

University of Leeds
Faculty of Medicine and Health

Guidance for supporting menopause in the workplace

Introduction

The management of gender-specific health issues other than pregnancy are rarely discussed in the workplace.

Around **75-80% of women** of menopausal age are in work and whilst some women will have no issues, the majority of women are currently unwilling to disclose menopause-related health problems to line managers.

This guidance document is for members of staff and those with staff management responsibilities to increase understanding of what menopause is and to establish an environment for discussions to take place regarding support to assist with the management of menopausal symptoms in the workplace.

Every woman is different, and we recognise it is not feasible to set out specific and structured guidelines but this document sets out how you can confidently have good conversations. It also outlines which of the University's policy and practices support this area as well as the support available from Human Resources and Occupational Health.

Key principles

- The University is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.
- The School of Medicine is committed to progressive ways of working which support female staff to achieve their full potential.
- Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life and should not be taboo or 'hidden'. The aim is to increase people's understanding of what menopause is to create an environment where we can talk openly about it, without embarrassment.
- Menopause isn't always an easy transition. Not every woman will suffer with symptoms but for those that do, the right support can improve their experience in work benefiting both the individual and the organisation.

What is the Menopause?

Menopause is a natural part of female ageing when menstruation stops. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur anytime up to mid-60s.

Peri-menopause is the transition period leading up to the menopause during which women may experience symptoms due to fluctuating hormones.

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40; this is known as premature menopause. This can occur naturally or because of some cancer treatments or a hysterectomy.

For the purposes of this guidance the term menopause refers to all aspects of this transitional period.

Menopause Symptoms

- Overall, this period of hormonal change and symptoms of the menopause usually last **between 4 and 8 years** from the last period, and 1 in 10 women experience symptoms for up to 12 years
- Around **30-60% of women** experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause
- **20-25% of women** will have hot flushes (which may not be their only symptom) which adversely affect their perceived quality of personal and working lives
- **1:4 women** experience severe symptoms

Symptoms associated with the menopause include hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats, sleep disturbance, fatigue, poor concentration / memory, irritability, mood disturbance, depression and anxiety, urinary tract infection/genito-urinary infections, skin irritation and dryness.

Impact of Symptoms

The impact of symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life. In the workplace they may:

- Lead to tiredness, poor concentration and memory.
- Be stressful, cause embarrassment and diminish confidence.

It is important to recognise that women may not experience the above symptoms in isolation. There may also be other factors about their circumstances to consider, including the development of other health conditions, caring responsibilities for ageing parents and relatives and some may also still have children living at home.

This is a normal stage of life and many adjustments can easily be made. It is important to acknowledge the potential impact of the menopause on women and become aware of the simple steps that can be taken by individuals themselves as well as by managers to support this.

Support for Individuals

It is important that all staff are proactive in taking responsibility for their health and wellbeing. For women who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and their capacity to carry out their work they are encouraged to seek support which may include:

- Seeing your GP for advice on available treatment options.
- Discussing your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager you feel comfortable talking to.
- Seeking advice from the Occupational Health service. Employees can make a self-referral to occupational health but the University will not be able to implement any recommendations including work place adjustments unless the individual gives consent for a management referral which will usually be initiated through HR. Occupational Health will advise on this as necessary.
- Seeking confidential support from Staff Counselling and Support Services. Staff are able to contact the service through a self-referral.

- If those you work with are supportive, this can make a big difference. Talk about your symptoms and solutions with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing symptoms, use humour to deflect embarrassment, and work out your preferred coping strategies and working patterns.

The following are other examples of practical things that may help women dependent on their personal experience of the menopause:

- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks) especially before presentations or meetings.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and other potentially helpful techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy, as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes through discussion with healthcare professionals.

Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information in Appendix A.

Guidance for Managers

Every woman's experience of the menopause is different and there is no standard approach to supporting women at work. However, as with any health-related matter, we should provide a supportive approach and no one should experience less favourable treatment as a result of the menopause.

Discussing the menopause

Regular, informal conversations and / or catch ups between manager and employee may enable discussions around changes in health to take place more easily, including issues relating to the menopause.

Some women may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience of the menopause with their manager and may prefer to initially seek guidance and support from other sources within the University.

If an employee does wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), above all, it is important to listen to women and respond sympathetically to any requests for adjustments at work.

Similarly a male of female employee may wish to speak to you if the menopause is adversely affecting someone in their family which is in turn having an impact on them from a work perspective.

If an employee does wish to speak to you:

- Allow enough time.
- Find an appropriate room to ensure confidentiality.
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported or signpost to sources of support (HR, Occupational Health, Health and Safety, Staff Counselling and Psychological Support).

- Have a follow up meeting.

Advice regarding support and possible work adjustments can also be sought from HR (facilitating the involvement of Occupational Health and sign posting other sources of support as applicable).

Workplace support and adjustments

If further support is needed:

- Put support / adjustments in place and make sure there's a record of these.
- Have regular dialogue about support required and follow up meetings to review any support/adjustments.
- Agreeing if other colleagues need to know about any adjustments (the reason doesn't have to be disclosed).

Some possible support or adjustments may include:

Flexibility working arrangements for those experiencing debilitating symptoms. For example:

- Where the role permits, allowing staff to work around their symptoms, perhaps by allowing them to rest when they are tired and make the time up later, or permitting occasional homeworking when symptoms are severe.
- Some women experiencing the menopause will find that they have times of the day where symptoms are more or less problematic and start and finish times could be adjusted to take this into account. For example, women with disturbed sleep patterns may find they are more productive with a later start time.
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day.
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments.

Other examples of adjustments and support which may be appropriate dependent on the individuals' circumstances:

- Signposting changing and washing facilities for women to change clothes during the working day.
- Where uniforms are provided, consider if natural fibres where possible, and provide additional uniforms to ensure it is possible to change during the day. Uniform requirements may also be adjusted if necessary.
- Facilitating a more comfortable working environment, taking into account temperature and lighting, to help women manage their body temperature. Make desk fans easily available and consider if ventilation is sufficient or can be improved.
- Looking at how technology can help, e.g. for reminders or note taking if memory is affected.

Appendix A- Further Information:

Supporting information within the University

Policies, procedures and guidance:

- [Human Resources](#)
- [Flexible working policy](#)
- [Dignity and mutual respect policy](#)
- [Managing stress at work](#)

Services:

- [Wellbeing, Safety and Health Services](#)
- [Occupational Health Service](#)
- [Staff Counselling and Psychological Support](#)
- [Health and Safety](#)

External sources of information

- [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\) guidelines](#). These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you.
- The [National Health Service](#) provides an overview of menopause.
- The [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists](#) offer further information in a dedicated area of their website.
- [Henpicked](#) provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories.
- [Faculty of occupational medicine](#) provides information about menopause within the workplace.

This guidance has been created by a working group in the School of Medicine led by Barbara McPherson (LIME) and Laura Dowling (HR.)