

All Staff Toolkit: Supporting Menopause at Work

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Introduction

Increasingly women are working well into their 50s and 60s and with the number of older women in the workforce expected to continue to rise. Women are working through peri-menopause and post-menopause which can mean managing the demands of work and home life, whilst also dealing with sometimes severe menopausal symptoms. It should be noted that for some women, the menopause can occur early naturally or for medical reasons such as surgery (e.g. hysterectomy), chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

Although it is women who experience the physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause, it is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home. This can include male and female colleagues, family members, same sex partnerships, those going through gender re-assignment and disabled colleagues who may experience menopause differently to others.

With average female life expectancy in the UK currently at 82.9¹ years, many women are living in this post-menopausal phase for up to a third or even half of their life and these symptoms can have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing, as well as their work and relationships.

Purpose

All managers have a duty of care to their employees. The purpose of this toolkit is to raise awareness of menopause transition and assist managers in supporting employees going through the menopause in the workplace. Although the menopause usually impacts women in their 40s to 60s, it can impact younger women, partners and families of women and those who are transitioning. The focus is on the support of anyone affected by the menopause in the workplace either directly or indirectly. This toolkit is to be used alongside the Guiding Principles document.

¹ ONS Life Expectancy Tables:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2018to2020>

What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Every experience will be different and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

Although for many women this is a natural life change, for some women the menopause may be medically induced. Surgery such as a hysterectomy or chemotherapy/radiotherapy treatment can affect women in younger age groups, creating severe symptoms in some cases. So, for some it is not a 'natural life change' or transition and this makes the psychological aspect more important. It is therefore a very personal transitional phase in an individuals' life.

- Peri-menopause: The time leading up to the end of an individual's periods when changes start to happen.
- Menopause: Happens on the day after they have not had a period for 12 months if under 50 years old or two years if under 50.
- Post-menopause: The rest of the time after the day of menopause. Symptoms may continue for a long time during the post-menopausal period and may never completely disappear.
- Premature menopause: Can happen naturally, or because of illness, medication or surgery.
- Andropause - The Male Menopause. *(Note the Andropause is not covered in this guidance)*

The symptoms of menopause include:

During menopause a woman's **brain and mood** can be affected causing: depression and anxiety; sleep problems which lead to tiredness, fatigue and/or dizziness; brain fog leading to reduced concentration, poor information retention and a reduced ability to learn; unexplained mood swings, irritability and emotional outbursts. These symptoms could impact on an individual's performance in terms of coping strategies or the pressure of dealing with deadlines and priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence, anxiety or panic disorder.

Women can experience **hair** loss or hair can become thin, lacklustre and brittle. Women can have **mouth** problems such as bleeding gums or a dry mouth. This can lead to bad breath. They may also experience taste changes and strange oral sensations including a burning tongue.

A woman's **heart** can be affected, causing palpitations and an increased risk of heart disease. A woman's **lungs** can be affected as they may develop new allergies or existing allergies can become worse. For example, asthma, hay fever, dermatitis (see skin/nails below).

A woman's **abdomen** and **gut** can be affected as they may gain weight, develop bloating, abdominal cramps, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), sickness or nausea and women can experience **urogenital problems** which bring about greater urgency and/or more frequent trips to the toilet.

Women can have irregular **periods** or unpredictable pre-menstrual tension, heavy or painful bleeding, water retention and bloating.

Women can suffer from general **skin** itchiness and formication (this has been described as feeling like something crawling about under the skin), allergies such as dermatitis and thinning skin. Also, nails can become dry and brittle.

Women can develop problems with their **muscles, joints, nerves and bones**. This can lead to muscle pain and weakness, joint pain, osteoporosis / loss of bone density and nerve function may be affected.

Women can suffer from sudden changes to **body temperature**, which might include daytime sweats and hot flushes, sudden heat or redness in the face and neck, or night time sweats and flushes.

Other symptoms of the menopause (of which there are at least 34 recognised as part of the menopause and up to 80 possible symptoms) can also include loss of libido, vaginal dryness and/or atrophy, weight gain, incontinence, breast pain and headaches.

Workplace environments that may make symptoms worse:

- High temperature
- Poor ventilation
- High humidity
- No access to quiet or restful space
- Excessive noise
- Dry air and lack of natural light

Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work

Menopause affects everyone – it is not just an issue for women

Whether experiencing the menopause first-hand or second-hand as a colleague or partner, education and information helps to break the taboo.

Supportive ‘human’ conversations make the difference

Equipping line managers to have sympathetic and thoughtful conversations with their team members and providing an effective framework allows women to feel listened to and supported in the workplace. Think in terms of situation, behaviour, impact and result.

A healthy environment and culture is better for everyone

Creating an open, honest environment means we can all flourish at work.

Retaining our talent

Twenty-five per cent of menopausal women have considered leaving work because of their symptoms². Providing the right support can help retain experienced employees and save on recruitment costs which is beneficial to the individual and business success.

Enabling women to be their best at work

Wide-ranging physical and psychological symptoms can seriously inhibit a woman’s career. By providing the right support and communicating openly enables women and their teams to perform at their best.

How you can support your colleagues with the menopause

An individual may be affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, therefore it is important to listen carefully and with an open mind, be sensitive to the issues and not make any assumptions. When someone has spoken with you in confidence, it is important to respect that and to keep the information confidential. Traditionally, the menopause has not been widely discussed in workplaces, with some finding it difficult and embarrassing to raise the subject.

Managers and colleagues who want to support colleagues going through the menopause are often uncertain how to do this. Thankfully due to the increased coverage of the menopause in the media and the increased availability of online support and guidance, conversations around managing the menopause in the workplace are becoming more and more normalised. Many Departments now have Staff Support Networks in place. Menopause transition does not necessarily lead to reduced performance at work and may be managed with consideration, understanding and in some circumstances, with workplace adjustments or workplace adaptations.

It is important not to ignore the impact of menopausal symptoms at work or to simply regard them as “a women’s thing”. Similarly, workplace “banter” which has historically been the acceptable way menopause has been dealt with in some organisations, could be interpreted as harassment. It is upsetting for the person being mocked and critical that we act with kindness and tolerance to all our colleagues.

² Carolyn Harris MP writing for www.Healthawareness.co.uk 18/01/2019

The department's employee assistance programme (EAP) is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to both employees and managers. The EAP can advise on a range of issues and arrange counselling where required. Please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact for more information on your EAP scheme, including contact details.

Individuals may need more in-depth, specialist support and advice. It is best practice to recommend that individuals speak to their GP or other medical professionals if in any doubt.

Menopause at work: for the manager

Your role

Your role as a manager is to have a supportive conversation with your employee. You are not expected to be an expert or a healthcare professional/occupational health adviser when discussing the menopause. But you do need to listen carefully and take conversations seriously. Please remember to consult occupational health and/or advise the employee to contact their GP for further support where necessary.

When an employee tells you about their issues with the menopause, you should gain an understanding of what the employee is likely to need from you. You can use the information provided in this toolkit as well as your own research to help you start a conversation about the menopause. Annex A is self-identification of menopausal symptoms. Annex B is the Workplace Adjustment Passport; this is what opens discussion between manager and staff. Annex C is a list of some of the support available.

The employee may have chosen to speak to a colleague, a different manager or your HR department before raising the subject with you.

You should:

- Remember that every employee's issues are unique to them, do not make assumptions;
- Listen carefully to what your employee is saying: it can be a very emotional discussion for them.
- Be aware of cultural considerations in discussing menopause and be prepared to respect a person's right not to discuss intimate issues especially with a male line manager. In this case potentially suggest someone else of their choosing they can talk to, perhaps a menopause ambassador or champion who can intercede.
- Be prepared to make adjustments on request without delving into the fine and very personal details.
- Ensure that all information shared by the employee is treated in the strictest confidence and is not shared further without the employee's express consent.
- Discuss timescales and leave requirements if this has been raised as part of the discussion. It is worth underlining that peri-menopausal and menopausal symptoms do not have an indicative timeline for resolution and can last for the rest of someone's working life and beyond.
- Take account of individual and business needs when dealing with requests for special/medical leave, being mindful of the importance of being supportive of attendance at medical appointments.
- Be aware of and do not stereotype older employees because of their age or symptoms.
- Outline the support available to the employee, such as occupational health, the employee assistance programme, workplace adjustments and the Workplace Adjustment Passport.

Please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact for more information on this, including contact details.

- Contact CSHR Casework* for advice, if unsure of any aspect of the policy or process.

Employees

Need more support with your menopausal symptoms?

