



AVENUE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION

Guidance on the Menopause in the Workplace 2021 - 2024

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CONTENTS

PAGE

Purpose	2
Menopause:	2
What is the Female Menopause?	2
Symptoms of the Female Menopause	2
What are the treatments and support?	2-3
 Managers	 3
Having a sensitive conversation	4
How can I support my member of staff?	4
What else do I need to consider?	4
 Appendices	
Appendix A - Additional resources	5
Appendix B - Examples of potential support / adjustments for your staff	6-8

Purpose

This guidance is designed to provide help and support to employees and managers in relation to the working environment and employees who are going through the menopause or experiencing menopausal symptoms.

What is the female menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

- Menopause - a biological stage in a woman's life when they have not had a period for 12 consecutive months and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels.
- Perimenopause - the time leading up to the end of a woman's periods when changes to their hormone balance begins and some symptoms may start to occur.
- Premature menopause - can happen naturally, or because of illness or surgery.

Symptoms of the female menopause

It is important to note that every woman's experience will be different. Symptoms of the menopause vary between individuals and some women may not experience any symptoms at all.

Below is a list of symptoms which individuals may experience. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive.

- Hot flushes – intermittent short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make your skin red and sweaty
- Night sweats and difficulty sleeping
- Problems with concentration – sometimes called 'brain fog'
- Headaches and migraines
- Mood changes, low mood and anxiety
- Palpitations – heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections

What support is available?

There are a range of treatments and support available as well as lifestyle changes an individual can make.

Occupational Health (OH) – the menopause can affect an individual's confidence and it may feel daunting or uncomfortable discussing this with a line manager, especially if they have limited knowledge or experience of it themselves. An OH referral can identify the most appropriate ways a manager can support and assist an employee at work. OH referrals need to be carried out by the employee's line manager.

For more information regarding a referral to OH, please refer to the school's sickness absence policy.

Counselling and the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) - Where schools have purchased this service, the school's EAP can offer support in a range of areas related to work or personal life, such as lifestyle and health changes and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Employees have free access to the Health Assured Employee Assistance Programme helpline and counselling service, which the school subscribes to on your behalf. This may be accessed by yourself or your family and the contact number is 0800 030 5182 or you can visit the website www.healthassured.org

GP – If an employee is struggling with menopausal symptoms or experiencing symptoms, it is recommended they visit their GP. Usually GPs can confirm whether someone is menopausal based on their symptoms, however, they may carry out a simple blood test to measure hormone levels.

Regular 1:1s/supervision – these provide employees a confidential space to talk to their manager about their wellbeing and changes to health. Time should be incorporated at the start of the meeting to discuss an employee's wellbeing. If an employee feels comfortable they can use this as an opportunity to let their manager know the symptoms they're experiencing – remember, they are completely normal. If for any reason an employee feels that they cannot speak with their line manager about their wellbeing and changes to health, they may request to speak with an alternative manager or, where relevant, wellbeing lead. Employees are encouraged to contact their line manager if they need support or are struggling with symptoms – employees don't have to wait for their 1:1/supervision to ask for help.

Flexible working – where it is identified that this may help, discuss and consider changes to working hours or shifts such as starting/finishing earlier/later, temporarily reducing working hours or taking a longer lunch break or regular breaks throughout the day. Managers may consider allowing employees to take leave at short notice (where possible and subject to service needs). Please refer to the school's flexible working policy.

Temperature and ventilation – using a desktop fan or, where possible, re-locating a workspace next to a window or away from a radiator may help.

Time out - an employee may discuss with their manager whether there is a quiet/ cool room they can go to if symptoms persist.

School attire; uniforms/office wear – employees may wish to consider wearing optional layers and breathable clothing (e.g. cotton, linen) or looser fitting clothing. If employees have to wear a uniform, employees should discuss the options with their manager; for example, whether they could remove more restrictive clothing such as jackets or tunics or adapt the uniform requirements.

Managers

Having a sensitive conversation

Speaking to your member of staff about such a sensitive and personal topic can be daunting and challenging. Try not to worry too much; being over-sensitive or avoiding the conversation altogether, will limit the quality of the conversation or can end up preventing you doing or saying anything.

Here are a few points to consider:

- Tone – think about the volume and pitch of your voice. Taking time to pause allows you to gather your thoughts and speak more slowly and clearly.
- Avoid interruptions – ensure you're somewhere quiet and can speak openly and in confidence. Ensure colleagues can't interrupt, switch off mobiles and switch video conferencing to 'do not disturb'.
- Reassure the employee that your conversation will remain confidential.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Speak calmly.
- Encourage the employee to talk – give them time and space to explain the situation. Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Avoid interrupting and making assumptions; keep an open mind.
- Listen, really listen – actively and carefully.
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Don't offer medical advice.

