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Introduction

The aim of this guidance is to help create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for adjustments at work.

We will aim to promote a greater understanding of the menopause and seeking to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices.

This guidance may also be useful for employees who have family members who are going through the menopause, as this may also be affecting them.

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What is the Menopause?

The menopause marks the time when a woman’s periods stop. It is a natural part of ageing and usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55 and the average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. However, 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before the age of 40.

What is the Perimenopause?

This is the time when menopausal symptoms start to be experienced but before periods stop and the menopause officially starts.

A woman is said to have reached the menopause once she has not had a period for one year. Up to this point, she is perimenopausal; after this point, she can be described as post-menopausal.

Menopause Symptoms?

Most women will experience menopausal symptoms, with different levels of severity. Some symptoms can be difficult to deal with and quite severe and have a significant impact on everyday activities. Every women’s experience of the menopause will be different but some of the most common symptoms that women may experience are:

Hot flushes which can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downwards. At night they are felt as night sweats. Most flushes only last a few minutes and the woman may sweat and the face, neck and chest become red and patchy. Some women find these uncomfortable, disruptive and embarrassing. Hot flushes can start before the menopause and last for several years after the last period. The flushes can be accompanied by a quicker or stronger heart rate.

Sleep disturbance can be caused by the night sweats, although it can also be caused by the anxiety women feel during the menopause. Sleep loss can cause irritability, lack of concentration and tiredness during the day.

Anxiety, low mood, depression and irritability

The menopause can be linked to anxiety, low mood, depression and irritability which can impact on both home and work life. This can affect women who have not suffered in this way previously.

Urinary problems may also occur during the menopause, and many women have recurrent lower urinary tract infections, such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.

Heavy periods and clots are common during the menopause and some periods may last longer. Most women will also experience irregular periods, which are harder to prepare for.

Vaginal symptoms such as vaginal dryness, itching or discomfort are common. These happen not only during the menopause and shortly after but can occur in the in the period leading up to the change. Linked to this is a loss of libido.

Other symptoms can include problems with memory, concentration and spatial awareness. Women who have previously juggled several tasks easily may need to adopt a different approach. Many women also experience dry skin, dry hair, joint pains and headaches.

The symptoms described do not necessarily impact on a woman at work but could affect how she feels about herself and impact adversely on her confidence and self-esteem which will impact on her at work.

Talking about the menopause

The menopause is not openly discussed in our society and some women may find it difficult to talk about it with their manager and colleagues. Because of this women may feel the need to take time off work to deal with symptoms without disclosing the real reason. Encouraging individuals to talk about their situation with their line manager or another supportive individual can really help.

Every woman experiences the menopause differently and so presumptions shouldn't be made, instead ask what, if any, support or adjustments may be required.

It is important to consider how menopausal symptoms can affect women at work or impact on the way she does her job. Doing so will better enable us to consider what adjustments may be necessary to support women who are going through the menopause.

How can Managers/Head teachers support employees who are affected by Menopause?

Managers/Head teachers should be supportive and aware of the menopausal symptoms, so that women don't feel embarrassed to approach them and discuss how the menopause is affecting their health. Menopause can affect people's confidence and it can be extremely daunting and embarrassing talking to someone who has no idea about the menopause.

It is good practice to ask all employees about any health conditions that they may have or be experiencing. This could be undertaken as part of the regular one to one meetings. Any specific needs that are identified (including agreed workplace adjustments) should be recorded and reviewed at least annually, this could form part of regular supervision meetings. Managers will need to maintain confidentiality in handling health information relating to the menopause.

Managers should also consider discussing things such as menopause during team meetings/briefings and to challenge derogatory language and remarks in the workplace in relation to the menopause. This will help remove the stigma around the subject which may help employees who are affected by menopause feel more comfortable when approaching the subject with their manager and colleagues.

It is important to consider that an employee themselves may not be going through the menopause, it could still be affecting them if someone in their personal life is.

Appendix 1 contains information on menopause treatments and websites which employees may find helpful. Libraries also stock books which help women (and their colleagues/friends/family) to understand the menopause.

Workplace Adjustments

Workplace adjustments will need to be fully considered and implemented accordingly for women currently going through the menopause and experiencing symptoms. This will include those diagnosed with peri-menopause symptoms, which can affect women from their mid-30's.

The purpose of a workplace adjustment is removing barriers wherever possible that get in the way of an individual doing their job. The adjustment should be tailored to address the barriers/issues experienced specifically by that individual, and should be identified through the discussions with the individual and other relevant experts (where appropriate). It is essential to avoid making assumptions as the menopause symptoms vary between women. There is a list of potential workplace adjustments in appendix 2.

