

MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

Contents

1. Introduction
2. What is the Menopause?
3. Who is affected?
4. Menopause symptoms and self-help strategies
5. Managing sickness absence
6. Workplace adjustments and support

List of Resources

Internal:

[Mind Matters](#)

[Stress Risk Assessment](#)

[Attendance Management Policy](#)

[Women Together \(Staff Network\)](#)

[Employee Assistance Programme](#)

[Working Hours and Related Policies](#)

[Workplace Adjustments Policy & Procedures](#)

[Workplace Adjustment Passport](#)

External:

[NHS Choices Advice](#)

[The Menopause Exchange](#)

[Menopause Matters](#)

[The Daisy Network](#) (premature menopause support)

[TUC Guidance](#)

Social Media sites such as [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) also host a number of menopause support networks

WELSH GOVERNMENT HR GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of this guidance is to raise awareness of some of the symptoms that employees who go through menopause may be experiencing and the support that is available if those symptoms impact negatively on working life.
- 1.2 Please note that all of our policies are fully inclusive of all staff regardless of age, marriage (including equal/same sex marriage) and civil partnership, impairment or health condition, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender identity or gender expression.
- 1.3 As menopause is a very personal transitional phase in an individual's life, this guidance does not 'prescribe' roles and responsibilities in relation to menopause nor make assumptions about how each individual will experience this natural life event.
- 1.4 Instead the guidance asks that employees and their Line Managers familiarise themselves with potential symptoms and their impacts in order to **understand, manage and minimise** any difficulties that may arise in the workplace.
- 1.5 Line Managers should be aware that there is limited and inconsistent evidence that the symptoms of menopause transition lead directly to reduced performance at work.¹ Not all individuals will experience difficulties in the workplace as a result of their menopause, and for those that do, such difficulties are usually temporary in nature and may be easily managed with consideration, understanding and in some circumstances, with simple workplace adjustments.
- 1.6 Welsh Government employees are entitled to their privacy, and also to be treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity when discussing personal issues. Discussing menopause with a male and/or significantly younger Line Manager may feel inappropriate for some employees. If an employee is unable to talk to their own Line Manager they should request a discussion with a more suitable manager in the line management chain or with an HR Business Partner. Either the Line Manager or alternative manager will act as an advocate to agree and facilitate appropriate workplace adjustments.

2 What is Menopause?

- 2.1 The term 'Menopause' describes the changes a woman goes through which mark the end of her reproductive years. Menopause symptoms may start a few months or years

¹ Department for Education, "[The Effects of Menopause Transition on Women's Economic Participation in the UK](#)", July 2017

WELSH GOVERNMENT HR GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

before a woman's periods stop - a phase known as the 'peri-menopause' - and can persist for some time afterwards.

- 2.2 Because they may still be having regular periods, women in the peri-menopause phase of transition may not realise that their symptoms are related to the hormone changes preceding menopause. This can be a barrier to accessing support.
- 2.3 Menopause is a natural part of the aging process for women. It is important to remember that some women experience a smooth menopause and find that it doesn't interfere with their personal or working lives significantly. Others may struggle with the physical and psychological aspects of the menopause and need additional support to get through what can be a lengthy and difficult time for them.

3 Who is affected?

- 3.1 The average age of menopause is 51, and the Welsh Government has many female employees between the ages of 45 and 55 most of whom will be familiar with menopause, though each will have their own unique experience of it. Often, employees experiencing menopause are at an age where they have additional caring responsibilities e.g. for children and/or elderly relatives. Menopause symptoms can place an additional stress on these employees.
- 3.2 Some employees will experience menopause at a (sometimes significantly) younger age either naturally or because of surgical/medical intervention e.g. as a result of cancer treatment. The resulting impact on fertility can further complicate their experience of menopause transition.
- 3.3 Because the physical changes in the body are hormonally based, menopausal symptoms can also be experienced by non-binary, intersex or transgender people. Impairment or health condition, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status may also have a bearing on how menopause is experienced and managed.

4. Menopause symptoms and self-help strategies

- 4.1 The physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause may be interrelated and often exhibit a 'domino' effect whereby one symptom can cause or exacerbate another – e.g. hot flushes at night-time could disrupt sleep; leading to tiredness, irritability and loss of focus during the working day.
- 4.2 Women may experience only some or all of these symptoms (and others not listed below). Most women will experience some symptoms, but some women do not experience any noticeable symptoms at all. On average, women continue to

WELSH GOVERNMENT HR GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

experience symptoms for four years after their last period, but around 10 per cent of women continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years.

4.3 Beyond the menopause, due to lower levels of certain hormones, post-menopausal women can be at an increased risk of certain conditions such as developing osteoporosis (“brittle bones”) and heart disease. These risks increase for women who have an early or premature menopause.

