledge around menopause, as well as raising awareness. Quite often, being part of a group of people who are experiencing similar symptoms can be reassuring – to know that you are not alone, and that help is available.

Reasonable adjustments and practical support

Sometimes, simple practical adjustments and support can improve the quality of work life for someone who is experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Fatigue / Sleep disturbance

- Allowing flexibility for the individual, who may be suffering from fatigue during the day. Can adjustments be made to the working pattern to accommodate later starts for example?

Hot flushes / Night Sweats

- Ensuring the working environment is a reasonable temperature and is well-ventilated
- Reviewing seating plans (if relevant) to allow the individual to sit near a window
- Allowing flexibility within uniform provision – can items/ layers be removed? Could an additional uniform be provided in order for it to be changed throughout the day if needed?
- Provide access to cold water supplies
- Making temporary adjustments to duties - hot flushes can be difficult to cope with when undertaking high visibility work such as formal meetings/ presentations.
- Providing easy access to washing/ shower facilities

Psychological problems

- Agreeing adjustments described above wherever possible
- Encouraging open discussion at 1:1 meetings with the line manager or Occupational Health
- Addressing the problems associated with stress using the Trust's stress risk assessment
- Encouraging the individual to join the Menopause Peer Support Group
- Referring to (or encouraging the individual to) counselling via Occupational Health

Urinary tract infections/ Urogenital Problems/ Heavy and irregular periods

- Allowing more frequent toilet breaks
- Providing easy access to drinking water
- Allowing water bottles to be used in the work area

It should be noted that *"the menopause is...an equalities issue; under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty not to discriminate and employees should be treated with respect in terms of their age and gender. As the menopause is a strictly female condition, any detrimental treatment of a woman related to the menopause could represent direct or indirect sex discrimination"* CIPD, 2020.

What do people who have experienced the menopause tell us about their experience?

I often didn't recognise myself in the mirror and at times felt alone and invisible.
I had great support from family, a great manager and work colleagues who helped me realise I was not alone in this journey and it's ok to not be ok!!

Meeting some wonderful people at the menopause support group who could relate to each other, made me feel that what I was going through was normal and that I wasn't alone...and that there's light at the end of the tunnel!

Don't be afraid to say that you are having a bad day!

I think the hardest part of this experience was the fact that I felt like I wasn't in control of anything and felt like I was spiralling down a long path with no end. I was also angry that this was happening to me - my own body was making me feel this way.

How the menopause can affect different groups of people

The menopause can affect different groups of people in different ways. It's important to consider this when managers are supporting their team members with issues surrounding the menopause. [Our staff networks are dedicated to supporting all members of staff to have a voice within the organisation, and provide peer support and guidance. Click on the images below to visit their intranet pages.]

People with existing Health Conditions and Disabilities

Many people report that the menopause seems to make existing health conditions worse. Pre-existing conditions such as chronic backache, depression, anxiety, sleep problems, or irritability may worsen menopausal symptoms. If someone has an existing condition that is worsened by the menopause, they may need more time off for medical appointments or treatment for that condition and it may be necessary to review any reasonable adjustments that were previously in place.



Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people

People with diverse cultural backgrounds may have more difficulty in communicating symptoms or difficulties they are experiencing, as many cultures do not have a term to recognise the menopause. This may make it more difficult for them to ask for help or adjustments at work.



Racism at work can increase work related stress which may worsen some menopausal symptoms.

Transgender people

Transgender men (who were assigned female at birth) and some non-binary people will experience a natural menopause if their ovaries remain in place and no hormone therapy is given. Transgender men will also experience menopausal symptoms if the ovaries and uterus are surgically removed (this may happen at an earlier age than commonly happens with a natural menopause).



Transgender women (who were assigned male at birth) and some non-binary people undertaking hormone therapy will usually remain on this for life and should generally experience limited menopausal-like symptoms, unless hormone therapy is interrupted, or hormone levels are unstable, for example when they are required to stop hormone therapy for several weeks before and after any type of major surgery.

Some transgender people may not wish to disclose their transgender status and as a result, may be reluctant to discuss menopausal symptoms if doing so would disclose their status.

Negative and discriminatory attitudes may also make it more difficult to disclose difficulties or ask for adjustments.

LGBT+ people

Women in same sex relationships may have a partner who is going through the menopause at the same time. While this can be positive in terms of increased mutual understanding and support at home, sometimes, if both partners are experiencing symptoms such as sleep disturbance or night sweats, this may increase tiredness and fatigue for both partners.



Many people report that stress can impact on menopausal symptoms. If someone is experiencing homophobia at the same time as symptoms of menopause, this can also increase stress which may exacerbate some symptoms.

Men

Men can be indirectly affected by the menopause for example if their partner is experiencing insomnia and night sweats, men may also experience disrupted sleep and fatigue. In some cases, people can experience relationship problems or difficulties at home at this time. These issues can have an impact on men in the workplace.



Useful websites and documents

- NHS Wales Menopause Policy <https://www.nhsconfed.org/-/media/Confederation/Files/Wales-Confed/Wales-Employers/FINAL-NHS-Wales-Menopause-Policy-19-Dec-18.pdf>
- The NHS Staff Council - Health, Safety and Well-being Partnership Group "Menopause at Work 2020" <https://www.nhsemployers.org/-/media/Employers/Publications/Health-and-wellbeing/HSWPG-menopause-at-work-March-2020-FINAL.pdf>
- CIPD "The menopause at work: guidance for people professionals" https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause/people-professionals-guidance?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=menopauseatwork&utm_content=MAW_PPC_BMM&gclid=EAlaIqObChMI2O6yldmi7AIVWuztCh0ztAobEAAAYASAAEgLfefD_BwE
- British Menopause Society <https://thebms.org.uk/publications/tools-for-clinicians/>

- Daisy Network (Charity network for women with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency) <https://www.daisynetwork.org/health-professionals/management/>
- NICE Guidelines – Menopause: diagnosis and management <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
- PositivePause <https://www.positivepause.co.uk/symptoms>
- Women 's Health Concern (Patient arm of BMS) <https://www.women-s-health-concern.org/>
- <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/one-in-four-with-menopause-symptoms-concerned-about-ability-to-cope-with-life>

For support with mental health concerns, please visit the Mental Well-being pages on Staff Zone for details of internal support and further external support agencies

<http://staffzone.xghnt.nhs.uk/health-and-well-being/mental-well-being.php>

Symptoms of menopause

(Please note, this list is not exhaustive)

Hot flushes	<p>Most people will experience hot flushes when going through the menopause. They're often described as a sudden feeling of heat that seems to come from nowhere and spreads throughout the body.</p> <p>You might also experience sweating, palpitations and flushing of the face.</p> <p>Some people only have occasional hot flushes that do not really bother them, while others can have many a day and find them uncomfortable, disruptive and embarrassing.</p> <p>Hot flushes can start a few months or years before your periods stop (before you start the menopause) and usually continue for several years after your last period.</p> <p>For more information visit the NHS website here https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/hot-flushes/</p>
Night sweats/ sleep disturbance	<p>Night sweats are when you sweat so much that your night clothes and bedding are soaking wet, even though where you're sleeping is cool.</p> <p>For more information visit the NHS website here https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/night-sweats/ https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/</p>
Anxiety / low mood/ depression	<p>Anxiety can cause many different symptoms. It might affect how you feel physically, mentally and how you behave.</p> <p>When you're feeling anxious or scared, your body releases stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol.</p> <p>This can be helpful in some situations, but it might also cause physical symptoms such as an increased heart rate and increased sweating. In some people, it might cause a panic attack.</p> <p>Regular anxiety, fear or panic can also be the main symptom of several health conditions. Do not self-diagnose – speak to a GP if you're worried about how you're feeling.</p> <p>For more information visit the NHS website here https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-panic/ https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/low-mood-and-depression/</p>
Headaches	<p>Headaches can last between 30 minutes and several hours.</p> <p>For more information visit the NHS website here https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/headaches/</p>

Recurrent urinary tract infections	<p>Urinary tract infections (UTIs) can affect different parts of your urinary tract, including your bladder (cystitis), urethra (urethritis) or kidneys (kidney infection). Most UTIs can be easily treated with antibiotics.</p> <p>Urinary urgency and frequency are common and many women find this symptom particularly embarrassing.</p> <p>Symptoms of a UTI include (but are not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needing to pee suddenly or more often than usual • pain or a burning sensation when peeing • smelly or cloudy pee • blood in your pee • pain in your lower tummy <p>For more information visit the NHS website here https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/urinary-tract-infections-utis/</p>
Other urogenital issues	<p>Although other urogenital issues such as prolapse, incontinence, vaginal dryness and decreased libido are less likely to have a direct impact whilst at work, around 50% of people post menopause will have pelvic floor dysfunctions such as these.</p> <p>These issues can lead to reduced self-esteem, relationship break down and therefore affect mood and cause distractions or reduce ability to concentrate at work.</p> <p>All these symptoms can be supported and sometimes resolved with help from services such as pelvic health physiotherapists, continence nurses and urogynaecology clinics which can be accessed through the GP.</p>
Other symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory loss • Joint stiffness, aches and pains • Reduced concentration • Heavy/ irregular periods • Vaginal Dryness • Reduced Libido • Palpitations <p>For more information visit the NHS website here https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/symptoms/</p>