



**Isle of Man
Government**

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Guidance on Supporting Colleagues Experiencing Menopause Symptoms in the Workplace

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Guidance on Supporting Colleagues Experiencing Menopause Symptoms in the Workplace

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Isle of Man Government is committed to ensuring that all employees are treated fairly, with dignity and respect in their working environment, whilst improving the wellbeing of its employees.
- 1.2 Menopause is a natural stage of life experienced by most women and it is not always an easy transition, however with support it can be eased. Whilst not every woman will suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work. The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related symptoms with their line manager, or ask for support or reasonable adjustments that may help their quality of working life.
- 1.3 Menopause should not be a taboo subject and everyone should understand what it is and be able to talk openly about it without embarrassment. This is not just an age or gender issue, everyone should be aware and can be indirectly affected too. These guidelines are inclusive of all gender identities including transgender and non-binary employees¹.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness and provide a framework to help and support employees who may be experiencing menopausal symptoms and create an environment where people feel confident to seek support at work.

3. Aim

- 3.1 The aim of this guidance is to:
 - Increase awareness about the menopause in the workplace;
 - Provide appropriate information about menopause and the potential symptoms;
 - Provide information for on how to support employees who raise menopausal issues;
 - Ensure that employees suffering with menopause symptoms feel confident to discuss it and ask for support.

¹ It should be recognised that the menopause can impact transgender and non-binary people who do not identify as women. They require the same support in the workplace as others with similar symptoms.

4. Scope

- 4.1 The guidance applies to all staff employed by the Isle of Man Government, regardless of their terms and conditions, and to retained, bank, casual, relief or supply staff.
- 4.2 The guidance recognises that menopause is an equality and occupational health and safety issue and that colleagues may need appropriate flexibility, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during or after the menopause.
- 4.3 The Equality Act 2017 prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. Conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

5. Symptoms of Menopause

- 5.1 The menopause is a natural stage of life for women, usually in their late forties or early fifties although it can also happen earlier or later. For many women symptoms last about four years but in some cases can last longer.
- 5.2 Women can go through a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms associated with the menopause transition. Some symptoms can be quite severe and have a significant impact on everyday activities including whilst at work.
- 5.3 The majority of menopausal women experience symptoms although everyone is different and symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. Some typical symptoms include hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, loss of confidence and difficulty sleeping.
- 5.4 For further information on symptoms of menopause and symptoms support see the section on **Additional Information**.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- 6.1 All employees are responsible for:
 - Taking a personal responsibility for looking after their health and wellbeing;
 - Being open and honest in conversations with their manager and Occupational Health;
 - Seeking further support by speaking to a colleague, HR Advisor, Staff Welfare or their Union Representative;
 - Contributing to a positive working environment, treating others with dignity and respect;
 - Being willing to help and support their colleagues;
 - Understanding and being supportive of any adjustments their colleagues may be receiving.

6.2 All line managers are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the menopause guidance;
- Being ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause and its effects, respecting confidentiality of personal matters and treating the discussion sensitively and with empathy;
- Using the guidance to support an employee;
- Maintaining ongoing dialogue and support;
- Referring an employee to Occupational Health should some further advice and guidance be helpful.

6.3 If an employee or colleague tells you about their health condition, including menopause symptoms this should be treated as confidential and if they want information about their condition to be shared consent must be explicit.

7. Where to Get Additional Support

7.1 Further guidance and support may be sought from the following:

- Line Manager / Colleagues
- [HR Advisory Team, Office of Human Resources](#)
- [Staff Welfare](#)
- [Occupational Health](#) – management or self-referral
- [Healthy and Well Intranet site](#)

7.2 In addition to the list above an employee who is experiencing the menopause should be encouraged to seek support and advice from their GP if they have not already done so.

8. Link to Other Isle of Man Government Policies

8.1 These guidelines are supported by other internal policies or procedures:

- Flexible Working – refer to [terms and conditions](#)
- [Fairness at Work Policy and Guidance](#)
- [Management of Sickness Absence Policy and Guidance](#)
- [Homeworking Guidelines](#)

Additional Information

What is the menopause?

Menopause is the medical term given to a woman who is in the final stages of having menstrual periods. It is when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant. This usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51.

The perimenopause is the period that leads to the menopause when many women may experience symptoms. This is the time in a woman's life when physiological changes occur that begin the transition to the menopause.

Women can experience both physical and psychological effects of the menopause. Some experience few or no symptoms, whilst others can have symptoms that can debilitate them. Some women can suffer such debilitating symptoms that it affects their work and the role that they do.

