

Managing Menopause at Work: A Guide for Line Managers and HR

Introduction

Menopause will impact around half of the UK population directly, and will indirectly impact almost all of us. With women over 50 being the fastest growing workforce demographic¹, it is estimated that by 2022, 1 in 6 British workers will be women over 50. This means that most women will go through menopause at some stage in their working life.

Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their employer, or ask for the support or adjustments that they may need. Furthermore, 90% of women say that their workplace has no support available for employees going through menopause².

Considering the vast number of employees menopause will impact, businesses are beginning to realise the importance of managing menopause correctly in the workplace. This guide has been created to inform and advise HR and line managers; covering the following:

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Understanding Menopause

What is menopause?

Menopause is a natural biological process where a woman's menstrual cycles end, periods stop and they are no longer able to get pregnant naturally. Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 as women's oestrogen levels decline; with the average age being 51 in the UK. It is also estimated that 1 in 100 women will experience menopause before 40 years of age³. This is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency. It is also important to note that certain surgical procedures can trigger menopause to start early; including breast cancer treatments, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hysterectomies.

Menopause is officially diagnosed when a woman has gone 12 months without a menstrual period. However, menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before periods stop (known as perimenopause) and last on average 4 years after the last period; although some women can experience symptoms for up to 15 years.

Stages of menopause

Perimenopause	Menopause	Postmenopause
Perimenopause refers to the period of time during which the female body makes its natural transition to menopause. Women can still get pregnant but oestrogen levels are decreasing and therefore fertility is reduced. This is typically when symptoms first start and could last a few months or even years before menopause itself is reached.	Once a woman has had 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period, the perimenopause period is over and menopause is reached. This means the ovaries have stopped producing eggs and oestrogen production is at minimum level. The average age for women to reach menopause in the UK is 51.	This is the period of time after menopause is reached where symptoms may continue to be present. It is expected that with time symptoms will decrease, on average lasting 4 years after periods stop. However, some women can continue to experience symptoms for a decade after the menopause transition.

What are the symptoms?

Menopause is a natural part of women's lives, but it's not always an easy transition. Three-quarters of women experience symptoms, whilst 1 in 4 will experience severe debilitating symptoms⁴. Symptoms can vary in frequency and intensity and can be both physical and psychological. The most commonly experienced symptoms are:

Joint stiffness, aches and pains	Hot flushes	Night sweats	Low mood
Poor memory	Fatigue	Depression	Anxiety and panic attacks
Trouble concentrating	Change in sex drive	Urinary problems	Headaches
Irregular, heavy and/or painful periods	Sleep problems	Hair thinning or loss	Dry skin, mouth and eyes
Chills	Vaginal dryness	Weight gain	Heart palpitations
Taking longer to recover from illness	Exacerbation of existing conditions	Digestive problems	Dizzy spells

Remember: Everyone will experience menopause differently. Try not to make assumptions and ensure that you understand each individual's needs.

Why Menopause Matters at Work

Due to the lack of education surrounding menopause, many women find they are unprepared for menopause itself, let alone managing it in the workplace.

The menopausal symptoms women experience can significantly impact their work lives. A recent survey of menopausal women in work by [Forth²](#) found that:



Further research has found that 1 in 5 menopausal women take time off to deal with their symptoms, whilst 1 in 50 are on long term sick leave⁴. Businesses that do not support their employees also find that they are more likely to lose valuable talent. Therefore, not only is the health and wellbeing of employees being impacted, but it can also cost the business in decreased performance/productivity and increased absence and turnover.

Thus, it is very much in the interests of an organisation to support workers with perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms in the workplace; in order to support wellbeing and retain/recruit skills and experience.

To download our infographic poster ‘Why Menopause Matters at Work: The Facts’ click [here](#).

Menopause and the law

Whilst employers have a moral and business case to support employees through menopause, there are also two provisions within employment law that relate to menopause at work: The Equality Act 2010 and The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

The Equality Act 2010

Legally protects employees from discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of protected characteristics including sex, disability and age. Whilst menopause is not specifically protected under the Equality Act, case law has demonstrated that menopausal symptoms can be accepted as a disability at an employment tribunal. Similarly, cases have been filed for sex discrimination, whereby employers have treated menopause less seriously than an ongoing health problem in a male employee.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Employers have a legal responsibility to do all they reasonably can to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of their employees. They must therefore ensure appropriate health and safety checks/risk assessments are carried out to reduce or remove risks where possible.



