



# Policy -Menopause v1.0





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## Roles and Responsibilities

### Employees:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health;
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health;
- If a member of staff is unable to speak to their line manager, or if their line manager is not supporting them, they can speak to HR ( [hrdirect@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:hrdirect@denbighshire.gov.uk) ), their Union, or Occupational Health ( [occupational.health@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:occupational.health@denbighshire.gov.uk) )
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment;
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues;
- Understanding any necessary adaptations their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

### Line Managers

- Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance;
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally;
- Use the guidance, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adaptations required;
- Record adaptations agreed, and actions to be implemented;
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates;
- Ensure that all agreed adaptations are adhered to.
- Where adaptations are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager may:
  1. Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice;
  2. Refer the employee to Occupational Health if appropriate;
  3. Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical;
  4. Update the action plan, and continue to review.

## **Occupational Health**

- Carry out an holistic assessment of individuals as to whether or not menopause may be contributing to symptoms/wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with up-to-date research;
- Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice;
- Provide support and advice to HR and Line Managers in determining and agreeing adaptations, if required;
- Monitor referrals due to menopause symptoms, and provide additional signposting, where required;
- Review the Menopause Advice Sheet, and keep this up to date.

## **Human Resources (HR)**

- Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of this Policy and Guidance;
- Attend any training sessions made available;
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in respect of related absence levels and performance.

## Introduction

The council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, men should be aware too.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adaptations that they may need.

This policy sets out the guidelines for employees and managers on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. It is not contractual, and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment – however, if the council wishes to amend the Menopause Policy, employees will be consulted on proposed changes via the recognised Trade Unions.

## Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Foster an environment in which employees can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidently have good conversations, and are clear on the council's policy and practices, supported by Human Resources and Occupational Health.
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work.
- Ensure that women suffering with menopause symptoms feel confident to discuss it, and ask for support and any adaptations so they can continue to be successful in their roles.
- Reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms.
- Assure women that we are a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.

## **Definitions**

### **Menopause:**

Is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating, and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.

### **Perimenopause:**

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.

### **Post menopause:**

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

### **Symptoms of Menopause**

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Some women also experience difficulty sleeping.

## **Overview and Guidance for Managers and Women**

The menopause is a natural part of ageing for women. The medical definition of the menopause is when a woman has her last period. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur any time up to a women's mid-60s. A premature menopause can occur, with periods stopping before the age of 40, either naturally or as an effect of a medical condition or its treatment. Around 1 in 100 women will experience a premature menopause and this of course can be at a time when still planning to conceive.

Around 30-60% of women experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause. These are associated with a decrease in the body's production of the hormone oestrogen. For some, symptoms include hot flushes, night sweats and related symptoms such as sleep disruption, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Hot flushes are short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make the skin red and sweaty. Severe flushes can cause sweat to soak through clothing. Mood disturbances, anxiety and depression are also reported. Symptoms on average continue for four years from the last period, and 1 in 10 women experience symptoms for up to 12 years.

These symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life. At work, they can cause embarrassment, diminish confidence and can be stressful to deal with. The menopause may be compounded by the development of other health conditions, as well as coinciding with caring responsibilities for ageing parents and relatives. Some women may also still have children living at home.

There is good reason to consider the needs of this group of workers. In 2016, the employment rate for women in the UK of nearly 70% was among the highest since records began in 1971. Over the last four years the number of women over the age of 50 has also increased: a trend predicted to continue. Employers have responsibilities for the health and safety of all their employees, but there are also clear business reasons for proactively managing an age-diverse workforce. Some employers have been slow to recognise that women of menopausal age may need specific considerations and many employers do not yet have clear processes to support women coping with menopausal symptoms.

These practical guidelines aim to help women experiencing troublesome menopausal symptoms, and to support them and their colleagues and managers in tackling the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms.

## Guidance for managers/employers

Regular, informal conversations between manager and employee may enable discussion of changes in health, including issues relating to the menopause. It may be valuable simply to acknowledge this is a normal stage of life and that adaptations can easily be made. Such conversations can identify support at work that can help women remain fully productive and encourage them to discuss any relevant health concerns with their GP. Employees should be able to expect respectful behaviours at work including those that relate to their gender and age. The provision of information (for example, see the infographic that accompanies this guidance ( <http://fom.ac.uk/menopause> ) may be helpful in these discussions and for more general awareness-raising. However, employers need to recognise that some women may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience of the menopause with their manager and an occupational health professional can be very useful.