Some employees may not be aware that they are going through menopause transition. GPs can arrange for blood tests to be undertaken to confirm menopause. However, NICE guidance suggests that specific menopause/Follicle Stimulating Hormone tests for the over 45s are unnecessary. Consult your GP for any symptoms that you are concerned about; many of them can also relate to other conditions which your doctor will want to rule out by conducting other tests before giving a definitive diagnosis.

The Positive Menopause

It is not all bad news; there is a positive side to menopause:

- Many employees do not experience any adverse symptoms of menopause.
- Post-menopause you may be more confident, some employees have gone on to create their own successful businesses and your creativity may increase.
- Freedom from some of the more annoying and painful aspects of having periods.
- No more Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMT) every month.
- HRT is an option and many find it possible to continue at work normally as a result of using it.
- There is now a wealth of information and support available.
- A new beginning, time to re-adjust and re-set options and priorities.

You may find it useful to consider

- Researching the menopause. (See useful links below);
- Joining a network or buddying with someone you trust;
- Discussing with your family, friends etc. and seeking support;
- Having a confidential discussion with your manager, sharing relevant information about your needs and possible impact on your work if any;
- Discussing any workplace adjustments that you might need;
- Recording your symptoms, frequency and when they occur using a Workplace Adjustment Passport;
- Requesting special leave to attend appointments*;
- Requesting an occupational health referral*;
- Referring to support offered by wellbeing and/or diversity and inclusion networks*;
- Women are now having children later in life and it should be recognised that a woman may be responsible for children and/or teenagers whilst also caring for elderly relatives;
- Noting absences directly related to menopause symptoms under the Endocrine or GU categories for those organisations using SOP

* For more information on contacting CSHR casework, special leave policy, occupational health referral and staff networks, please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact

Adjustments that may help at work

Talk to your manager about workplace adjustments that might help you in managing your menopausal symptoms at work. Here are some ideas you could consider:

Working hours/location

- A change in working hours, or remote/home working.
- A reduction in travel or increased comfort breaks, dialling or video calling into meetings.
- Some possible adjustment to shift patterns.

Uniform / PPE

- A possible change to uniform requirements – avoiding man-made fibres or close-fitting uniforms.
- Uniforms in various sizes to accommodate bloating / short term weight gain.
- If own clothes are worn, consider natural fibres over man-made fibres and wear layers.

Workspace

- Flexible and easy access to bathroom facilities, so may need to move to a desk nearer the toilets.
- Timings of site visits/inspections to allow access to toilet facilities regularly.
- Ensuring there is good ventilation (fan when allowed or open a window if possible or adjust air conditioning where present).
- Access to cold drinks.
- Regular breaks in a quiet space to be able to take a moment away from the working area.
- A desk fan (when allowed by the HSE – currently advice is to remove fans due to risk of spreading Covid UNLESS there is no other alternative for an agreed Workplace Adjustment or if you are in a single occupancy space).
- Using the welfare facilities to take a break (where facilities are available, following local processes).

Agreeing the process for further support

You should agree a plan with your manager which will be led by you and be unique to your situation. In some departments this is known as a Workplace Adjustments Passport.

Confidentiality and disclosure

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that information is only shared where necessary (such as if the employee divulged a threat to life, self-harm or suicidal thoughts) and with the consent of the employee. Disclosure without consent can be distressing for the employee concerned and in some instances breach:

- the Data Protection Act 2018;
- the Equality Act 2010; or
- GDPR requirements

Wellbeing and mental health

The menopause can challenge physical and mental wellbeing for many different reasons. Some examples of this can be:

- Mood swings;
- Difficulty concentrating or memory lapses;
- Anxiety or depression;
- Pain and headaches; and
- Sleep disorders or fatigue.

As with all employees, the department or agency has a duty of care and managers should watch for symptoms of mental ill health.

Handling absences

Absences related to the symptoms of menopause are often recorded as sickness absences against the main symptom experienced e.g. Endocrine (hormonal) issues or Genito-Urinary issues.



Annex A: Self Identification of Menopausal Symptoms

Included below is a template (guide) to assist with understanding how to support staff experiencing issues through the menopause. This list is of symptoms employees may experience when going through the menopause, and how these may impact on their ability to undertake their current role.

Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom						Adjustments you feel may assist (Examples included)
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Constant	Hourly	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	
Hot flushes													Desk/Hand fan, sit near windows, regular breaks
Night sweats													Access to showers, change of clothes/uniform
Irregular periods (heavy, painful, flooding)													Flexible working arrangements inc. work from home if possible
Mood swings or irritability													Ask colleagues to be understanding
Fatigue													Flexible working arrangements inc. work from home if possible
Sleep disorders													Flexible working arrangements inc. work from home if possible
Hair loss/thinning													Sensitivity from colleagues
Brittle nails													
Brain fog													Use of notes/aide memoire
Difficulty concentrating													
Memory lapses													
Dizziness/vertigo													Quiet area available to recover



Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom						Adjustments you feel may assist (Examples included)
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Constant	Hourly	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	
Changes in odour													Access to showers, extra uniform
Palpitations													
Depression													
Anxiety													Weighted blanket.
Panic attacks													
Breast pain													
Headaches/migraine													Access to quiet room or assistance to go home
Aching joints													
Osteoporosis													
Burning tongue													
Tingling extremities (pins and needles)													
Feeling of electric shocks													
Tinnitus													Some types of headphones.
Genitourinary syndrome of menopause (Vaginal dryness/atrophy and urinary problems)													Regular and close access to toilet facilities



Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom						Adjustments you feel may assist (Examples included)
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Constant	Hourly	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	
Gum problems													
Formication (feeling of the skin crawling)													
New allergies including itchiness													
Add other symptoms below if not listed													



Annex B: Workplace Adjustment Passport Workplace Adjustment Passport Guidance

Purpose

1. The Workplace Adjustment Passport was originally developed and introduced in response to actions in the 2015 refreshed Talent Action Plan, which recommended a single adjustment passport for all departments. This also forms a key part of the [Civil Service Diversity Strategy](#) published in 2017. The aim is to support employees with a disability, health condition or those who are undergoing gender reassignment in the workplace and will also be of help if you do wish to move between departments.

The passport has three main functions:

- to support a conversation between an employee and their line manager about the disability, health condition or gender reassignment and any workplace adjustments that might need to be made;
 - to act as a record of that conversation and of the adjustments agreed; and
 - to act as a record of any adjustment made for individuals as supportive measures
2. The passport will be particularly helpful when the employee changes line manager, as it will help the new line manager to understand what workplace adjustments the employee had been receiving previously and avoid the need to begin the process again.
 3. It can also be helpful in starting a conversation about less visible health conditions or disabilities such as mental health conditions.
 4. The first section of the passport focuses on information that may help a line manager to understand more about an employee's disability, health condition or gender reassignment and the barriers experienced. The next section focuses on the impact (if applicable) of an employee's disability, health condition or gender reassignment on their daily working life and specific requirements or adjustments identified to overcome any barriers.



Procedure

Individual responsibilities

5. Completion of the passport is voluntary. You (as the employee) have control over the content and who it is shared with. You retain ownership of the form throughout.
6. Complete your personal details in the box provided, including as much detail as you feel is appropriate. Share a copy of your passport with your line manager and discuss the details so that they can understand how to support you.
7. A discussion will give you the opportunity to explain to your line manager the issues you have identified. Whilst it is up to you to decide how much to tell your line manager about your disability, health condition or gender reassignment and how it affects you, sharing information can help them to better understand something that they may be unfamiliar with and how they can support you.
8. Any actions agreed and review dates should then be entered on the passport and shared with your line manager. You may also want to discuss the contents to appropriate contacts such as a Fire Warden, Mental Health First Aider or buddy.
9. If your circumstances change e.g. due to your disability, health condition or gender reassignment you should update the passport and speak to your line manager to discuss any impact on your workplace adjustments. Adjustments should be reviewed when there is a change or at least every 12 months. The passport should be updated to reflect any agreed changes in your adjustment requirements.

Line manager responsibilities

10. The Civil Service aims to create an inclusive environment in which employees are confident that they can disclose information about their disabilities, health conditions or gender reassignment to those with whom they work without fear of discrimination or harassment. Your role as a line manager is to create an inclusive culture where people are comfortable sharing information with you. Your actions and decisions are of great importance in considering any steps which might be taken to assist an employee in their work. The passport is designed to support you to do this.
11. The Civil Service also has responsibilities to its employees under the Equality Act 2010. As a line manager, it is your responsibility to understand and comply with these requirements.
12. Line managers should treat information contained in the passport and discussions with individuals about their disability, health condition or gender reassignment in the strictest of confidence. It is important to remember that the passport belongs to the employee and is confidential. If you move to another role you should not pass the form to the next line manager without the employee's permission. Nor should you send it to the new line manager if the employee moves post, without their consent.
13. When you receive a passport from an employee you should arrange a one-to-one meeting with them as soon as possible. It is for the individual to decide how much to disclose about their particular disability, health condition or gender reassignment. However, it is important that as a line manager you are able to understand how it affects their day-to-day work and what you can do to support and assist them to succeed. Line managers have a responsibility



to ensure that anyone wishing to complete the passport is given adequate official time to do so.