Hear from the expert

“Menopause is the ‘elephant in the room’ of HR issues. Present and an issue for so many women in the workforce but almost never directly addressed by employers. According to BUPA, menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the workplace. There are 34 symptoms of menopause, any other condition with so many indicators would rightly be treated seriously by employers.

Whether through worry of embarrassment or the risk of upsetting someone, it is not discussed enough in the workplace and it is a subject which is often found to be lacking in terms of support, either practically in the workplace or even at a policy level.

As with many workplace issues, education and communication are key. Women should feel free to be able to discuss menopause issues in an open, honest and healthy way whilst feeling that they can and will be supported by their employers.

The legal risk to employers should not be underestimated. An employee who feels they have been treated poorly as a result of menopause could potentially have claims for constructive dismissal and sex discrimination.

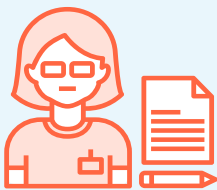
The cost and management time of defending a tribunal claim can cause serious disruption to a business, not to mention the impact of a discrimination award for a successful claim.”



Elissa Thursfield
Director and Head of Employment Law at
[Gamlins Solicitors](#)

Lived experiences of menopause at work

We asked women who were, or had, experienced menopause how it affected them at work... here are some of their responses:



Secretary

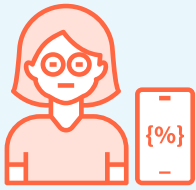
“There isn’t a specific day when you ‘start’ the menopause, you just realise over time that you are behaving differently. And that’s the scary bit, because you go from normal everyday you, to anxiously doubting yourself and getting out of control feelings. The impact I felt on my work life was the lack of concentration and that the normal, simple tasks I wouldn’t have thought twice about previously, I was having to concentrate on more to make sure I got them right. I suffered from anxiety which I’d never had before, it felt like an out of body experience. I was fighting these feelings that I wasn’t up to the job, second-guessing myself and wondering if I was going ever so slightly mad...oh and those hot flushes, perfectly described as power surges....head down so nobody comments how red your face is, a polite ‘excuse me’ to rush to the bathroom when you feel the heat travelling up your body, fan the underarms to disguise the sweaty blouse; the fear of being asked to take notes in an important meeting, wiping down those sweaty palms and fingers, trying desperately to hang onto the pen at the same time as trying to remember what the last person said.

I didn’t know much about menopause beforehand and naively didn’t expect it to have the effect on my work life that it did. The long-lasting effect is that even now I still don’t feel secure in my work abilities and for me, the thought of now trying to compete with much younger (but much less experienced) work colleagues fills me with dread...so we don’t ever get past menopause without it having changed us.”

“I have experienced hot flushes and night sweats every day/night for the past 2 years. The main impact on my work life is probably how tired I feel all the time through lack of sleep, and therefore a drop in energy levels and difficulty in concentrating. I work mostly from home now, so there hasn’t been much of an issue with my office work environment caused by my menopausal symptoms. However, on the occasions that I have had to attend meetings outside my home or office (usually in London with Investment Managers, Bankers and Lawyers), I often experience hot flushes which are extremely embarrassing. It is a real knock to your confidence when sweat starts to seep down your forehead (as well as neck and back) whilst discussing serious and important matters in close quarters with a group of people (and mostly men).”



Finance Director



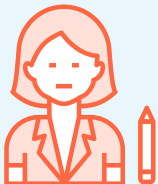
Executive Assistant

“The main menopause symptom that affects my work is brain fog/memory loss. I have to write everything down in case I forget, whereas before I would always be confident answering questions about things that had happened or were due to happen. This means I now feel I have to double-check everything as I have become less confident in my own abilities. The brain fog also means that I regularly forget people’s names... which is very embarrassing when you have worked with them for years!”

“When I first started the menopause, the worst bits were the hot flushes. I would be talking to someone and would burn up, turn bright red in the face and start sweating. It was very embarrassing. The other symptoms that had a big impact on my work were the brain fog and memory loss; I couldn’t remember the smallest, most recent things.”



Recruiter



Teacher

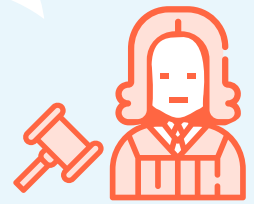
“Being a teacher, the body aches and joint pain in my ankles had the biggest effect on my work as it made it hard for me to stand throughout the day. I also found the mood swings hard to manage as I would go from happy to angry in what felt like a matter of minutes. Standing in front of a room full of teenagers also made covering the hot flushes hard.”

