

**MENOPAUSE
POLICY –
RESOURCE
PACK**
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Specific Information on Menopause and Perimenopause

What is the Menopause

The Menopause is a transition stage in women's lives, marked by hormonal changes and no longer having periods.

Menopause usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55. For many people symptoms last about 4 years, but in some cases, symptoms can last a lot longer. All stages and types of Menopause are different and symptoms can vary from person to person and range from very mild to severe.

Menopause can sometimes happen earlier naturally, or for reasons such as surgery to remove the ovaries or the uterus (hysterectomy), cancer treatments like chemotherapy, or a genetic reason. Sometimes the reason is unknown.

These types of Menopause can be medically complicated, and this should be considered in relation to the types of support employees may need.

Transgender men and women and non-binary people may also experience Menopause and/or Menopause systems. It is important that the support offered is trans and non-binary inclusive.

The Menopause is influenced by a change in hormone levels. During a woman's fertile years, her ability to produce an egg each month is associated with the release of three reproductive hormones - oestradiol, oestrone and oestriol - referred to collectively as oestrogen, which is mainly produced by the ovaries.

Oestrogen stimulates female characteristics at puberty and controls a woman's reproductive cycle: the development and release of an egg each month (ovulation) for implantation in the uterus (womb), and the way in which the lining of the womb thickens to accept a fertilized egg. The monthly period happens because no implantation has taken place - there is no pregnancy - and the lining of the womb is shed.

As women get older, their store of eggs in the ovary decreases and their ability to conceive diminishes. At this time, less oestrogen is produced. This gradual change is called the perimenopause during which women may experience significant changes including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the other symptoms associated with Menopause. The perimenopause can often last for four to five years although for some women it may continue for many more years or for others last just a few months.

Post-Menopause is a term used when periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may be ongoing.

Common Menopause Symptoms

For some women this loss of reproductive ability may be deeply felt, and for each person the Menopause is an individual experience. While some people experience few symptoms, for many the symptoms of Perimenopause and Menopause can be more severe and sometimes this may need medical attention. The impact of these symptoms on an individual's self-confidence, mental health and relationships with others, can have an impact not only on life outside work but also their working life.

Hot flushes are the most common symptom of the Menopause, occurring in three in every four menopausal women. Other common symptoms include night sweats, sleeplessness, vaginal dryness, hair loss, weight gain, irritated skin, more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections, low mood and a reduced interest in sex, loss of concentration. Symptoms vary hugely in duration, severity and what impact they have on women.

All the common symptoms of the Menopause are associated with a decrease in the body's production of oestrogen. Oestrogen lack can affect many parts of the body, including the brain, causing changes in emotional well-being, and the skin, influencing its elasticity and thickness.

Other changes take place which may have more of an effect on long-term health. Most commonly these changes affect the strength and density of bones, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease called osteoporosis. The bones of the female skeleton depend on oestrogen to maintain their strength and resistance to fracture. However, while hot flush or vaginal dryness are obvious, there are no obvious symptoms of osteoporosis - the first sign is usually the fracture of a bone. It's for this reason that osteoporosis has been called "the silent epidemic".

There is also some evidence that oestrogen deficiency is the cause of some chemical changes which make women after the Menopause especially vulnerable to heart disease and stroke.

For disabled women and those with pre-existing health conditions the Menopause can aggravate these conditions or even trigger new ones. For example, women with diabetes may find it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels stable, or conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), mental health conditions, skin conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia etc. may be exacerbated. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition.

Why is Menopause a workplace issue?

Women make up 51% of the UK workforce and these women will experience the Menopause at some point in their lives, and not necessarily in their late forties or early fifties.

It can affect younger women too through a premature or a medical or surgical Menopause.

It can also affect transgender and non-binary people.

Statistics show that around 1 in every 3 women has either experienced or is currently going through the Menopause. Around 8 in every 10 women will experience noticeable symptoms and of these 45% will find their symptoms hard to deal with.

Some women may cope well with the physical and emotional changes, but for others they may cause particular difficulties both in work and out of work. However, with the implementation of appropriate reasonable adjustments women can be supported to attend work.

Managers' Guidance for discussions with employees

Introduction

The ACAS guidance 'Menopause at work' highlights that if an employee does not get the help and support they need, it is increasingly likely that the effects of the Menopause can, for example, may lead to them for example feeling ill, losing confidence, suffering from mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression and even leaving their job.

Ulster University recognises that every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines which are appropriate in all cases. However, the following guidance is offered to provide assistance to managers who may be involved in supporting employees who are experiencing Menopause.

