

Menopause Guidance

January 2021

Menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life and women will experience it in different ways.

CHCP CIC recognises that perimenopause and menopause have the possibility to affect individuals in the workplace which may bring issues or challenges. This document provides guidance to employees who may be experiencing symptoms and provides guidance for managers to enable them to support employees.

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1. DEFINITIONS

1.1. Menopause

The menopause is when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally.

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51 however some women experience this early.

1.2. Peri-Menopause

Peri-menopause is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause. Many people experience symptoms of menopause during this stage as symptoms generally start a few months or years before the period stops.

2. SYMPTOMS

Menopause affects all women differently. Please see below some common symptoms. The duration and severity of these symptoms can vary however some may have a significant impact on someone's everyday life.

Physical symptoms can include:

- Hot flushes
- Palpitations
- Night Sweats
- Insomnia and sleep disturbances
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Joint Aches
- Dry skin and skin irritation
- Increased perspiration during the day
- Dry eyes
- Hair loss
- Urinary problems
- Vaginal dryness, itching and discomfort
- Irregular and/or heavy, painful periods

There also may be psychological symptoms including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic Attacks
- Poor concentration
- Changes to mood
- Problems with memory
- Loss of confidence
- Low Libido

Women may experience only some or all of these symptoms. These symptoms can start years before periods stop and last on average 4 years after the last period however this can go on for much longer. This can have a significant impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing which may affect work. It is important these symptoms are recognised and appropriate steps are taken to help people experiencing them feel more comfortable so they are better able to function both at work and home.

3. ADVICE FOR STAFF EXPERIENCING SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE

Where employees are experiencing symptoms of menopause which are affecting them at work, this should be discussed with their manager. The more open and honest they can be the more support that can be put in place.

A referral to the OccWellbeing team can be made through their line manager for additional support. Employees should contact their GP practice should they need to and discuss any treatment options with them. Please refer to available evidence-based resources in this document.

It is important any staff experiencing symptoms of the menopause get sufficient support and talk to others openly if possible about how they are feeling.

4. SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Some employees experiencing menopause may go through it without medical or alternative interventions. Some employees may choose a treatment option, options include hormone replacement therapy (HRT), anti-depressants or anti-anxiety medications, natural treatments and remedies and lifestyle support such as diet and exercise. However, it is not the employer's role to suggest or discuss treatment options. This is a decision for the member of staff in consultation with their GP. For guidance on time off for consultation and monitoring progress, please refer to the ***Miscellaneous Leave Policy*** available on My Compliance.

Employees should be reminded that they can access other NHS services such as Let's Talk and Emotional Wellbeing services which can enable access to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to help people develop techniques to tackle stress and anxiety. If advice and guidance is required, then a referral to the OccWellbeing Team can be made via the line manager.

Conifer in Wilberforce Health Centre run a specialist menopause service which can be accessed only via a GP referral. GPs can request advice via choose and book (ERAS) system online. In the first instance, Employees should speak to their GP or Nurse Practitioner who can prescribe HRT treatments to help manage symptoms. The specialist service is used when GPs or Nurse practitioners have already tried HRT treatments and they have not been successful in alleviating symptoms. Please remember diet and lifestyle choices contribute to resolving not all but some symptoms of the menopause. We do have out of area referrals into the service.

5. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Some of the Reasonable Adjustments you may wish to consider are listed below (These may not always be practical depending on the role):

- Encouraging the employee to work in a quiet meeting room, alone from time to time if this helps them concentrate.
- Ensuring they take short screen breaks and rests throughout the day if they experience tiredness.
- Allow for more breaks to use toilet facilities.
- Agree for them to sit near a window or in a ventilated area or provide a desk-based fan if they become hot.
- Be as flexible as possible with start and finish times, employees may feel tired in a morning or lack energy later in the day. Try to work around this where possible.
- Give them flexibility to attend appointments (***please refer to Miscellaneous Leave policy***).
- Provide extra support and guidance if they're struggling to concentrate or have reduced confidence.