“How did menopause NOT affect me at work! The flooding that happened at work more than once... totally embarrassing. I had to bring spare knickers in case. The hot flushes where you wanted to strip off because your clothes were wet, some ladies used to even stand in the freezer to cool down! At first, I couldn’t understand why I was so hot as I always felt the cold. It was easy to talk to some of my female colleagues – well those of the age as the others just did not get it. One of my male colleagues said, “I wish my wife had told me she was menopausal instead of crazy”. It is not understood how it can be difficult to work when hormones are all over the place, especially when you can’t quite pinpoint what it is.”



Receptionist

“The main problem I have with menopause is the hot flushes. They come on so suddenly that I have to excuse myself because my face is pouring with sweat and I can’t concentrate, not to mention the embarrassment especially if I am clerking a male Judge. Although they probably have wives going through the same experience, I still find it awkward. Luckily for me if it happens during a hearing I can leave the courtroom and return when the flushes have subsided without any disruption. I also had months where I hardly slept due to night sweats, which obviously takes its toll trying to hold down a full-time job with no sleep for long periods of time.”



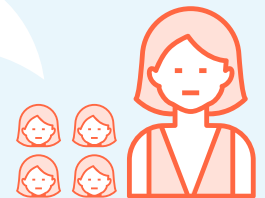
**High Court
Judge's Clerk**



**Educational
Consultant**

“The menopause nearly killed me. I was driving at the time, about an hour away from home. The menopause had really interrupted my sleep. I fell asleep at the wheel and I knew it was only for a nano-second, but my head nodded and I thought for a second... this could kill me! It was so bad that I could only drive for a maximum of half an hour before I'd have to pull over and have what I call a power nap in a lay-by somewhere to regain a level of consciousness so that I could carry on and get to where I needed to be.”

“I think I have been very lucky as my menopause symptoms have not adversely impacted my work. However this is mainly down to the fact that I work in a culture where it can be openly discussed (“hold on a moment, just having a really hot flush”) and I am comfortable doing this. I can see however how the many symptoms can impact our working life and feel strongly that more needs to be done to raise awareness in the workplace for everyone and make women feel comfortable about being honest if the menopause is affecting them.”



HR Director



**Optical
Assistant**

“At the age of 45 following a full abdominal hysterectomy (this means they took my womb, ovaries & cervix), I went into early menopause. In the workplace, my biggest challenge is brain fog. My thought processes are much slower, I struggle sometimes to find the right words to say to someone. I know what I want to say but sometimes cannot get the words out or say the wrong words. This is a source of great amusement among my younger colleagues, both male and female, but it is so embarrassing. This has caused me a lot of anxiety and made me feel at times quite worthless. It is not nice to be the butt of people’s jokes for something that is a natural part of life and something that all women will experience at some point in their lives.”

How to Support an Employee Through Menopause

It is clear to see that menopausal symptoms can significantly impact an individual's day-to-day life, which for the majority of women includes going to work. Menopause is therefore a real occupational health issue that needs to be addressed by employers, yet 72% of women in work say they feel unsupported when it comes to menopause⁴.

After extensive research and speaking to women who have experienced menopause at work, here are eight ways to support employees through menopause in the workplace:

1. Remove the stigma
2. Conduct appropriate health and safety checks
3. Make reasonable adjustments
4. Introduce a menopause policy
5. Train line managers
6. Introduce menopause champions
7. Sensitively monitor changes in performance and absence
8. Signpost to further support, information and resources



Remove the stigma

One of the biggest issues that employers face is that many women do not disclose their symptoms and therefore it is hard to help them. Similarly, many women who have to take time off due to their menopausal symptoms, do not tell their employer the real reasons for their absence.

This can be for many reasons, but most women express that it is due to the following: the subject matter is too personal; their symptoms being embarrassing for them and/or the person they would be confiding in; or they do not feel comfortable talking to their manager due to the nature of their relationship or because they may be male, younger or unsympathetic. They therefore worry that their symptoms will not be taken seriously, information disclosed would not be kept confidential, or that they will be seen as less capable and therefore negatively affect their career progression.

All of this is due to the stigma surrounding menopause in the workplace (and society as a whole!). Not only does this stigma make it difficult for women to open up about their experiences, but it has also created a knowledge gap whereby women themselves are not educated on the symptoms and changes they will experience, nor are their male counterparts.