There are recommendations about working conditions for menopausal women produced by the European Menopause and Andropause Society (EMAS). These are adapted below:

- Provide training for employees and managers to raise awareness and convey that the menopause can present difficulties for some women at work.
- Facilitate discussion about troublesome symptoms. Employers can help by communicating that health-related problems such as those experienced during the menopause are normal.
- Review control of workplace temperature and ventilation and see how they might be adapted to meet the needs of individuals.
- This might include having a desktop fan in an office, or locating a workstation near an opening window or away from a heat source.
- Consider flexible working hours or shift changes. If sleep is disturbed, later start times might be helpful.
- Provide access to cold drinking water in all work situations, including off site venues.
- Ensure access to wash room facilities and toilets, including when travelling or working in temporary locations.

Additional considerations may be required for specific occupations or locations. For example:

- Where uniforms are compulsory, flexibility is helpful. This might include the use of thermally comfortable fabrics, optional layers, being allowed to remove neckties or jackets, as well as the provision of changing facilities.
- Where work requires constant standing or prolonged sitting, having access to a rest room (e.g. to sit during work breaks) would be helpful, as would space to move about for those women in sedentary roles.

- In customer-focused or public-facing roles, it may help to have access to a quiet room for a short break so as to manage a severe hot flush.

Severe menopausal symptoms and their consequences may combine to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day to day activities – potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act.

Monitoring the projected age distribution of the workforce will enable employers to be proactive about the needs of their employees, avoiding a reactive approach to age-related health issues. Advice from occupational health professionals can support human resource policy. Information for employers about how to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce encompassing women of menopausal age can be obtained from a variety of sources such as the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service ( [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) ), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development ( [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk) ) and other professional bodies.

Embedding the menopause in a wider health and wellbeing agenda may help encourage discussion of issues related to supporting longer working lives.

For women who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and their capacity to work:

- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at the end of this guidance).
- See your GP for advice on available treatment options.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager you feel comfortable talking to.
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- If there is an occupational health service available, make an appointment to discuss support and possible work adaptations.
- 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.
- 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 such as weight reduction, smoking cessation and exercise.

It is important to be aware that the menopause is a natural and temporary stage in women's lives and that not all women experience significant symptoms. The menopause has been regarded as a taboo subject. But this is changing as employers gradually acknowledge the potential impact of the menopause on women and become aware of the simple steps they can take to be supportive.

## **Managers' Guidance for employee discussions**

We recognise that every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

All advice is given, and written, in accordance with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) recommendations and best practice.

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a male employee wishes to speak about a family member, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation;
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality;
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly;
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below)
- Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use the template ([attached](#)) to record the meeting, so that all parties agree what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential, and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom;
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or break room.

## **Symptoms Support**

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively; support for women should be considered as detailed below:

### **Hot Flushes:**

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source;
- Easy access to drinking water;
- Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket;
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

### **Heavy/light Periods:**

- Have permanent access to toilet and wash facilities;
- Request an extra uniform;
- Ensure sanitary disposable products are available in toilet facilities.
- Provide storage space for a change of clothing if required.

### **Headaches:**

- Have ease of access to fresh drinking water;
- Offer a quiet space to work;
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices;
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

### **Difficulty Sleeping:**

- Ask to be considered for flexible working, particularly suffering from a lack of sleep.
- Consider homeworking if appropriate to the employees role, if fatigued to reduce travelling etc.
- Agree time out from others, when required.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – outside of the work area;
- Identify a 'time out space' to be able to go to 'clear their head';
- Contact the council's Employee Assistance Programme provider on .....

**Loss of Confidence:**

- Ensure there are regular Personal Development Discussions;
- Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues;
- Offer coaching to the individual which might help with confidence;
- Offer reassurance about a person's value and worth in the organisation
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

**Poor Concentration:**

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly;
- Review task allocation and workload;
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment;
- Offer quiet space to work;
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices;
- Reduce interruptions;
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having 'protected time', so that they are not disturbed;
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

**Anxiety:**

- Promote counselling services provided by EAP.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – outside of work their area;
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques;
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk.

Discuss whether the member of staff has visited their GP. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

If they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make an Occupational Health referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace.

## References and links

All colleagues can access **counselling** by contacting Occupational Health.

**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. You can find out more on their website.

The **National Health Service** provides an overview of menopause. You can find more on their website

**Menopause information.** The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer further information their dedicated area of their website.

**Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)** information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more their website.

### Further Sources of Information

- <http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- The Daisy Network – <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>
- Healthtalk.org – <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/later-life/menopause/topics>
- Women’s Health Concerns – <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/focus-series/menopause/>
- The Menopause Exchange – <http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/>
- NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management – <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
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