

Supporting Employees during the Menopause

Contents

Purpose.....	1
What is the female menopause?.....	1
What causes the female menopause?.....	1
Symptoms of the female menopause.....	2
How is the female menopause diagnosed?	2
How can female menopausal symptoms be managed?	3
What is the male menopause and what causes it?	4
Symptoms of the male menopause	4
How is the male menopause diagnosed and how can its symptoms be managed?... 	4
How to support an employee during the menopause.....	5
Appendix A - Examples of Potential Reasonable Adjustments	6
Appendix B - Sources of Further Support and Information	10

Purpose

The Council is committed to the wellbeing of its employees and aims to create an environment where those, who are experiencing the menopause, feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support at work.

The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness of menopause related symptoms and to provide advice to managers on how best to support employees to help reduce the effect of these symptoms at work.

What is the female menopause?

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. In medical terms, it is the point at which a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. The average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51 however around 1% of women will experience a premature menopause (i.e. their periods stop before the age of 40).

What causes the female menopause?

The menopause is caused by changes in the balance of the body's reproductive hormones (e.g. oestrogen and progesterone).

The cause of premature or early menopause is not always clear however it could be genetic, caused by certain types of surgery (e.g. hysterectomy), cancer treatments or underlying medical conditions such as Down's syndrome or Addison's disease.

Symptoms of the female menopause

Every woman is different. The majority of women will experience some symptoms around the menopause however their duration and severity will vary. Symptoms may start a few months or years before the woman's periods stop (known as the perimenopause), and on average, last around four to eight years from the last period. However, for some women these symptoms can continue for a longer period.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically and can have a significant impact on daily life for some women. In severe cases, the symptoms may have such an adverse impact that they may meet the legal definition of a disability.

Early signs of the menopause usually include a change in the normal pattern of the woman's periods, either by them becoming lighter, heavier and/or less frequent. Other common symptoms include:

- Hot flushes - short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make your skin red and sweaty;
- Night sweats - hot flushes that occur at night;
- Problems with memory and concentration;
- Difficulty sleeping;
- Headaches;
- Mood changes, such as low mood or anxiety;
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), such as cystitis;
- Palpitations - heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable;
- Skin irritation;
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains;
- Reduced muscle mass;
- Reduced sex drive (libido);
- Vaginal dryness and pain.

The above is not an exhaustive list and women may experience other symptoms to those shown.

Employees may find it helpful to keep a record of their symptoms including the relevant dates, frequency and the impact they are having. If the symptoms are troubling or are being experienced under the age of 45 then advice should be sought from a GP.

The menopause can also increase a woman's risk of developing long term health risks, such as weak bones (osteoporosis), raised cholesterol and heart disease.

[Back to Contents](#)

How is the female menopause diagnosed?

A GP is usually able to confirm whether a woman is menopausal based on her symptoms. However, where an individual is under the age of 45 then a blood test to measure hormone levels may also be required.

The following table sets out what should and should not happen during a consultation with a GP regarding the menopause:

They should	They should not
✓ Talk about lifestyle, how to manage symptoms and long term health	✗ Put it down to 'that time of life'
✓ Provide advice on HRT and non-medical options and their safety and effectiveness	✗ Say that they don't prescribe HRT or impose unnecessary restrictions on how long it can be taken

To ensure that an employee gets the most out of their GP appointment, they may want to consider:

- Asking which GP at their surgery is the best to talk to about the menopause;
- Asking for a longer appointment to allow them time to discuss the issue;
- Making themselves aware of the [NICE guidelines](#);
- Taking along a record of their symptoms including changes to and frequency of their menstrual cycle;
- Asking for a second opinion if they're not happy with the support provided by their GP.

[Back to Contents](#)

How can female menopausal symptoms be managed?

Not all women will require assistance to help alleviate their symptoms however where this is not the case, there are a number of treatment options available including:

- Medical options such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) - tablets, skin patches, gels and implants that relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing oestrogen. If HRT isn't suitable, other medications may be prescribed.
- Lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy, balanced diet, exercising regularly, stopping smoking, reducing alcohol and caffeine consumption, managing stress and having sufficient calcium and vitamin D. Employees should consider how their actions may be impacting on their symptoms (e.g. drinking alcohol may increase the likelihood of hot sweats and disturbed sleep, etc.);
- Complementary and herbal remedies such as St John's Wort, Milk Thistle, Sage and Red Clover. Advice should be sought from a [medical herbalist](#) before trying any of these remedies;

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - a talking therapy that can help with low mood and anxiety;
- Self-help measures such as getting plenty of rest, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, talking to others about what they are experiencing, and practising relaxation techniques such as yoga, tai chi or mindfulness.

GP's can refer individuals to a menopause specialist if their symptoms don't improve after trying treatment or if the individual is unable to take HRT.

[Back to Contents](#)

What is the male menopause and what causes it?

'Male menopause' is the more common term for andropause which describes age-related changes in male hormone levels usually experienced by individuals in their late 40s to early 50s. It may also be referred to as testosterone deficiency, androgen deficiency, and late-onset hypogonadism.

[Back to Contents](#)

Symptoms of the male menopause

The male menopause can cause physical and psychological symptoms which typically worsen with age. They can include:

- Low energy;
- Depression or sadness;
- Decreased motivation;
- Lowered self-confidence;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Insomnia or difficulty sleeping;
- Increased body fat;
- Reduced muscle mass and feelings of physical weakness;
- Decreased bone density;
- Development of breasts;
- Erectile dysfunction;
- Reduced libido;
- Infertility.

The duration and severity of these symptoms will vary however some men may experience these uncomfortable effects for up to 20 years as the body gradually adjusts to lower testosterone production.

