

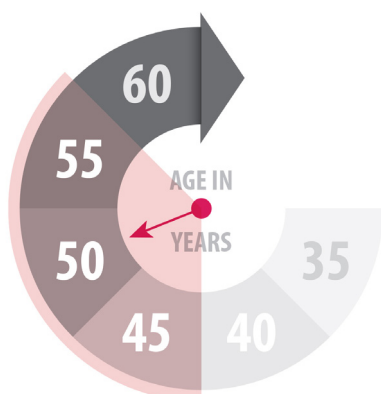
Guidance on menopause and the workplace



Overview

The menopause is a natural part of ageing for women. The medical definition of the menopause is when a woman has her last period¹. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur any time up to a women's mid-60s. A premature menopause can occur, with periods stopping before the age of 40¹, either naturally or as an effect of a medical condition or its treatment. Around 1 in 100 women will experience a premature menopause and this of course can be at a time when still planning to conceive.

Around 30-60% of women experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause². These are associated with a decrease in the body's production of the hormone oestrogen³. For some, symptoms include hot flashes, night sweats and related symptoms such as sleep disruption, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Hot flashes are short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make the skin red and sweaty. Severe flashes can cause sweat to soak through clothing. Mood disturbances, anxiety and depression are also reported. Symptoms on average continue for four years from the last period, and 1 in 10 women experience symptoms for up to 12 years⁴.



Menopause usually occurs between 45 and 55 of age



20-25% women have troublesome hot flashes

These symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life⁵. At work, they can cause embarrassment, diminish confidence and can be stressful to deal with. The menopause may be compounded by the development of other health conditions, as well as coinciding with caring responsibilities for ageing parents and relatives. Some women may also still have children living at home.⁶

There is good reason to consider the needs of this group of workers. In 2016, the employment rate for women in the UK of nearly 70% was among the highest since records began in 1971. Over the last four years the number of women over the age of 50 has also increased: a trend predicted to continue^{7,8}. Employers have responsibilities for the health and safety of all their employees, but there are also clear business reasons for proactively managing an age-diverse workforce. Some employers have been slow to recognise that women of menopausal age may need specific considerations⁹ and many employers do not yet have clear processes to support women coping with menopausal symptoms.

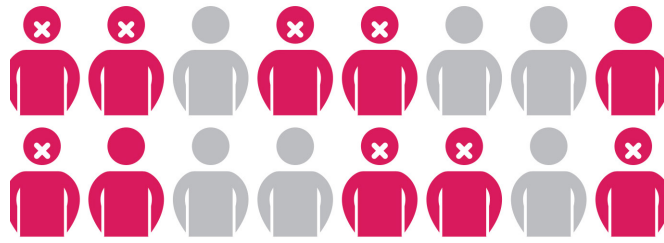
These practical guidelines aim to help women experiencing troublesome menopausal symptoms, and to support them and their colleagues and managers in tackling the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms.

Guidance for managers/employers

Regular, informal conversations between manager and employee may enable discussion of changes in health, including issues relating to the menopause. It may be valuable simply to acknowledge this is a normal stage of life and that adjustments can easily be made. Such conversations can identify support at work that can help women remain fully productive and encourage them to discuss any relevant health concerns with their GP. Employees should be able to expect respectful behaviours at work including those that relate to their gender and age. The provision of information (for example, see the infographic that accompanies this guidance <http://fom.ac.uk/menopause>) may be helpful in these discussions and for more general awareness-raising. However, employers need to recognise that some women may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience of the menopause with their manager and an occupational health professional can be very useful.



