



MANAGING MENOPAUSE

A guide for employers on how to support
menopause in the workplace

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, our clients are looking at ways in which they can support employees who are going through the menopause. This is fantastic to see and really pleasing that the topic of menopause, and the impact it has on employees, is being talked about more; but this is just the beginning, and it feels like we still have a long way to go.

Menopause is still often perceived as a personal and private matter but for 1 in 6 women they will experience debilitating symptoms that will directly impact their workplace productivity through no fault of their own.

This guide will provide tips on how you can best support employees experiencing menopause at work.



1 EDUCATE YOUR MANAGERS

It's really important to provide training and support to your managers on how to have conversations with your employees about the menopause.

If managers understand what their role is when it comes to offering support to employees and how the menopause relates to the law and discrimination, then as an employer you can be confident that your managers, supervisors and team leaders are equipped to have both productive and effective conversations where your employees feels valued, supported and understood.

Training should include:

- effective conversations enabling employees to raise any concerns;
- how different stages and types of menopause can affect people;
- the support and workplace changes available to employees;
- how to deal with menopause issues sensitively and fairly;
- gender identity and gender reassignment discrimination, and the importance of talking with employees about this.

It might not always be obvious who is experiencing symptoms of menopause. It's important for employers to remember that a large number of people can experience symptoms, including:

- trans people – 'trans' is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth;
- intersex people – some people prefer the term 'differences in sex development' (DSD);
- those who identify as non-binary.

Employers should support everyone equally and keep conversations confidential and private. This is particularly important because someone might talk about their gender identity when discussing their menopause symptoms and might not want it more widely known.

2 INVITE EMPLOYEES TO TALK TO YOU PRIVATELY

Talking about any part of menopause may be extremely stressful and embarrassing for some people, often causing feelings of isolation and confusion about what is happening to them both physically and emotionally.

Employers can help by breaking the silence. Promoting the fact that your organisation is eager to support employees during this period of transition and highlighting the support available, may encourage employees to feel more comfortable in approaching their manager to discuss the impact their symptoms may be having on them. Normalising the conversation and just talking about menopause can make the world of difference to a person's ability to cope, especially in the workplace.

Encouraging employees to ask for changes at work that may help them to cope more easily with menopausal symptoms will create a more open and inclusive environment and make a positive difference to your employees' physical and mental health. As managers, ensuring frequent conversations/check-ins with your employees will make it easier to build trust. Ask open ended questions, such as:

- How can we help you?
- How do you feel?
- What would you like to happen?

and actively listen to gain a better understanding of the symptoms they are experiencing, and don't make any assumptions.

You could demonstrate your commitment to supporting employees through the menopause, through internal communications, posters or newsletters.

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PROVIDE THE OPTION TO TALK TO SOMEONE ELSE

Whilst managers can assist with practical reasonable adjustments being implemented and should absolutely be involved in agreeing any changes, even if the person has an initial conversation with someone else, it may be a great benefit to an employee to know they can talk to other trained people for additional support.

Managers should not be expected to offer medical advice but what they can offer is support, and able to signpost employees to the right people and places. This support could come in the form of Employee Assistance Programmes, Occupational Health, HR or other known employees who are going through, or have gone through, the menopause and are happy to share their experience and knowledge.

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TAKE MEDICAL ADVICE

If there are concerns that an employee's health may be affecting their work, then it is always a good idea to get a medical opinion. The employee's consent will need to be sought, and advice is usually taken from the employee's GP/specialist or an independent Occupational Health doctor. It will be important to ask the right questions of the doctor/OH practitioner to ensure the information they provide is as useful as possible.

EXPLORE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

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It is important to understand how symptoms may affect employees at work.

Everyone recognises hot flushes as a symptom of menopause, but fatigue, difficulty focusing or concentrating, anxiety, worry and insomnia are also symptoms that many women will experience.

As an employer, there are a number of reasonable adjustments that could help to support someone experiencing menopause, including:

- being flexible, where possible, over start and finish times to help them manage their symptoms;
- allowing them to take breaks when needed;
- providing a private area where they can rest to help manage symptoms;
- allowing them to work from home when practical;
- allowing them time off if they cannot carry on working that day
- changing certain duties in their role;
- where appropriate, letting them have control over their working environment, for example having a desk next to a window that opens or providing a fan.



6 **CONSIDER FLEXIBLE WORKING**

If someone believes a longer-term change to the job would help them with their menopause symptoms, they could make a flexible working request.

Some women will experience debilitating symptoms which can increase in stressful situations and when they are tired. There may be some flexible working options that could be considered that will enable employees to work productively and manage the impact of the symptoms.

7 **HAVE A MENOPAUSE AND WELLBEING CHAMPION**

Having a menopause or wellbeing champion at work, or even a support group, could help people affected by the menopause. A menopause champion could be a point of contact if employees need advice, or someone to talk to initially if they are not comfortable talking to their managers.

It's also important that employers raise awareness among staff that they will handle menopause in the workplace sensitively, and with dignity and respect.

Knowing they are not alone will help.

8 CONDUCT A RISK ASSESSMENT

In the context of employees' experiences, the importance of maintaining a safe workplace cannot be overstated. Managers play a crucial role in acknowledging that every employee brings their complete selves to work, which encompasses both personal challenges and positive aspects of their lives outside of work.

When someone is going through peri- or post menopause, employers should ensure:

- menopause symptoms are not made worse by the workplace or its work practices;
- they make changes to help staff manage their symptoms when doing their job.

Conducting a risk assessment for the menopause, will help employers to consider the following:

- the temperature and ventilation of the workplace;
- the material and the fit of the organisation's uniform, if there is one, and whether it might make staff going through the menopause feel too hot or worsen skin irritation;
- whether there's somewhere suitable for staff to rest if needed, for example a quiet room;
- whether toilet facilities are easily accessible;
- whether cold drinking water is available;
- whether managers and supervisors have been trained on health and safety issues relating to the menopause.

DEVELOP A MENOPAUSE POLICY

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To help employees feel supported and to know what support their employer offers, it's a good idea to have a policy specifically for the menopause. A menopause policy should include:

- an explanation of what the menopause is and how it can affect people;
- acknowledge the fact it can affect everyone differently;
- clear guidance on what support is available to anyone affected by it.

We would also recommend the menopause policy includes:

- who employees can reach out to if they have any queries related to the menopause;
- how the organisation is open and trained to talk and listen sensitively about the effects of the menopause;
- information on gender identity and gender reassignment discrimination and how talking with staff about this is important.

Remember even if there is a policy in place, managers should bear in mind, when supporting staff through the menopause, everyone's experience will be different and there is no one size fits all.



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MANAGE SICKNESS ABSENCE AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Menopause does not necessarily lead to poor performance, increased absenteeism or presenteeism, however, when someone is off sick because of the menopause, consider recording these absences separately from other absences. This is because there may be times when it could be unfair or discriminatory to measure menopause-related absence as part of the person's overall attendance record. Consider having a separate menopause related absence reason for recording purposes.

It's also good practice for an employer to allow staff to go to medical appointments related to the menopause. There is no law for this type of time off, but employees and workers might have a right to paid or unpaid time off written in their employment contracts.



AdviserPlus

AdviserPlus can give your managers the confidence to deal with menopause related-issues more effectively with manager capability training.


We've helped hundreds of organisations by providing managers with the capacity, capability and commitment to spot signs of wellbeing issues as early as possible – before they become a problem.

Our HR Technical Consultants can also provide expert HR policy and document services. From best-practice, compliant policies, to bespoke solutions that align your documents with your business values and strategies.



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