

# Managing through the Menopause

## University of Bristol Policy & Guidance

### 1. Introduction

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here. Menopause is a part of life and it is not always an easy transition. Whilst not everyone suffers with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work. Although the menopause usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age it is also important to remember that menopause can affect younger people as well. It can also occur anytime up to mid-60's. Menopause can be natural, surgical or induced and may be as a result of hysterectomy or cancer medication.

We want everyone to understand what menopause is and to be able to talk about it without the stigma of it being a taboo subject. We consider this is an issue for men as well as women. Even if you are not experiencing menopause transition yourself, you may be working or living with someone who is.

The changing age of the UK workforce means that between 75-80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of people are unwilling to or are anxious about discussing menopause-related health issues with their line manager and many do not feel comfortable in asking for support or adjustments that they may need.

This guidance sets out our preferred approach for staff and managers to help provide the right environment and support in the workplace for managing menopausal symptoms and has been developed in conjunction with our Occupational Health Service, Trade Unions and our Diversity and Inclusion Team.

### 2. University Aims:

- To foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversation about menopause
- To ensure everyone understands what menopause is and can have supportive conversations if required in conjunction with a line manager or HR and Occupational Health
- To help managers be more informed about the potential symptoms of menopause and how they can support staff in the workplace as required
- To support staff suffering with menopausal symptoms and enable them to feel confident discussing and asking for support
- To reduce absenteeism
- To reassure staff that we are a responsible employer who will try and support their needs during the menopause

A lot of what might be required by staff transitioning through the menopause can be addressed via existing flexible working, wellbeing or health and safety provisions and any reasonable adjustments are not necessarily specific to the menopause.

### 3. Definition & Symptoms of Menopause

**Menopause:** defined as a biological state in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. It is usually defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

**Perimenopause:** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, irregular periods and other symptoms.

**Post-menopause:** is the time after menopause has occurred from when periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months.

It is important to note that not all women will notice significant symptoms or need help and support, but research shows that 75% of women do experience some symptoms and of those, 25% experience severe symptoms. It is also worth noting that different symptoms can occur at different times through the transition and therefore it is worth having regular conversations or review at work as symptoms are prone to change.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy periods, insomnia, fatigue, night sweats, skin irritation, mood disturbances, anxiety or loss of confidence.

Self-management can also play a large part in managing symptoms and the University is highlighting resources providing self-management guidance. In line with Occupational Medicine Guidelines, staff are also encouraged to seek medical advice from their GP. To help the GP, it is recommended that you keep a diary of symptoms, their frequency and severity along with the impact they have on work and home life.

Further information on Menopausal symptoms can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

### 4. Adjustments & Support Tools

- **HOT FLUSHES** - Take time to consider the environment and provide access to fans or see if a desk can be allocated nearer to windows, consider adjustment to uniform requirements where appropriate and give consideration to lighter, layered, non-synthetic workwear
- **HEADACHES** – Offer quieter space to work if possible and offer time out to take medication if required
- **FATIGUE & SLEEP DISTURBANCES** - Provide time for breaks if needed and consider rest areas, consider flexibility in start and finish times in line with our Flexible Working policy, recommend attendance at Sleep Clinic provided by Staff Counselling

- CHANGES IN MONTHLY PERIODS - Ensure there is easy access to clean, well equipped washroom facilities
- ANXIETY OR LOSS OF CONFIDENCE – More regular catch up meetings for additional workplace support
- LOW MOOD – Consider referral to Occupational Health or other specialist provision including the Employee Assistance Programme
- REDUCED CONCENTRATION – Offer a quieter space to work if possible, reduce interruptions, review task allocation

#### 5. **Line Manager Responsibilities:**

- Familiarise themselves with this Guidance and the resources available
- Adapt return to work meetings to include menopause support where appropriate and include on Wellness Action Plans
- Be ready & willing to have conversations treating discussions sensitively and confidentially
- Be familiar with other University policies that may also be supportive to women experiencing menopausal symptoms such as Flexible Working
- Take advice from HR in conjunction with Occupational Health on what other adjustments may be supportive for women experiencing menopausal symptoms

#### 6. **Links to Other Policies & Support**

Other policies linked to this one that may be helpful include:

- Flexible Working
- ED & I Strategy
- Staff Counselling including **University Employee Assistance Programme provided by Carefirst**
- Managing Health & Absence
- University Health & Wellbeing Strategy

#### **Further sources of external support available:**

**NHS**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

**Women's Health Concern**

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>

**Menopause Matters**

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>

**Daisy Network - For women experiencing premature menopause**

<https://www.daisynetwork.org/>

The Government Equality Office Report on Menopause transition: effects on women's economic participation ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation))

TUC Wales Menopause Toolkit: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-workplace-toolkit-trade-unionists-wales-tuc-cymru>

Menopause: Change the Conversation, TUC webinar by Bristol City Council members of staff ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH1ikUvd9f8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH1ikUvd9f8))

The TUC Education eNote: Menopause support in the workplace, you will need to be logged in to access an eNote. ([www.tuceducation.org.uk/local/enotes/index.php](http://www.tuceducation.org.uk/local/enotes/index.php))

Henpicked menopause in the workplace: [menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk](http://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk)

The British Menopause Society ([thebms.org.uk](http://thebms.org.uk))

The International Menopause Society ([www.imsociety.org](http://www.imsociety.org))

Menopause Cafes: <https://www.menopausecafe.net>

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