The management of gender-specific health issues other than pregnancy are rarely discussed in the workplace



The majority of women are unwilling to disclose menopause-related health problems to line managers, most of whom are men or younger than them

There are recommendations about working conditions for menopausal women produced by the European Menopause and Andropause Society (EMAS). These are adapted below:

- Provide training for employees and managers to raise awareness and convey that the menopause can present difficulties for some women at work.
- Facilitate discussion about troublesome symptoms. Employers can help by communicating that health-related problems such as those experienced during the menopause are normal.
- Review control of workplace temperature and ventilation and see how they might be adapted to meet the needs of individuals. This might include having a desktop fan in an office, or locating a workstation near an opening window or away from a heat source.
- Consider flexible working hours or shift changes. If sleep is disturbed, later start times might be helpful.
- Provide access to cold drinking water in all work situations, including off site venues.
- Ensure access to wash room facilities and toilets, including when travelling or working in temporary locations.

Additional considerations and adjustments may be required for specific occupations or locations. For example:

- Where uniforms are compulsory, flexibility is helpful. This might include the use of thermally comfortable fabrics, optional layers, being allowed to remove neckties or jackets, as well as the provision of changing facilities.
- Where work requires constant standing or prolonged sitting, having access to a rest room (e.g. to sit during work breaks) would be helpful, as would space to move about for those women in sedentary roles.
- In customer-focused or public-facing roles, it may help to have access to a quiet room for a short break so as to manage a severe hot flush.

Severe menopausal symptoms and their consequences may combine

Symptoms of the menopause usually last between 4 and 8 years



to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day to day activities – potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act.

Monitoring the projected age distribution of the workforce will enable employers to be proactive about the needs of their employees, avoiding a reactive approach to age-related health issues. Advice from occupational health professionals can support human resource policy. Information for employers about how to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce encompassing women of menopausal age can be obtained from a variety of sources such as the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (www.acas.org.uk), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (www.cipd.co.uk) and other professional bodies. Embedding the menopause in a wider health and wellbeing agenda may help encourage discussion of issues related to supporting longer working lives.

Guidance for women

For women who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and their capacity to work:

- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at the end of this guidance).
- See your GP for advice on available treatment options.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager you feel comfortable talking to.
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- If there is an occupational health service available, make an appointment to discuss support and possible work adjustments.
- If those you work with are supportive, this can make a big difference. Talk about your symptoms and solutions with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing symptoms, use humour to deflect embarrassment, and work out your preferred coping strategies and working patterns.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks) especially before presentations or meetings.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and other potentially helpful techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy, as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as weight reduction, smoking cessation and exercise.

And, finally ...

It is important to be aware that the menopause is a natural and temporary stage in women's lives and that not all women experience significant symptoms. The menopause has been regarded as a taboo subject. But this is changing as employers gradually acknowledge the potential impact of the menopause on women and become aware of the simple steps they can take to be supportive.

Further Sources of Information

- <http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- The Daisy Network – <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>
- Healthtalk.org – <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/late-life/menopause/topics>
- Women's Health Concerns – <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/focus-series/menopause/>
- The Menopause Exchange – <http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/>
- NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management – <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
- Davies, S.C. "Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, 2014, The Health of the 51%: Women" London: Department of Health (2015) Chapter 9: Psychosocial factors and the menopause: the impact of the menopause on personal and working life. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officer-annual-report-2014-womens-health>

References

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2. <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause/>
3. <http://www.bridgewater.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Menopause-Briefing.pdf>
4. <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>
5. Annual report of the Chief Medical Officer 2014, Chapter 9, Psychosocial risk factors and the menopause: the impact of the menopause on personal and working life
6. http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/Work_and_the_Menopause-A_Guide_for_Managers.pdf
7. ONS labour market statistics Jan-Mar 2014.
8. ONS Labour Market Statistics 2016
9. <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461>
10. <http://www.cipd.co.uk/>
11. https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_menopause_0.pdf
12. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
13. Menopause and work: an electronic survey of employees attitudes Griffiths, MacLennan, Hassard 2013

These guidelines are produced by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

The Faculty of Occupational Medicine is the professional and educational body for occupational medicine in the United Kingdom.

It seeks to ensure the highest standards in the practice of occupational medicine, overseeing the continuing professional development and revalidation of its members. It is also focused on

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