- If their symptoms form part of a cycle, be mindful of this and review workloads to coincide with these.
- Consider flexible working options, i.e. allowing them to work from home where possible, they may have had a poor night's sleep or have a heavy period. (***please refer to the Flexible Working Policy***)
- Agree temporary adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
- Agree protected time to catch up with work if required.

Certain aspects of a job or the workplace can present a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. Line managers should discuss any reasonable adjustments that may help staff manage their symptoms at work. Reasonable adjustments should be agreed with the employee following discussions on how their symptoms affect them at work. Managers can make a referral to the OccWellbeing team in conjunction with the employee or additionally contact their HR Representative for additional advice and support.

It is important to note that in some circumstances, conditions arising from the menopause may also meet the definition of 'impairment' under the Equality Act 2010. If there is any doubt about whether absences will qualify as an impairment under the Act, further advice and guidance should be sought from the OccWellbeing team at the earliest opportunity.

Should an employee hit a sickness trigger point due to menopause absences, a referral to the OccWellbeing team can be made via the line manager. Occupational health advice can also be sought to get further advice on supporting someone experiencing symptoms at work. Please contact the HR representative should an employee hit a sickness trigger point.

6. ADVICE FOR LINE MANAGERS

It is important to create an environment that encourages open discussion about the effects of menopause to ensure that the practical steps are taken to support an employee's full engagement and productivity at work. Line managers should be supportive and aware of menopausal symptoms so that employees do not feel embarrassed to approach them and discuss this. Having some understanding of how menopause affects people will help this.

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings as part of a normal working routine, to give employees an opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have. It is important you appreciate that it may be hard for them to discuss these concerns with you, try to prompt them to explain by regularly asking how they are.
- Be aware that you can seek occupational health advice regarding menopause if you feel you need further advice and remind the employee of the support available. Please refer employees to the ***Colleague Health and Wellbeing Guide*** which will signpost them to a range of services and resources that are provided and designed to support and encourage a healthy lifestyle both at work and outside of work.
- Should an employee feel uncomfortable discussing their symptoms with their line manager they can request a different delegated manager to do this instead. This request should only come from the employee and not the line manager and the delegated manager should feedback to the line manager so they are aware how the symptoms may be affecting the employee at work.

- Inform staff who present with Hot flushes and night sweats that CHCP have approved lighter uniforms that can be ordered through their manager.

Tips on Holding Sensitive Conversations

Following the above principles will make it much easier to have conversations with employees regarding menopause however the below points provide some further tips to holding sensitive conversations:

- Avoid interruptions
- Listen actively
- Show empathy in understanding
- Encourage the employee to talk
- Avoid judgemental responses
- Be sympathetic
- Be calm
- Ask open ended questions

7. TRAINING AVAILABLE

- Mental Health First Aid
- Menopause in the Workplace
- Menopause in the Workplace for Managers

8. OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

British menopause society podcasts:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PL0C6Rg3xiMhnHUtv6SbbsxDSDGC7QQvKD>

Menopause Doctor: www.menopausedoctor.co.uk

Menopause Matters: www.menopausematters.co.uk

Women's Health Concern: www.womens-health-concern.org

Rock my Menopause: <https://rockmymenopause.com>

This series of short menopause videos from The British Menopause Society includes presentations from menopause specialists on menopause-related subjects including:

- Premature ovarian insufficiency
- Use of bioidentical hormones
- Headaches, migraines and HRT

- Testosterone

<https://pcwhf.co.uk/resources/bms-menopause-videos/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/retention-and-staff-experience/health-and-wellbeing/taking-a-targeted-approach/taking-a-targeted-approach/menopause-in-the-workplace>

www.womens-health-concern.org.uk

Dr Louise Newson who has developed many resources to help healthcare professionals to improve care and patients to learn more about perimenopause and menopause – including this series of podcasts on a wide range of important aspects of healthcare.

https://pcwhf.co.uk/resources/dr-louise-newson-menopause-podcasts/?utm_source=Primary+Care+Women%27s+Health+Forum&utm_campaign=1af61e2b72-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_29_03_16_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9f6eea8a01-1af61e2b72-165224693

8.1. Manager Resources

<https://archive.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6752>

www.menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk