MEDIGOLD HEALTH

LET'S TALK MENOPAUSE

Your guide to dealing with menopause in the workplace

WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

Menopause is when a person stops menstruating due to a reduction in hormone levels and marks the end of natural fertility. It is not a single event, but rather a transition process which begins with the perimenopause.

During perimenopause, the body's production of oestrogen and progesterone will begin to fluctuate and gradually start to decline, creating hormonal imbalances. These imbalances disrupt the menstrual cycle, meaning periods may become more irregular. They are also responsible for the symptoms typically associated with menopause that many women experience during this phase, which we cover on the following pages.

A person is deemed to have reached menopause once they have gone 12 consecutive months without a period. After this, they will then enter post-menopause and will remain in this stage for the rest of their life. While menopause symptoms will gradually decrease, lowered levels of oestrogen mean that post-menopausal women are at increased risk of certain health issues, including osteoporosis and heart disease.



Facts about menopause

- Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, but can happen earlier or later
- 1 in 100 women experience early or premature menopause (before the age of 40)
- Premature menopause can occur naturally or as a result of a medical condition or surgery, such as hysterectomy (surgical menopause)
- The menopause transition usually lasts anywhere between 7 and 14 years
- 80% of women will experience noticeable menopause symptoms
- Menopause symptoms typically persist for around 4 years, but some women experience them for a lot longer

Source: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_menopause_0.pdf

MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS: SO MUCH MORE THAN HOT FLUSHES!

Around 8 in every 10 women going through menopause will experience noticeable symptoms, and of those, **45%** will find them hard to deal with.

Pain and fatigue	Physical sensations	Emotional and psychological symptoms	Cognitive issues	Other health issues and symptoms	
Headaches and migraines	Tingling extremities	Mood swings	Memory lapses	Irregular periods	Gum problems
Breast soreness	Skin issues	Anxiety, feelings of dread or feeling tense or nervous	Poor focus and concentration	Vaginal issues	Hair loss and thinning
Disrupted sleep and insomnia	Hot flushes	Irritability	Brain fog	Decreased libido	Brittle nails
Fatigue or extreme tiredness	Electric shocks	Low mood or depression	Problems with decision making	Digestive problems	Bloating
Muscle tension	Night sweats	Anxiety or panic attacks	Difficulty learning and retaining new information	Allergies or intolerances	Irregular heartbeat or heart palpitations
Low stamina	Burning mouth	Loss of interest in most things	Increased forgetfulness	Body odour	Weight gain
Joint ache, pain, swelling and stiffness	Dizzy spells	Crying spells	Reduced verbal fluency	Bladder issues	Osteoporosis
Reduced muscle strength	Tinnitus	Low confidence or self-esteem		Breathing difficulties	Dry eyes

Source: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_menopause_0.pdf

TREATMENTS

Menopause symptoms can be debilitating, and even if they are less severe, they can still have a significant impact on your daily life. If this is the case for you, remember that treatment is available, so it's important to go and see your GP or healthcare professional to discuss your options.



Conventional treatment

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is one of the most common menopause treatments. It works by replenishing levels of oestrogen and progesterone in the body, helping to balance hormone levels and reduce or eliminate menopausal symptoms.

There have been huge improvements in HRT over the past 20 years and it is safe and very effective for many women.

HRT is available in several forms:

- Patches
- Gel
- Tablets



Remember that with **all** treatments, it can take time for them to start taking effect, so it's important to persevere for at least 4-6 weeks to see if they help your symptoms.

