



Menopause: Guiding Principles for Employees and their Managers

October 2021



Foreword



Antonia Romeo, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Justice, and Civil Service Gender Inclusion Champion

Menopause is not a new subject, but despite much progress on gender equality in recent years, a stigma remains around the topic. Women affected can often feel uncomfortable talking about menopause with colleagues and their managers in the workplace. Starting the conversation, encouraging colleagues to feel able to discuss these matters, and adopting a more supportive approach will continue to bring about positive change for civil servants, and for the Civil Service as a whole.

The Cross-Government Menopause Network is an excellent example of civil servants' commitment to inclusion in the workplace. Progress has been made since the launch of the guiding principles set out in this document, which aim to raise awareness of menopause in the workplace and provide practical advice for individuals and line managers.

This updated document takes into account the changes that have affected all of us over the past year, from new ways of working, to additional challenges at home and at work owing to the pandemic.

This important work will help us continue the conversation about menopause and help remove the stigma around this topic and continue to make the Civil Service an inclusive place to work, for all of our colleagues.





Angela MacDonald, Deputy CEO and Second Permanent Secretary HM Revenue and Customs and Senior Sponsor of the Cross Government Menopause Network (CGMN)

The menopause is not an illness, it is a natural phase of a woman's life, that does not mean it is always easy. Many women, and I include myself in this, find the menopause hugely impactful, and at times, a difficult journey. The menopause can bring about symptoms that are, for some, life changing, making life harder at home and at work.

Many of us will remember the standing jokes about the menopause being all about hot flushes and irritability, and for some, that is their very real lived experience. However, I know that for many women it is the insomnia, brain fog and subsequent loss of confidence, anxiety and depression that is devastating. I have been in many meetings where a word has eluded me or I have lost my train of thought and it is embarrassing.

Having open and honest discussions about the menopause can make a world of difference. When I started to open up about my own difficulties, I felt better but so did others around me. I fully support the work of the Cross Government Menopause Network in their ambition to encourage the whole Civil Service to become menopause friendly, a place where we can all have rich and meaningful discussions.

The Guiding Principles and Toolkit developed by the Cross Government Menopause Network are helpful for women, line managers and colleagues, helping to break down the taboo around the menopause and facilitate good quality conversations. The products provide information, advice and guidance relating to women experiencing the menopause, but they may also be helpful for anyone who might be undergoing any form of hormone treatment, as often the symptoms can be very similar. I encourage everyone to take a look at the products and to make the menopause an easier subject to discuss.



Jane Harbottle, Chief Executive of the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) and Ministry of Justice Senior Menopause Sponsor

I am privileged to sponsor the Ministry of Justice Menopause Network. The impact of the menopause can be far reaching and can affect every aspect of a woman's life, including their work. It is important that line managers understand how to provide support for their staff. Supporting those affected by the menopause, maintaining their wellbeing and being a source of support is vital to ensure that everyone can achieve their full potential.

I am delighted that there is now a source of support for colleagues and line managers via the Menopause Principles and Toolkit. I would encourage all managers to use this resource and sign up to their Departmental Networks for further information, ideas and support. The products are an important step towards making conversations about the menopause easier between line managers, colleagues and peers, and providing much needed support.



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Statement

The Cross-Government Menopause Network (Including NHS England/Improvement) is committed to ensuring that all individuals impacted by the menopause are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. It is also committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce. We promote a positive attitude to the menopause and will work proactively with others to make adjustments where necessary to support women experiencing the menopause and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse.

Aims and Objectives

The Civil Service and NHS England/Improvement aim to be the UK's most inclusive employers and be representative of the public we serve. A brilliant organisation is also one where we work in an environment that supports our wellbeing. An inclusive workplace is one that provides everyone with a sense of belonging, allows everyone to be their authentic selves, and ensures they have a voice in their teams and the organisation.

The aim of this Cross-Government Menopause Network guidance is:

- To make managers aware of the responsibility to understand the menopause and the related issues that can affect staff;
- To raise wider awareness and understanding among employees across all our organisations; and
- To provide clarity and direction on how our respective organisations should deal with menopause related issues, either for individuals experiencing the menopause or those who are affected indirectly for example partners, colleagues or line managers.

The menopause largely impacts women in their 40s to 60s; however, it can occur at an earlier age. Other groups affected by the menopause at any age include those who have functioning ovaries, such as some transgender, some non-binary people and some intersex people. Menopause can also have an impact on partners and families of those experiencing it.

The focus on the support in these guiding principles is predominantly directed at women, however it also applies to anyone affected by the menopause in the workplace either directly or indirectly.

There is a Toolkit to support this guidance for managers and employees.



Introduction

The intention of this document is to raise awareness of the menopause, the symptoms employees may experience and ensure consistent support is made available to them.