4.4 **Physical symptoms** could include:

- Hot flushes – sudden feelings of heat that build up and mostly affect the face, neck and chest causing redness and perspiration;
- Night sweats – hot flushes that happen through the night;
- Insomnia and sleep disturbances;
- Headaches;
- Joint aches/stiffness;
- Fatigue – night sweats can disrupt sleep causing tiredness through the day;
- Urinary problems e.g. infections or increased frequency/urgency of urination;
- Irregular and/or debilitating² periods (usually in the peri-menopause stage);
- [Other symptoms](#) (which are less likely to impact in the workplace).

4.5 To help cope with these **physical symptoms** you could:

- Seek medical advice, reassurance and treatment from your GP and/or alternative therapists;
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle – eating a balanced diet and taking regular exercise can help alleviate symptoms and keep bones healthy;
- Drink plenty of water – you may find sipping chilled water during hot flushes particularly helpful;
- Avoid hot flush triggers (e.g. hot food/drinks) before meetings or presentations;
- Wear layers of clothing which can be easily removed or added – you may find wearing natural fibres helps maintain a more even body temperature;
- Arrange meetings at optimal times in line with your energy levels;
- Take regular breaks to move and stretch throughout the day;
- Discuss any difficulties you are experiencing with your Line Manager or alternative advocate. (see section 1.5).

4.6 **Psychological symptoms** could include:

- Poor concentration;
- Problems with memory;
- Irritability and/or mood swings;
- Low mood or depression;

² During the peri-menopause, some women may experience very heavy menstrual bleeding (menorrhagia). In some cases this could lead to anaemia.

WELSH GOVERNMENT HR GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

- Anxiety, loss of self esteem and/or confidence;
- Decreased ability to cope with stress.

4.7 To help cope with these **psychological symptoms** you could:

- Take regular breaks away from your workstation;
- Go for a walk at lunchtime;
- Eat healthily and regularly;
- Use 'to do' lists/diaries or mobile phone reminders to support your memory;
- Do relaxation or mindfulness meditation sessions in work or at home or both;
- Use the Employee Assistance Programme for counselling/advice;
- Discuss any mental health difficulties with your GP and seek suitable treatment;
- Explore alternative therapies that could potentially help.

Additional time for these activities is now available to you as part of the new [Wellbeing Hour](#) initiative.

5. Managing sickness absence

5.1 **Menopause in itself is not an illness** but there may be times when the symptoms of menopause transition are severe enough to cause the employee to take sickness absence. Such sickness absence will be treated as any other sickness absence for the purposes of attendance management and related procedures.

5.2 If the impact of the menopause is sufficiently severe for someone to meet the definition of 'disability' in the Equality Act 2010, then a change to the sickness absence trigger points as a reasonable adjustment may then be possible.³ Occupational Health will manage referrals from employees or their managers for specialist support and advice.

6. Workplace adjustments and support

6.1 It is the Welsh Government's aim that all staff experiencing difficulties because of menopausal symptoms are supported as much as possible. Depending on how an individual is affected by the menopause, the Workplace Adjustment and Workplace Passport policies and procedures may prove helpful and it may be beneficial to discuss possible workplace adjustments to assist staff to deliver to their full potential. Any adjustments that are made should be subject to regular review to ensure they are still suitable / effective.

6.2 Welsh Government will consider any reasonable physical or non-physical workplace adjustments where we have implied or actual knowledge of a health issue which may

³ You are considered to be disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to undertake normal daily activities.

WELSH GOVERNMENT HR GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

be impacting on an employee's ability to undertake their role. This includes adjustments where health issues are being experienced as a result of the menopause.

6.3 Support by Line Managers for employees dealing with menopausal symptoms could include:

- **Review of workplace equipment** such as chairs, keyboards, mice, monitors, alternative telephones, headsets, desk-top fans;
- **Relocation of desks / workspaces** e.g. near air conditioning vents or windows and away from direct sources of heat;
- **Allowing more frequent breaks** away from the workstation and/or easy access to toilet / shower facilities (where these exist);
- **Considering flexible working arrangements** where business needs permit that might help the employee to cope with problematic symptoms such as fatigue. This could include a change to the normal working pattern and/or home working;
- **Temporary or permanent reduction in working hours** (with a consequent reduction in salary if the change is permanent) if that is an option;
- **Temporary adjustment of working duties or timings of meetings;**
- **Talking with employees about problematic symptoms** – this may help diffuse anxiety and calm mood;
- **Praising good work and providing support to improve** if there is reduced performance;
- **Completing a stress risk assessment** to identify any additional issues;
- **Offering a phased return to work** if long term sickness absence occurs due to menopause related health issues;
- **Adjustment of sickness trigger points under the attendance management procedures** for staff likely to be covered by the Equality Act

GUIDANCE ENDS