Here are some suggestions on how to reduce the stigma in your organisation:

- Start the conversation
- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably discuss menopause
- Get employees to share their experiences
- Provide general menopause training for all employees (regardless of age or gender) to cover the symptoms and how it is a genuine workplace concern
- Challenge any unwanted or inappropriate comments or 'banter' around menopause
- Embed menopause champions within the organisation (see page 17)
- Promote external support groups and encourage menopause champions to start their own support group within work
- Introduce a menopause policy/guidelines (see page 15) and ensure that all employees are aware of it, can access it easily and understand its contents

Conduct appropriate health and safety checks

Employers have a legal duty to ensure menopausal symptoms are not made worse by the workplace and/or work practices, by assessing health and safety risks for perimenopausal and menopausal workers. The risk assessment should consider any workplace factors that might make menopausal symptoms worse. These may include, for example:

- Workplace temperature and ventilation
- Access to washroom and bathroom facilities
- Access to cold drinking water
- Access to quiet break out rooms
- Materials used in any uniform or clothing provided

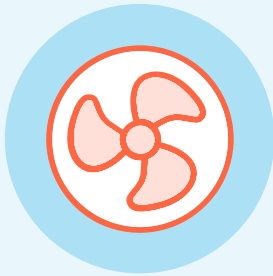
Once identified, most risks can be alleviated by making reasonable adjustments (see page 14).

It is also important to note that workplace stress can exacerbate menopausal symptoms. It is therefore advised to continually manage workplace stress as you would with any other employee. You may find the Everymind at Work [Workplace Mental Wellbeing Risk Assessment](#) Template useful for this.



Make reasonable adjustments

As discussed previously, case law has demonstrated that menopausal symptoms can be accepted as a disability at an employment tribunal. Like any other employee disability, employers should make reasonable adjustments to try to remove or reduce the negative effects of menopausal symptoms at work. Here are some practical steps that you may wish to consider when tailoring adjustments to an individual's specific needs:



Improve temperature control and ventilation by providing a fan or moving the desk near a window that opens



Offer flexible working arrangements such as a later start and finish time



Allow the employee to work from home when needed (if symptoms are bad)



Adjustments in uniform or access to spare/additional uniform if required



Cool and quiet break out rooms



Allowing the camera to be off in video calls



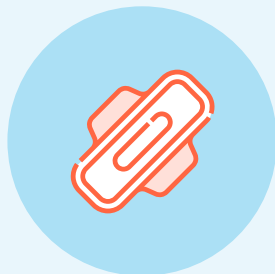
Moving their desk nearer to a bathroom



Easy access to cold drinking water



Use of washroom facilities



Have sanitary products available in the bathrooms



Provide the opportunity for regular breaks



Re-assess workload and job tasks

Remember: Symptoms may change over time so ensure you check in with the employee regularly to ensure the correct support continues to be provided.

Introduce a menopause policy

Whilst there is currently no legal requirement to have a menopause policy, it is advised that employers develop a specific policy or guidelines for menopause in the workplace to ensure that there is documented support and practices for employees experiencing menopause at work. This will help organisations implement sufficient plans to protect themselves and their employees, now and in the future.

A great example comes from Channel 4, who in 2019 launched the UK media industry's first dedicated [menopause policy](#) to support employees experiencing menopausal symptoms and to provide guidance for line managers. Alex Mahon, Chief Executive of Channel 4, said that they made the policy accessible to the public in the hope that it would make it “easier for other companies to benefit from the retention of expert women in their industries”.

Since its launch, 78% of Channel 4 staff feel better about Channel 4 as a place to work, whilst a high percentage of female employees have used the policy to support their menopausal symptoms. This highlights the importance of having a menopause policy/guidelines, not only for women experiencing menopause but for the whole business too.



Train line managers

The role of line managers in supporting employees experiencing menopause is crucial. Line managers are usually the first point of contact when an employee wants to disclose any issues they may be experiencing, however, 9 out of 10 women say they feel unable to talk to managers about menopause⁴. This needs to change.

To ensure line managers are equipped to deal with menopause at work and reduce the stigma, they should be trained to:

- Hold regular check-ins with employees that focus on wellbeing as well as performance
- Confidently have difficult conversations
- Not make assumptions or judgements
- Build good working relationships
- Understand menopause and how it can affect employees at work
- Spot changes in behaviour or performance
- Know the support and possible adjustments that may be appropriate
- Know the company's menopause policies and procedures
- Be ready to signpost to internal and external support
- Carefully manage changes in absence and performance

Remember the power of asking twice

Sometimes, when we ask someone how they are, they respond with “I’m fine, thank you”, or “I’m good thanks”. If you ask twice, you might get a different response on the second attempt because you are signalling that you are not asking out of politeness, or as a conversation starter, you are asking because you care.

