

MENOPAUSE AT WORK

Dealing with menopausal symptoms can be tough: evidence suggests that 50% of women going through the menopause experience symptoms that affect their working life



We have a look at how managers can support team members, and how colleagues can support each other.

What is the Menopause?

The menopause is a natural stage of life for women that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins several years before menopause itself, when the ovaries gradually begin to make less oestrogen. Women may feel its effects in their 30s or even earlier and symptoms can last around four years or more.

Every woman's menopause experience is unique, the extent and type of symptoms are extremely varied among different women. Not all physical changes caused by reduced female hormone levels are negative and many of the emotional and social changes can actually be energising.

These are a few common symptoms associated with perimenopause or the menopause:

- Hot flushes
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Joint pain and muscle tension
- Tingling hands and feet
- Itchy skin
- Disrupted sleep and excessive night sweats (causing extreme tiredness during the day)

- Memory lapses and concentration difficulties
- Anxiety and panic attacks

Awareness in the Workplace

The chances are you work alongside or manage women who are experiencing menopause symptoms. However, women might choose not to disclose their symptoms at work and many who take time off because of their symptoms, won't tell their colleagues or manager the real reason for their absence.

This may be because of a desire for privacy, but could also reflect a feeling that male colleagues or those who are younger, will not understand or sympathise. There may even be a concern that they will be thought of as less capable or that their chances of promotion or job security would be at risk.

Best Practice for Supporting Menopause Wellbeing at Work

Knowledge, Understanding and Confidentiality. Management should make it clear to all staff that their organisation will handle menopause in the workplace sensitively, and with dignity and respect. Training and/or coaching for HR and line managers will also help to embed and support this approach. It may be helpful to appoint a specific person who has knowledge and training to be a point of contact for both colleagues and managers who need advice or support.

Workplace Environment. Some menopausal symptoms might be made worse by the workplace environment or working practices: for example, the temperature and ventilation in the workplace or the materials used in an organisation's uniform. Willingness to make changes to help a colleague manage their symptoms when doing their job will help them to feel more comfortable, able and supported.

Conduct a health and safety risk assessment and discuss with your colleague what might help. Some changes could be quite straightforward, for example:

- Offering them a fan
- Moving their desk closer to a window that opens
- Encouraging regular breaks
- Being flexible (where possible) with start and finish times

Other possibilities, depending on circumstances, might include:

- Working from home where practical and when appropriate
- Having the option of going part-time or switching to a job share
- Allowing time off if they cannot carry on working that day
- Adapting certain duties in their role to make their job more manageable

Some Useful Reading

- [The Unexpected Symptoms of Menopause](#)
- [Menopause at Work Matters](#)
- [Challenging the Culture of Menopause at Work](#)