If an employee wishes to speak about their Menopause symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if an employee – regardless of gender - 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 may use the template at Appendix 1 or other method to record the agreed actions or outcome of 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.
- Discuss and agree if it would be beneficial and supportive if other members of the team should be informed and why, 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 over lunch breaks.
- Advise that a colleague, Employee Wellbeing Advisor, Trade Union, H&S or Equality Representative, can be involved and attend meetings.

Reasonable Adjustments / Symptoms /Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including those 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.
- Role dependent - be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket or the provision of a lighter alternative. This includes lab coats and other items of work clothing.
- 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 adequate access to washroom facilities.
- Ensuring regular comfort breaks in lengthy meetings.
- Request an extra uniform if required.
- Ensure sanitary products are available in washroom facilities, in order to obtain personal protection.

Headaches

- Have access to fresh drinking water.

- Offer a quiet space to work.
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Ask to be considered for flexible or hybrid working particularly for those suffering from a lack of sleep.
- Consider referral to Occupational Health to seek further guidance

Low Mood

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – outside of the work area.
- Identify a 'time out space' they can access when needed.
- Encourage seeking medical advice from their GP as such symptoms may be linked to changes in hormone levels.
- Undertake an individual stress risk assessment where appropriate.
- Contact Inspire for confidential counselling, on 0800 389 5362.

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure there are regular Personal Development Discussions.
- Have regular time set aside with their manager and/or Employee Wellbeing Advisor, TU H&S or Equality Rep to discuss any issues faced.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.
- Ensure that there is no detrimental impact to the individual's career, including their promotion opportunities.

Reduced Concentration

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse and consider changes in working pattern/practice, as appropriate.
- 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

- Contact Inspire for confidential counselling, on 0800 389 5362.
- Signpost to GP and Occupational Health for further support.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Ensure the employee is aware of all initiatives and support available from Employee Wellbeing as well as the other areas of support listed above.
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Panic Attacks

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask permission.
- 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.

Urinary Control

- Ensure easy access to washroom facilities.
- Ensure regular comfort breaks are available at work, e.g., in lengthy meetings.
- Ensure sanitary products are available in washroom facilities, in order to obtain personal protection.

Other Support

Discuss whether the employee 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 supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make an occupational health referral to request specific advice regarding the workplace.

Advise that Occupational Health self-referrals can be made, and Employee Wellbeing Advisors can be contacted and involved.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing at Work

The Duty of Care that the University has for its employees is satisfied by compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Order, Workplace (HSW) regulations, Display Screen Equipment regulations and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (including stress risk assessments) and this helps mitigate against Many of the symptoms experienced during Menopause will be covered in the workplace

However, it is vital that when anyone is experiencing Menopause symptoms that require adjustments to these general provisions, that they can have an informed conversation with their line manager, Employee Wellbeing Advisor / Occupational Health, People Partner or their trade union representative. These conversations and the resulting reasonable adjustments act as a specific amendment to any generic workplace risk assessment.

The Sickness Absence policy has been designed to provide a framework to support employees while they are absent and to help employees return to and remain in work wherever possible.

Equality at Work

The University recognises that the provision of equal opportunities in the workplace is not only good management practice; it also makes sound business sense.

Menopause discrimination is largely covered by our:
Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976
Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006

Additional Sources of Support

All colleagues can access free confidential 24/7, 365 counselling by contacting **Inspire - Employee Assistance Programme**


The National Health Service provides an overview of Menopause.

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) offer interactive information to both Line Managers and employees. Information can be found on the Online Learning Zone.

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

Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced Menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at .

Henpecked. This site provides information on managing Menopause, and an insight into women's stories



Menopause information NI:

Belfast Trust Menopause Clinic:

Well Women Clinics – Many GP practices offer these as part of their services, more information on what they offer can be found here:

Derry Well Women offer a free Menopause Clinic. This clinic is by appointment only and it is open to any woman going through the Menopause who wishes to discuss care or treatment. 02871360777 or email info@derrywellwoman.org

Other Support

Further support and guidance may also be provided by:

local Trade Union H&S or Equality Representatives

Equality Commission (ECNI)

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

Labour Relations Agency

Appendix 1

Confidential Colleague Discussion – Template

Employee details:			
Name		Job Title	
Department / Faculty		Location (Campus / Room Number / Online)	

Present at meeting (Line manager name and position)	
Date of discussion	

Agreed Summary of Discussion

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Agreed Actions/Adjustments

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Date of next review meeting

Signed (Employee)

Signed (Line Manager)

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