[Back to Contents](#)

How is the male menopause diagnosed and how can its symptoms be managed?

A GP can measure a man's testosterone levels by undertaking a blood test.

The most common types of treatment for symptoms of the male menopause are:

- Lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, managing stress and having enough sleep;
- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) - tablets, skin patches, gels, implants and injections that relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing testosterone.

[Back to Contents](#)

How to support an employee during the menopause

There are a number of practical steps that managers can take to support employees to reduce the impact of menopausal symptoms at work:



- Encourage the employee to speak openly;
- Consider how the symptoms listed in this guidance may be impacting on the employee;
- Undertake a [risk assessment](#) to ensure that all factors have been taken into account and any potential support measures have been identified;
- Identify and agree possible reasonable adjustments. [Appendix A](#) includes a list of the most common symptoms, how they impact at work and possible adjustments that could be considered;
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed and by whom;
- Ensure all agreed adjustments are implemented without delay;
- Ensure ongoing discussions take place including reviews of agreed adjustments;
- If appropriate, undertake a [stress risk assessment](#);
- Signpost to other sources of support (e.g. GP, Employee Wellbeing Service, support groups, etc.). Please see [Appendix B](#) for more information;
- Consider a referral to Occupational Health and discuss with the employee whether they feel this would be beneficial.

[Back to Contents](#)

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Appendix A - Examples of Potential Reasonable Adjustments

The following is a list of possible adjustments that may help both female and male employees to manage their symptoms in the workplace. It is not an exhaustive list so consideration should be given to any other adjustments that are identified.

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
Daytime sweats and hot flushes	- Less tolerant of temperatures in the workplace. - Work clothes / uniform may become uncomfortable. - Personal protective equipment (PPE) may be uncomfortable if worn for long periods.	- Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site. - Ensure easy access to washroom/changing facilities, particularly when working off site. - Access to shower facilities, if required. - Allow for more frequent breaks to manage symptoms, change clothes, etc. - Avoid close fitting or non-breathable clothing. - Allow flexibility with uniforms (e.g. no jacket required). - Consider providing additional uniforms. - Look at ways of cooling the work environment (e.g. desk fan, moving to a desk near a window that opens, adjusting the air conditioning). - Limit the time spent wearing PPE.
Night-time sweats and hot flushes	- Tiredness (due to lack of sleep). - Concentration issues (due to lack of sleep).	Allow for flexible working (e.g. working at home, temporary adjustment to start time,

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
		alternative shift pattern).
Insomnia or sleep difficulties	- Tiredness (due to lack of sleep). - Concentration issues (due to lack of sleep).	Allow for flexible working (e.g. working at home, temporary adjustment to start time, alternative shift pattern).
Irregular and/or heavy periods	- Need to access toilet facilities on a frequent basis. - Certain tasks may be unfeasible (e.g. a teacher supporting swimming may not be able to be in the pool).	- Ensure easy access to toilet facilities particularly when working off site. - Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet. - Access to shower facilities, if required. - Temporary adjustment to duties, if required.
Poor concentration / loss of confidence	- Performance may be affected. - Difficulty making decisions. - Work-related stress.	- Consider if concentration is better or worse at particular times of the day and adjust working pattern / work tasks accordingly. - Review task allocation and workload. - Have regular one-to-one meetings so that any issues can be discussed. - Provide books for lists or other memory-assisting equipment. - Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions. - Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices. - Identify and address work-related stress

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
		through risk assessment.
Low mood / anxiety / panic attacks	Performance may be affected.	- Contact the Employee Counselling Service for advice and support. - Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk. - Identify a 'buddy' for the individual to talk to (this could be within or outside of their team). - Allow for more frequent breaks to undertake relaxation techniques or to have time out from others (without needing to ask for permission).
Headaches	Loss of concentration / performance may be affected.	- Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site. - Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions. - Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices.
Urinary problems	- Need to access toilet facilities more frequently. - May need to drink more fluids.	- Ensure easy access to drinking water, particularly when working off site. - Ensure easy access to toilet facilities particularly when working off site. - Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet.

Symptom	Potential Workplace Impact	Potential Adjustments
Joint stiffness, aches and pains	Static postures may be more uncomfortable.	- For desk based employees, undertake a workstation risk assessment. - Allow for more frequent breaks so that the employee can stretch.

[Back to Contents](#)

Appendix B - Sources of Further Support and Information

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for Menopausal Symptoms	www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms
Employee Assistance Programme	https://leics.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/News/Pages/employee-assistance-programme.aspx
First Contact Plus - provides advice on a range of issues including getting active and stopping smoking	http://www.firstcontactplus.org.uk/
Henpicked menopause	https://henpicked.net/menopause/
Learning Hub	https://leicestershiretotara.learningpool.com/login/index.php
LCC's Employee Wellbeing Service (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)	Telephone: (0116) 3055515 Email: counsellingandwellbeing@leics.gov.uk
LCC menopause information - Learning Hub	https://leicestershiretotara.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=3581
LCC's menopause support group	Please refer to the Learning Hub for further details
LCC's Yammer menopause group	https://www.yammer.com/leics.gov.uk/#/threads/inGroup?type=in_group&feedId=13775957&view=all
Menopause Matters	https://menopausematters.co.uk/index.php
NICE guidelines	https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/Menopause
National Institute of Medical Herbalists - provides advice on herbal remedies	http://www.nimh.org.uk/
NHS Choices - provides advice on symptoms and treatments for the female menopause	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/ https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/menopause/Pages/Menopausehome.aspx
NHS Choices - provides information on symptoms of the male menopause	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/male-menopause/
The Daisy Network - provides support to women experiencing early menopause	https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/