Many women may not need any adjustments to be made but if they are needed, this is a positive way to keep valued employees in the workplace and continuing to deliver in their role. Menopause lasts for a phase only and it is important not to lose staff through sickness or as leavers through lack of understanding and support.

Managing an employee's absence?

The menopause may cause an employee to have an increase in absences from work, it is important to remember that an employee who is going through the menopause, or who is effected by a family member who is going through the menopause, may be covered by the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, it is essential to take this into account when an employee has absences linked to the menopause, for more information on managing absences please view the '[Absence and Wellbeing Procedure](#)'.

Additional Support

There is information available externally through the following websites

[NHS website - menopause guidance](#)

[34 Menopause Symptoms](#)

[Nice.org.uk guidance](#)

[Women's health concern website - factsheets on the menopause](#)

[Women's health concern website - healthy menopause](#)

[Project Aware website - managing exercise](#)

[Menopause matters website](#)

[Simply hormones website](#)

[Henpicked.net website](#) - an informal forum style alternative to the above professional help websites.

Additional help for partners of those going through menopause

[Healthspan website](#)

Appendix 1 - Treatment Options

Some women do not need any assistance with the symptoms of the menopause and they can go through this natural stage with no requirement for medical interventions. However there are a number of treatment options and it is vital that women are aware of all the different treatments available.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

There are a number of different types of HRT that can be prescribed for women. HRT is the main treatment for women suffering with symptoms of the menopause. HRT replaces the oestrogen that your body no longer produces after the menopause and can be taken in many forms such as tablets, gel, or patches. It is shown to be extremely effective in providing relief to many of the menopausal symptoms but for some women, there are side effects and risks. As a prescribed drug, a GP or nurse will discuss this on an individual basis.

Anti-depressants

Anti-depressants or other similar medications can be prescribed instead of HRT to help ease some of the symptoms such as low mood, depression and headaches.

Natural Treatments

There are a number of natural products available in chemists, supermarkets and pharmacies. However, if a woman wants to use these remedies, it is advisable to discuss the full range of options with a GP.

Healthier Lifestyle

Making simple dietary and lifestyle changes can often improve menopausal symptoms. For example, eating a healthy, balanced diet and taking plenty of regular exercise can help avoid putting on extra weight. Combining aerobic activities, such as walking, with strength and flexibility exercises will also help maintain bone strength and muscle mass. There are also self-help alternatives such as strategies for managing stress, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, going for a short walk whilst at work may also help.

Appendix 2 – Potential Workplace Adjustments

The following adjustments could be made:

- Provide private area/spaces available for women to rest / recover /make a telephone call to personal or professional support. Women going through the menopause may need to manage the impact of the symptoms, a private space to rest temporarily or talk with a colleague before they can return to their workspace.
- Flexibility and increased frequency in breaks - flexibility to take breaks or rest breaks will enable people managing impairments / conditions or pain to contribute more fully in the workplace. A member of staff with medication may want to take it in quiet / private space and at specific times. Other staff might benefit more from being able to take rest breaks when needed rather than at pre-determined times. Some may just need time to walk around and ease pain in arthritic joints / back pain.
- Where possible, facilitate a comfortable working environment for those suffering menopausal symptoms. This will include adequate drinking water supplies, temperature controlled areas, showers/ washing facilities, area to change, adequate access to toilet facilities.
- Staff going through the menopause may request to be positioned near a door or window or maybe provided with a desk fan where possible. Positioning within the office or in an area where they can get a breeze should be considered.
- Employees who are required to wear a uniform may request to adjust or partly remove certain items where possible, for example a scarf.
- Provision of additional uniforms may be considered to ensure individuals can change during the day. Pro Natural fibres like cotton are preferable to synthetic materials if an employee is experiencing hot flushes and sweating. Uniform made of natural materials may be considered.
- Flexible working arrangements may be considered for those that are experiencing debilitating symptoms. Menopause symptoms can increase in stressful situations and when the person is tired symptoms can increase. This also enables staff to work productively and manage the impact of their impairments. This may include flexibility for women who need medical treatment or to attend clinics, hospital or doctor appointments and also for women and men seeking advice relating to the menopause.
- Consideration to be given for flexible working arrangements rather than the usual set times including split shifts if the day to day business allows, later starts, earlier finishing times. Many staff have a best part of the day when they are able to work most productively on a task. Adjusting a shift to suit that time is a workplace adjustment. In the case of women going through the menopause who has trouble sleeping at night a later start may be appropriate.