14. You may require specialist help when identifying appropriate workplace adjustments. Where necessary you should seek advice, particularly about mental health issues, complex disabilities or gender reassignment where the effects on work may be difficult to predict. In the first instance, you should speak with your HR Business Partner and/or CSHR Casework, who will suggest other sources of support if necessary. Please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact for more information on CSHR casework, including contact details.
15. Understanding the impact of the disability, health condition or gender reassignment can help you to agree with the employee, which adjustments are most practical and appropriate.
16. If your employee's circumstances change e.g. due to their disability, health condition or gender reassignment you should advise them to update their passport and discuss any impact on workplace adjustments. Adjustments should be reviewed when there is a change or at least every 12 months. The passport should be updated to reflect any agreed changes in your employee's adjustment requirements



Further information

17. Additional guidance on supporting employees can be found in:

- For more information on workplace adjustments, including a manager's best practise guide: [Workplace adjustments](#)
- [Becoming disability confident: further resources](#)
- Please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact for more information on your organisation's Workplace Adjustment guidance.



Workplace Adjustment Passport

Official Sensitive - Personal when completed

The purpose of the passport is for you to record all workplace adjustment requirements agreed with your line manager. Sharing and discussing your passport with your line manager can enable them to provide you with tailored support and appropriate workplace adjustments.

Name:	Name of line manager:
Details of your disability, condition or barriers you currently experience: This section should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> information that may help your line manager to understand the impact your disability, health condition or gender reassignment has on your life. please do not list anything that you do not feel comfortable disclosing. 	
Details of how this affects you at work and the support you need: This section could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the aspects of the job where you experience barriers and require adjustments. This could include the work environment, communicating with others, working arrangements or equipment. any specific requirements such as altered lighting, sitting away from draughts or near to toilets. These adjustments may be in place now but this may alter if your accommodation changes. specific adjustments you already use or know you need. For example, screen reading software to convert text to speech already installed on your laptop or flexibility in start and finish times. how the adjustments will help you or remove the barriers identified above. 	



Name:	Name of line manager:
Additional information: This section could include any: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • details of any recent assessments for Occupational Health, Display Screen Equipment or Workstation. • information about help you may need to evacuate a building in an emergency and whether you have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan. Contact details of someone to get in touch with in case of an emergency. • information about any plans you have in place such as a Wellness Recovery Action Plan or what your line manager and/or colleagues should do if you feel unwell. • details of anything else you think would be useful. 	

Details of agreed workplace adjustments

Adjustment	Date identified	Date implemented

The following table is used to keep a written record of when the passport is reviewed and/or amended. The passport should be reviewed at least annually.

Review date (DD/MM/YYYY)	Amendments made	Reason for amendment	Employee signature	Line manager signature
Employee signature and date:		Line manager signature and date:		

This document contains personal information, which should be stored in accordance with Data Protection regulations and departmental document retention policy.



Annex C: Support available regarding Menopause

[NHS menopause pages](#)

[NHS information on HRT](#)

[NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management](#)

[The British Menopause Society](#)

[Menopause matters](#)

[ACAS Menopause At Work](#)

[Henpicked](#)

[Menopause Support UK](#)

[My Menopause Doctor](#)

[Healthtalk.org](#)

[Women's Health Concerns](#)

[The Menopause Exchange](#)

[Guidance from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians:](#)

[British Occupational Health Research Foundation – research on women's experiences working through the menopause](#)

[The Daisy Network: For women with POI](#) (Premature Ovarian Insufficiency)

Please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact for information on any local support networks, including contact details.

Further Reading:

Oestrogen Matters by Dr Avrum Bluming and Carol Tavis PhD

Me and My Menopausal Vagina by Jane Lewis

Haynes Menopause Manual by Dr Louise Newson

Preparing for the Perimenopause and the Menopause by Dr Louise Newson



Employee Assistance Programme

The organisation's employee assistance programme is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to both employees and managers. The EAP can advise on a range of issues and arrange counselling where required. Please refer to your organisation's intranet or HR contact for more information on this, including contact details.