



MENOPAUSE SUPPORT AT WORK

A FU⁺UREPLUS GUIDE



+ WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSE?

The menopause is a natural hormone transition and normal part of ageing that occurs when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. The transitional period leading up to the menopause is called the perimenopause where there can be significant changes for women.

There are a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms associated with the menopause. Common symptoms include, but are not limited to, insomnia, night sweats and hot flashes, changes in mood, anxiety, joint aches, irregular periods, memory loss, and fatigue. The range, severity, and duration of symptoms vary from person to person. Some transgender and non-binary people may also experience menopausal symptoms and should receive support and flexibility tailored to their needs.

+ WHY THE MENOPAUSE IS A WORKPLACE ISSUE

According to a 2017 UK Government report, menopausal women are the fastest-growing demographic in the workforce. One-third of the workforce is over 50, and nearly 8 in 10 women going through the menopause are in work.

Menopausal symptoms, frequently exacerbated by a lack of focused support in managing them, lead some employees to reduce their work hours or duties, while others leave their jobs entirely. Research conducted by BUPA found that almost 900,000 women in the UK have left their jobs due to menopausal symptoms. Clearly, left ignored the menopause will cost employers in talent and profitability.

It's time to break the taboo surrounding the menopause and include it in the business agenda. This guide will provide some key considerations and practical tips to help employers and line managers foster an inclusive work environment and support employees through the menopause.



+ YOUR ROLE AS AN EMPLOYER

Education and awareness

Creating internal campaigns and webinars, sharing useful resources, and inviting external speakers are great ways to normalise the conversation and educate employees. In addition, raise awareness around international events, such as [World Menopause Day](#) (held on October 18 every year).

Change the culture

Promote open and inclusive cultures where employees can freely express their struggles with symptoms. In addition to increasing awareness and knowledge, employers must offer various ways for individuals to access necessary support promptly.

Policies and procedures

Revise policies to avoid disadvantaging employees during the menopause. This may involve acknowledging the menopause in sick leave and flexible working policies, such as recording menopause-related sick leave as an ongoing issue, rather than separate absences.

Furthermore, consider implementing a specific menopause policy, and keep in mind that implementation and regular review are key for policy effectiveness.

The working environment, legal duties, and risk assessments

First and foremost, make sure you're aware of how the menopause relates to the law in your operational location(s). For example, in the UK, the Equality Act 2010 and Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

The menopause itself is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, but if an employee/worker is put at a disadvantage or treated unfavourably due to their menopausal symptoms, this could be discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, such as disability, sex, or gender reassignment.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 indirectly supports managing menopausal symptoms by mandating safe workplaces and reinforcing the need for reasonable adjustments when symptoms qualify as a disability under the Equality Act 2010.



Risk assessments should cater to cisgender women, transgender, and non-binary individuals to avoid exacerbating menopausal symptoms. Although every workplace is different, symptoms can be exacerbated by:

- Poor ventilation
- High temperatures
- Lack of access to cold water
- Perceived overcrowding and noise without quiet spaces
- Problems with accessing toilets
- Absence of natural light

External support services

Adopt a proactive approach to menopause support at work. Beyond raising awareness and knowledge, and providing internal support options, consider investing in external support services. These may form part of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Offerings like virtual GP consultations, expert clinical guidance, and helplines can be highly beneficial for employees. They can seek assistance at any time and from anywhere, enhancing accessibility and support.

+ YOUR ROLE AS A LINE MANAGER

Good people management is crucial to supporting employee health and wellbeing. As a line manager, you are typically the first point of contact if a colleague needs to discuss their health concerns or request for work and/or working hours adjustments. Additionally, you are often responsible for implementing policies and practices, as well as managing absences and supporting an effective return to work.

You don't have to be an expert, but having a basic understanding of the perimenopause and menopause, as well as your company policies and legal obligations is crucial. This knowledge should equip you to have supportive conversations, direct colleagues to appropriate services, and comprehensive the available support options.

The following page provides more detailed guidance on what you can do as a line manager.



Review your managerial approach

Cultivating trust with colleagues is vital for encouraging open discussions about health concerns and necessary work adjustments. Simple changes, such as establishing relationships built on trust, empathy, and respect, conducting regular one-to-one meetings, understanding individual needs, and checking in on colleagues' well-being regularly can make a significant difference.

Starting the conversation

Discussing health concerns or conditions can be sensitive. Approach these discussions with empathy, in a private setting, and refrain from making assumptions or judgements.

Approach the situation with general inquiries, without pressing for specific details. Be understanding and supportive if colleagues choose not to share anything.

Offer colleagues the choice to speak to another manager or HR representative if they feel more comfortable, ensuring they have a safe space to raise any concerns.

Confidentiality

Treat colleagues' health information confidentially. If they want any information to be shared, obtain explicit consent beforehand; discuss with them what information they want to be shared and with whom.

Workplace adjustments checklist

A checklist can aid discussions between an employee and manager, helping identify necessary workplace adjustments for menopausal support. Regularly review these adjustments as needs can evolve over time.

Possible adjustments and general considerations:

- Regular breaks to get up and walk about where stiffness and joint pain is an issue
- Change working hours and consider flexible working arrangements
- Reduce business travel
- Consider remote work options
- Allow for frequent toilet breaks, especially during long meetings
- Acknowledge the potential issue of higher absenteeism when considering applications for sick leave



+ NO 'ONE SIZE FITS ALL'

Employees should be provided with a range of different mechanisms and avenues to access the support they need, when they need it. Every person experiencing the menopause will have different symptoms for different lengths of time and different levels of severity. Therefore, assumptions about how to support them can be counterproductive, as the approach must be tailored to the individual's needs.

+ NEED MORE HELP?

Here are some useful resources:

- [CIPD Knowledge Hub](#)
- [NHS guidance](#)
- [Henpicked, Menopause in the Workplace](#)
- [International Menopause Society](#)
- [Peppy Health](#)
- [Menopause Support](#)

If you are creating a Menopause Policy for your business, search for our our Menopause Policy Guide in the Help Hub for more information on what to include. If you would like further assistance in developing a menopause support programme or policy, please get in touch with your FuturePlus Advisor or email: team@future-plus.co.uk