Whilst the changes involved only happen to women (men don't have a menstrual cycle²), men can also be indirectly affected by some symptoms of menopause and this can sometimes affect relationships in the home. As such it is important that men also have knowledge of the menopause and its symptoms so that advice can be sought where required and that they are able to support their partners or colleagues.

The current lack of knowledge on the menopause can mean that someone in the workplace could be misdiagnosed as being someone who is constantly having health issues which restrict her from fulfilling her normal role and possibly having to take time off work. She might be suffering in silence, afraid or embarrassed to approach anyone for help, and as such lose confidence or, feel isolated. This could potentially cause an employee to leave their place of employment.

Recognising these changes can help in making the links between workplace health and safety and the problems some women experience working through the menopause.

Symptoms of Menopause

The number of symptoms can vary from person to person and range from mild to severe. It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support.

Some symptoms of perimenopause and menopause can be the same. They include:

- hot flushes and night sweats
- palpitations
- headaches including migraines
- difficulty sleeping
- fatigue

² It should also be recognised that the menopause can impact transgender and non-binary people who do not identify as women. Although uncommon, menopause can still be experienced by transgender masculine and non-binary identified people whose female characteristics may persist at this stage of their lives. They require the same support in the workplace as others with similar symptoms.

- skin irritation
- irregular periods which can become heavier
- feeling anxious, panic attacks and loss in confidence
- depression
- putting on weight
- Aches and pains including muscle and joint stiffness
- problems with memory and concentration

For further information regarding menopause symptoms see the NHS website - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/symptoms/>

Symptoms Support

The number of symptoms can vary from person to person and range from mild to severe. Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically and often minor adjustments can make a huge difference to the quality of working life for a woman experiencing menopausal symptoms. Employers can reap the benefits with better attendance and engagement, and reduced employee turnover.

Managers should refer to the guidance below and agree with an employee how they can be best supported and any reasonable adjustments which may be required. Adjustments should be considered in relation to a specific employee and their specific role. Records should be kept of any reasonable adjustments agreed, ensuring there is ongoing dialogue and review dates as symptoms and the need for reasonable adjustments may change over time.

Suggestions for supporting women experiencing symptoms should be considered as detailed below:

Hot Flashes

- Allow temperature control for an employees work area such as a fan on their desk or moving nearer to a window or away from a heat source
- Easy access to drinking water
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if an employees work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe flush
- Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform

Headaches

- Have easy access to drinking water
- Offer a quiet place to work or allow use of noise-reducing headphones where possible
- Allow time out to take medication if needed

Heavy / Light Periods

- Have easy access to toilet facilities
- Ensure there is easy access to their sanitary products

Poor concentration

- Review task allocation and workload
- Provide notepad for lists or action boards or other memory-assisting equipment

- Offer a quiet space to work or allow the use of noise-reducing headphones
- Consider putting arrangements in place in an open office that an employee is having “protected time” so they are not disturbed
- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse and adjust working pattern accordingly or consider if homeworking or hybrid working, if possible, could be put in place

Difficulty Sleeping

- Consider making a request for flexible working or homeworking or hybrid working, if possible

Low Mood

- Agree time out from others, when required without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a “time out space” to enable an employee to go to clear their mind
- Suggest an employee contacts Staff Welfare for further support and guidance if appropriate

Anxiety or Panic Attacks

- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk
- Enable an employee to have short periods away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure there are regular personal development discussions
- Allow time for 1 – 1 discussions on any issues an employee may be having

How to approach a sensitive conversation

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or are a male employee who wishes to speak about a family member, ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation.
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality.
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly, treating the conversation with sensitivity.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported, refer to the section above on Symptoms Support.
- Agree actions and how to implement them so that all parties agrees what has been discussed and the next steps. Ensure that this is record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Agree if any other members of the team should be informed and by whom.
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting.

Useful Resources

Additional information and guidance is available from the links below (click on each title):

- [ACAS](#): Menopause at Work
- [NHS](#) – Menopause Information on Symptoms and Treatment
- [CIPD - A Guide to Managing Menopause at Work, Guidance for line Managers, May 2021](#)
- [CIPD – The Menopause, A Guide for People Professionals, March 2019](#)
- [Faculty in Occupational Medicine](#) – Guidance on Menopause and the Workplace
- [NICE](#): National Institute for Health and Care Excellence - Menopause Guidelines
- [Henpicked](#) – Menopause hub on a website for women’s health issues