How can I support my member of staff?

You are often the first point of contact when a member of your team is struggling or unwell, so it's important to think about how you can support their wellbeing and know where to signpost them to.

There are a range of practical steps you can take to support your member of staff. Please refer to Appendix B of this guidance for some examples of potential support and adjustments for employees.

Consider keeping your knowledge up to date, the more supportive and aware you are of the range of menopausal symptoms and support available, the less likely your member of staff will feel embarrassed to approach you and discuss how the menopause is affecting their health and their work.

What else do I need to consider?

As well as the symptoms mentioned earlier in this guide, the menopause may be exacerbated by any existing health conditions. It may also coincide with caring responsibilities for ageing parents or relatives, or with responsibilities for young children or older/adult children living at home.

Further information about caring responsibilities and flexible working can be found in the school's flexible working policy. Contact the HR team for further advice.

Appendix A - Additional resources

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for Menopausal Symptoms	www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms
First Contact Plus - provides advice on a range of issues including getting active and stopping smoking	http://www.firstcontactplus.org.uk/
Henpicked menopause	https://henpicked.net/menopause/
Menopause Matters	https://menopausematters.co.uk/index.php
NICE guidelines	https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/Menopause
National Institute of Medical Herbalists - provides advice on herbal remedies	http://www.nimh.org.uk/
NHS Choices - provides advice on symptoms and treatments for the female menopause	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/ https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/menopause/Pages/Menopausehome.aspx
NHS Choices - provides information on symptoms of the male menopause	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/male-menopause/
The Daisy Network - provides support to women experiencing early menopause	https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/

Appendix B – Examples of potential support and adjustments for employees

The following is a list of possible adjustments that may help both female and male employees to manage their symptoms in the workplace. It is not an exhaustive list so consideration should be given to any other adjustments that are identified.

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
Daytime sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less tolerant of temperatures in the workplace. Work clothes / uniform may become uncomfortable. Personal protective equipment (PPE) may be uncomfortable if worn for long periods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site. Ensure easy access to toilets/changing facilities. Access to shower facilities, if required/available. Allow for more frequent breaks to manage symptoms, change clothes, etc. Avoid close fitting or non-breathable clothing. Allow flexibility with any uniforms or usual dress code (e.g. no jacket required). Consider providing additional uniforms. Look at ways of cooling the work environment (e.g. desk fan, moving to a desk near a window that opens, adjusting the air conditioning). Limit the time spent wearing PPE.
Night-time sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tiredness (due to lack of sleep). Concentration issues (due to lack of sleep). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for flexible working (e.g. working at home, temporary adjustment to start time, alternative shift pattern).
Insomnia or sleep difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tiredness (due to lack of sleep). Concentration issues (due to lack of sleep). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for flexible working (e.g. working at home, temporary adjustment to start time, alternative shift pattern).
Irregular and/or heavy periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to access toilet facilities on a frequent basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to toilet facilities particularly when working off site.

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certain tasks may be unfeasible (e.g. a teacher supporting swimming may not be able to be in the pool). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet. Access to shower or changing facilities, if required. Temporary adjustment to duties, if required.
Poor concentration / loss of confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance may be affected. Difficulty making decisions. Work-related stress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider if concentration is better or worse at particular times of the day and adjust working pattern / work tasks accordingly. Review task allocation and workload. Have regular one-to-one meetings so that any issues can be discussed. Provide books for lists or other memory-assisting equipment. Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions. Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices. Identify and address work-related stress through risk assessment.
Low mood / anxiety / panic attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance and wellbeing may be affected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact the Employee Assistance Programme for counselling, advice and support. Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk. Identify a 'buddy' for the individual to talk to (this could be within or outside of their team). Allow for more frequent breaks to undertake relaxation techniques or to have time out from others

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
		(without needing to ask for permission).
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of concentration / performance may be affected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site. • Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions. • Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices.
Urinary problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to access toilet facilities more frequently. • May need to drink more fluids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site. • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities particularly when working outside or off site. • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet.
Joint stiffness, aches and pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Static postures may be more uncomfortable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For desk based employees, undertake a workstation risk assessment. • Allow for more frequent breaks so that the employee can stretch.