The Civil Service and NHS England/Improvement have a commitment to be the most inclusive employers in the UK, and we have made real progress in gender diversity, most notably on the representation of women in senior grades and roles. However, there is a growing commitment for us to do better with policies to support and understand the lived experience of women. Whilst pregnancy, motherhood and family friendly policies are becoming woven into the language and culture of our working environment, there is little mentioned about menopause. It is important for line managers to recognise the particular needs of women at this life stage to be able to support them.

The menopause is not an issue widely discussed in workplaces as there are often connotations of this being a taboo subject for women, with associations of embarrassment, discomfort and stigma. The time has come for change and we should normalise menopause as a workplace conversation and encourage managers to listen carefully to staff and encourage discussion about the broad range of symptoms; in addition to training and educating managers and colleagues on what menopause means in practice. We know that some women can feel that they must hide their symptoms and feelings as they may worry about their colleagues' perception of their competence at work, and they are therefore less likely to ask for the workplace adjustments that may help them. Managers who make it clear they are ready to listen will help staff to overcome these concerns.

Women make up 53.8% of Civil Service employees¹ and 76.7% of employees in the NHS². They make up a higher proportion of employees than men in both the 40 to 49 and 50 to 59 age groups. It is therefore highly likely that all employees will either work with or know someone going through the menopause during their working life.

The menopause is the time when a woman's hormone levels drop, either gradually over time or instantly as a result of removal of the ovaries, resulting in menstruation stopping. Because the physical changes in the body are hormonal, menopausal symptoms can also be experienced by non-binary, intersex or transgender people.

Disability, age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status may also have an effect on how menopause is experienced and managed. So, although it may be a natural life change for many, it can affect everyone differently, and understanding the psychological aspect can be central to understanding greater wellbeing relating to menopause in the workplace.

Not all will experience difficulties in the workplace because of their menopause, but for those that do, conversations should be managed with discretion and consideration, with a view to

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-diversity-inclusion-dashboard/civil-service-diversity-and-inclusion-dashboard>

² [NHS England » NHS celebrates the vital role hundreds of thousands of women have played in the pandemic](#)



understanding the broader circumstances and identifying where adjustments can be made. In some cases, this process may be better supported by an occupational health assessment.

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 age-related menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40 years. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

- Peri-menopause: The time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen.
- Menopause: Happens on the day after you have not had a period for 12 months (if aged over 50 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 under the age of 45, or because of illness, medication or surgery.
- Andropause - The Male Menopause. *(Note: the Andropause is not covered in this guidance)*

Although for many women this is a natural life change, for some women the menopause may be medically induced at any age. Surgery such as a hysterectomy and/or chemotherapy and radiotherapy can affect women in younger age groups, creating severe symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

A GP can usually confirm whether a person is menopausal based on the symptoms, and a blood test to measure hormone levels may be carried out for women under 45. Above that age NICE guidelines recommend diagnosis on symptoms alone, but other blood tests may be taken to rule out other health issues first along with ultrasound examinations or scans.

The physical and psychological symptoms of menopause are interrelated and can create a 'domino' effect whereby one symptom can cause or exacerbate another e.g. hot flushes at night-time can disrupt sleep, leading to tiredness, irritability and loss of focus during the working day.

While symptoms vary greatly, and are many in number, they commonly include:

- fatigue
- insomnia;
- hot flushes and/or night sweats;
- clumsiness;
- irritability;
- reduced concentration;
- loss of confidence;
- mood swings;
- palpitations;



- anxiety and worry;
- dizziness;
- memory loss, problems with recall
- Brain fog;
- depression;
- headaches;
- recurrent urinary tract infections
- Vaginal dryness
- Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (commonly called Vaginal Atrophy); and
- joint stiffness, aches and pains

On average, the symptoms can continue for up to four years after their last period, but around 10 per cent of individuals continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years or in some cases for the rest of their lives.

These symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work. Organisations have a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees and therefore to commit to ensuring that adjustments and additional support are available where appropriate to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Workplaces, however, can vary greatly and many more Civil Servants now work from home following the Covid Pandemic which began in early 2020. Some will eventually return to offices with a hybrid form of working arrangements. But many others remain on the operational frontline, in hospitals, prisons, schools, courts, customer facing offices, airports and in the countryside as just a few examples. Workplace Adjustments are available in all of these and other working environments.

How can managers help?

Organisations can help by creating an inclusive, understanding working environment, wherever that may be, and increasing awareness of the potential effect of menopausal symptoms on employees.

Menopausal symptoms can leave colleagues feeling less confident and at odds with their desired professional image. Some may feel that their performance is negatively affected and will work extremely hard to overcome their perceived shortcomings. As a result, some employees may not feel able to talk about such problems with their manager.

- Employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms,(including early symptoms of undiagnosed menopause), are encouraged to talk to their line manager at the earliest opportunity. This discussion could include identifying workplace adjustments to support the employee to undertake their role effectively, for example adjusting working hours, taking regular breaks, provision of a desk fan etc. It may also be useful to make a management referral to Occupational Health for additional advice, particularly if symptoms are severe. OH will also be able to advise if the Equality Act applies to the employee.
- If an employee is unable to talk to their own line manager, they should request a discussion with an alternative manager, a trusted colleague or a trade union representative. Either the line manager or alternative manager/colleague/trade union representative will act as an advocate to agree and facilitate appropriate workplace adjustments. Where it is possible, a 'Menopause Ambassador' in the role of advocate may be able to join the discussion to offer support to the employee.



- A variety of initiatives in different departments such as Staff Support Networks, Wellbeing programmes and menopause guidance are also on offer. Further details of these are set out on the intranet of each organisation.

Managing confidentiality

Managers should remember that the effects of the menopause may result in the need to treat a colleague differently from other staff for a while. It is good practice to discuss with the employee how they wish any questions from their peers/colleagues to be managed. Confidentiality must be respected unless the employee indicates that they do not mind their team being informed on their behalf in a tactful and respectful way.

The working environment

The working environment may inadvertently exacerbate menopausal symptoms and increase discomfort at work. It is also important to consider the organisational culture, which includes the values and behaviours of the workplace as well as the physical space. Working in a team which demonstrates respect and consideration can mitigate the potential for negative experiences during the menopause such as physical or emotional issues.

The main types of workplace-related issues are due to:

- High workplace temperatures or humidity
- Poor ventilation
- Restrictive uniforms
- Perceived overcrowding and noise; no access to a quiet or restful space
- Problems with accessing rest or toilet facilities
- Lack of access to drinking water
- Dryness and lack of natural light

It is important for organisations to consider the working environment and to explore what simple, practical steps could be taken to ensure the workplace is comfortable and promotes an inclusive and supportive culture.



Workplace adjustments

The purpose of workplace adjustments is to provide a supportive work environment by removing barriers, wherever possible.

The **checklist** in the **manager's section of the Menopause Toolkit** can be used to facilitate a discussion between a staff member, line manager or someone who they feel comfortable speaking to. The checklist is helpful in identifying workplace adjustments that may be useful in supporting a menopausal employee at work. Any agreed adjustments can then be added into a Workplace Adjustment Passport.

It is best practice for employees and line managers to review adjustments on a regular basis as needs may change.

Here are some general ideas on possible adjustments to consider:

- Change working hours or consider remote home working or a flexible hybrid arrangement for workplace and home.
- Reduce travel and consider dialling into/using widely available video technology for meetings.
- Allow for frequent toilet breaks, especially during meetings of more than an hour duration.
- Allow time for breaks to get up and walk about where stiffness and joint pain is an issue.
- Flexible working allows an employee the opportunity to manage their symptoms by altering their working pattern temporarily or on a longer-term basis.
- Consider the application of trigger points and warnings in the Supporting Attendance procedure.

Supporting absence and performance

Menopause in itself is not an illness but there may be times when the symptoms of menopause transition are severe enough to cause the employee to take sickness absence, or for it to affect performance. Because this issue is intensely personal, a manager may not be aware that any impacts are menopause related. A manager should make all reasonable efforts to ensure an employee is able to share information confidentially to help manage their symptoms whilst at work.

- If the impact of the menopause is resulting in the employee being absent from work, or it is affecting their performance at work, line managers and employees should consider whether an occupational health assessment would be appropriate, to ensure the best support can be put in place for the employee.
- When managing an employee with a disability or prolonged sickness (such as someone suffering symptoms related to the menopause) line managers must always follow the departmental supporting attendance process and consider whether The Equality Act 2010 applies.
- Absences due to menopause symptoms are not automatically disregarded for attendance management trigger points/consideration points. However, managers should deal with absences supportively and decide the appropriate action, including whether trigger points should be disregarded or whether formal action is appropriate. Managers may wish to seek further advice from OH or their HR casework team.
- A workplace adjustment passport may be helpful to document agreed workplace adjustments, which should be reviewed regularly.



Health and safety at work

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (the Act) and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 imposes a duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees. Employers have a responsibility to take into account the difficulties that individuals may experience during the menopause.

Due regard should be paid to temperature, ventilation, the ability to move from sitting to standing to avoid stiffness and pain, toilet facilities and access to cold water. It is important that workplace stress is also considered and addressed properly using the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) stress management standards.

For more help you can search your intranet site for Occupational Health, Workplace Adjustments and Workplace Adjustment Passport information.