Introduce menopause champions

Many companies have nominated specific 'menopause champions' in the workplace. These are typically members of staff who work in HR, are Mental Health First Aiders or have personal experience of menopause at work (although anyone can be one). The role of a menopause champion is voluntary and they must be enthusiastic about helping women through menopause at work. The role typically involves actively (both formally and informally) supporting menopause in the workplace, including tasks such as:

- Creating conversations around menopause in the workplace
- Facilitating support groups for women experiencing menopause
- Raising awareness of the organisation's policies and support available
- Arranging/delivering training for employees and/or leaders
- Liaising with senior leaders about providing appropriate support
- Designing new initiatives or projects
- Collating feedback from employees and presenting this to the leadership teams
- Providing a 'listening ear' to colleagues
- Signposting to internal and external support

As we have already discussed, women can be apprehensive about approaching line managers or HR about menopause, and therefore having someone available specifically for the subject can break down those barriers and make employees feel more comfortable. For menopause champions to be successful, they need to have knowledge of menopause itself, the symptoms and how they can affect work life, and a clear understanding of the organisation's policies/guidelines around menopause.


If you decide that menopause champions would work well in your organisation, make sure you add this to your menopause policy so that employees know who the champions are and how they can approach them.

Sensitively monitor changes in performance and absence

Due to the menopausal symptoms some women experience, their work performance may be impacted and absence may increase. Menopause is a long-term transition and any changes in performance and/or absence should be handled sympathetically to support the employee. Moreover, there are risks of disability, sex and/or age discrimination if a worker is mismanaged because of their menopause or perimenopause symptoms.

In relation to performance, the first step to supporting the employee is helping them address the cause of their dip in performance. The CIPD recommend that “where there are suspected or known health issues, these should be explored, prior to any formal processes for underperformance”. It is therefore important for line managers to have regular informal 1:1 meetings with their employees so that they can continuously approach performance conversations constructively and positively. This will help to build a good relationship, making it easier for employees to disclose any health issues they may be facing. Dips in performance should be managed by offering additional support where necessary/possible as well as readdressing workload and deadlines.

Moving to absence, it is important that the employer records menopausal absences in a way that can be distinguished 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 worker’s overall attendance record. To do this, you might consider adding ‘menopause symptoms’ (or similar) to your absence management system so that employees can be open and honest about their reason for absence.



Note: How line managers approach performance and absence management should be covered in the organisation’s menopause policy/guidelines so that all parties are aware of the process.

Signpost to further support, information and resources

It is useful to be armed with signposting information should anyone need it. Here is a selection of organisations that may be able to offer support for women experiencing menopause or premature menopause.

NHS England

To access information on the menopause/ early menopause, their symptoms and treatments, head to the NHS website.
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause>

Menopause and Me

An organisation that provides tailored information about all stages of menopause and the tools and support to help make informed choices when it comes to managing symptoms.
<https://www.menopauseandme.co.uk>

Manage My Menopause

A website providing the opportunity to get tailored menopausal advice from experts in post-reproductive health that is specific to each individual's needs.
<https://www.managemymenopause.co.uk>

My Menopause Doctor

Empowering women with the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding the treatment options that are available.
<https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk>

The Daisy Network

A charity dedicated to providing information and support for women who experience early menopause, premature menopause and/or premature ovarian insufficiency.
<https://www.daisynetwork.org>

Menopause Matters

An award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.
<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk>

Women's Health Concern

The patient arm of the British Menopause Society, providing a confidential, independent service to advise, reassure and educate women of all ages about their gynaecological and sexual health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns.
<https://www.womens-health-concern.org>

The Menopause Charity

A charity on a mission to bust myths, overcome ignorance and make menopause symptoms history. Supporting women and healthcare professionals with fact-based menopause research and access to the safest treatments.
<https://www.themenopausecharity.org>

Everymind at Work Resources

- [Why Menopause Matters at Work: The Facts](#)
- [Menopause Symptoms](#)
- [Why Menopause Matters at Work](#)
- [Managing Menopause: Hints & Tips for Managers](#)
- [Signposting Support: Menopause](#)
- [Understanding Menopause](#)



Sources:

1. CIPD (2019). The Menopause at Work.
2. Forth (2019). A Study of Menopause in the Workplace.
3. NHS England. Overview of Menopause.
4. Nuffield Health (2017). One in four with menopause symptoms concerned about ability to cope with life.