



MENOPAUSE POLICY

Menopause Policy

Introduction

1. The Organisation acknowledges that transitioning through the menopause can be a difficult and stressful period and employees can experience symptoms that can impact their work life and the Organisation is therefore committed to supporting employees in practical and reasonable ways. This policy sets out the support that the Organisation will provide when an employee is affected by the menopause or is experiencing menopause-related symptoms.

The aims of this policy are to:

- make line managers aware of the Organisation's responsibility to understand the menopause and related issues and how they can affect employees and their work colleagues
 - educate line managers about potential symptoms of the menopause and how they can support employees in the workplace
 - raise wider awareness and understanding among employees
 - encourage employees to talk about the menopause openly and confidently
 - outline the support and reasonable adjustments that are available to employees
 - reduce menopause-related sickness absence by supporting staff to remain in work.
2. The Organisation recognises that employees may need additional support and adjustments in the period before, during and after the menopause and it aims to help staff according to their individual needs and circumstances. The Organisation seeks to provide a work environment in which all employees are treated with respect and dignity and which protects employees' health, safety and welfare and it therefore actively encourages employees to discuss their menopausal symptoms and to ask for additional support and adjustments.

Definitions and symptoms

1. The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for all women, although it can also be brought on as a result of other medical conditions or certain surgical interventions. It refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months, but it is best described as a “transition” rather than as a one-off event. After a woman has not had a period for a year, the time from that point is then considered to be the post-menopause, but this does not mean menopause symptoms cease. Menopause symptoms continue, on average, for four years from the last period and can continue for up to twelve years.
2. The perimenopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause and it can often last four to five years, although for some women it may continue for many more years or for others it may last only for a few months. During the time of the perimenopause, individuals may begin to experience symptoms due to changes in their hormone levels. These symptoms may vary in degree between different individuals. As individuals may still be having regular periods at the onset of these symptoms, many do not always realise that they are experiencing the perimenopause and may not understand what is causing their symptoms. This can be a barrier to accessing support
3. The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. In the UK, the average age is 51, but it can happen much earlier. Many women experience the menopause before the age of 45 (early menopause) and some women experience the menopause before the age of 40 (premature menopause). Some women also experience a medical/surgical menopause which can occur suddenly when the ovaries are damaged or removed by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery. Individuals who are non-binary, transgender or intersex may also experience menopausal symptoms.
4. It is important to recognise that, for many reasons, the menopause affects women’s physical and psychological health differently. Symptoms vary in type, amount, severity and length between individuals. The menopause can often also indirectly affect individuals’ partners, families and work colleagues.
5. The symptoms of the menopause can include:
 - hot flushes and daytime sweats
 - palpitations
 - night sweats
 - fatigue
 - sleep disturbances and insomnia
 - headaches
 - skin irritation
 - muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains

- irritability
 - mood disturbances
 - poor concentration levels
 - forgetfulness and memory loss
 - anxiety and depression
 - panic attacks
 - weight gain
 - loss of confidence
 - changes in menstrual flow and regularity, including heavy bleeding
 - recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), including cystitis
 - the need for more regular and/or urgent toilet breaks.
6. These symptoms can adversely affect how employees work, their relationships with work colleagues and their performance and productivity levels.
7. Some individuals seek medical advice and treatment for the symptoms of the perimenopause and menopause and others may try self-help measures and alternative therapies to cope with the symptoms. A common form of treatment is known as hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Many women find these treatments helpful for alleviating symptoms, but HRT is not suitable or appropriate for everyone. Some women using HRT may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

Communication

1. The Organisation aims to create an environment in which employees feel confident about raising issues about their menopausal symptoms and asking for additional support and adjustments at work. Many employees still see the menopause as a private and personal issue and, for some, discussing the transition into menopause can be a difficult subject to be open about. The Organisation will therefore seek to promote a greater openness about, and understanding of, the menopause among line managers and staff and will encourage line managers to create a supportive and understanding team culture that removes any barriers to employees disclosing information to them.
2. **We will do this by:**
 - recording sickness absences that are related to the menopause as an ongoing medical issue rather than as a series of short-term sickness absences
 - providing training to line managers so that they are knowledgeable to have open and sensitive conversations with employees about their menopausal symptoms (and how these might affect their work) and what they can do to support them
 - treating the menopause in the same way as any other medical condition
 - being accommodating to temporary flexible working requests that will help employees manage their symptoms, such as a later start and finish time or home working on an ad hoc basis

- putting in place measures to help employees to better manage their symptoms, leading to a reduction in sickness absence and an increase in wellbeing and productivity
- reminding staff to support their work colleagues, not to make inappropriate comments or jokes and to respect any adjustments put in place to help them with their symptoms.

Workplace adjustments

1. The Organisation is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate support and adjustments are put in place. The Organisation will therefore work proactively to make adjustments where necessary to support any employees who are transitioning through the menopause. The Organisation also recognises that the menopause is a very individual experience and that employees can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.
2. **These may include:**
 - adjusting workplace temperatures
 - improving ventilation
 - providing fans and/or moving desks closer to windows
 - providing easy access to cold drinking water, rest rooms and toilet/washroom facilities
 - allowing temporary changes to work/shift patterns
 - allowing other temporary flexible working arrangements
 - offering a quiet space to work
 - reducing the need for attendance at formal meetings or presentations
 - re-assessing work allocation
 - making sure employees can take regular and flexible toilet and rest breaks
 - permitting time off for attendance at medical appointments
 - being flexible when applying the Organisation's performance management, attendance or disciplinary procedures
 - allowing employees to adapt their uniforms to improve comfort levels and making it easy for them to request additional uniforms so that they can change during the day
 - signposting or referring the employee to the Organisation's employee assistance programme.
3. The Organisation will also carry out risk assessments which take the specific needs of menopausal employees into consideration.
4. Line managers should apply individual discretion when assessing an employee's particular needs and circumstances and should act accordingly. Information about an employee's menopausal symptoms should be treated as confidential and line managers should expressly agree with the employee which (if any) work colleagues should be informed, by whom and on what basis.

5. Line managers should then record any agreed adjustments and review these at least annually. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so line managers should arrange regular follow-up discussions with the employee to ensure that the support and adjustments provided still meet their needs.