TREATMENTS



Alternative treatments

While there is little scientific research on the effectiveness of complementary medicines and herbal remedies for treating menopause symptoms, anecdotally many women do find them helpful. Common herbal remedies include:

- Black cohosh
- St John's Wort
- Angelica
- Ginseng

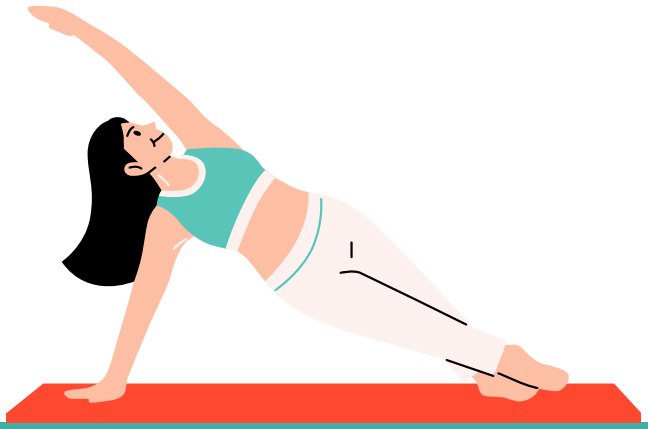
It's important to note that these alternative treatments are not regulated and there is little certainty around appropriate dosing. Some of them can also interact with other medication, impacting its effectiveness or causing serious side-effects. You should therefore consult with your GP or pharmacist before starting any complementary medicines or herbal remedies, especially if you have an existing health condition. For more information, visit the NHS website.

Employers can play an important role in promoting awareness among their employees about menopause and the treatments available. Having access to resources and information helps people feel more empowered to have conversations with their healthcare provider about their options.



LIFESTYLE TIPS

In addition to seeking treatment, maintaining a healthy lifestyle can really help to alleviate a lot of the symptoms many people experience during menopause.



Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet





Incorporate regular physical activity

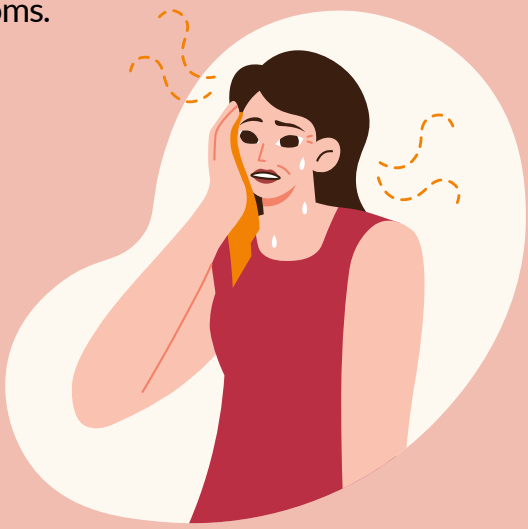
Strength exercises and resistance training are especially important for helping to protect and strengthen your bones.



Try to reduce stress

Wear layers

If you experience hot flushes or night sweats, wearing layers that you can easily remove will help you to better regulate your temperature. You may also want to avoid spicy foods if they trigger these symptoms.



Stop smoking and limit alcohol consumption



WHY IS MENOPAUSE STILL A WORKPLACE TABOO?

Sadly, despite the fact that over half of all people will go through menopause, a lot of people still don't feel comfortable or equipped to speak about it. Numerous myths still exist and there remains a general lack of awareness and understanding about the impact it can have. As a result, people often feel isolated in their experience or may even be unaware that their symptoms could be menopause-related and therefore don't seek the help and support that they need.

Research has found that less than half of women who have taken sickness absence due to menopause symptoms disclosed the real reason to their line managers.

Below are some of the common reasons why women may be reluctant to discuss menopause at work:



Source: https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/02/26305_menopause_guide-1.pdf

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ADDRESSING THE IMPACT ON WORK

Let's get talking: how to have sensitive conversations about menopause

Menopause affects every person differently. But although not everyone will encounter all the symptoms we've mentioned in this guide, most women will experience at least some of them, and it's easy to see how they might impact someone in the workplace.

As we've already covered, for many of us, talking about the menopause can still be daunting. However, starting conversations is crucial to ensure people are given the right support. While it's important not to be intrusive, if you think someone may be struggling with symptoms at work, providing them an opportunity to open up about their experiences and concerns can be really helpful.

If you're a manager, here's when you should be having wellbeing conversations with an employee:

- If you notice that they are experiencing adverse symptoms
- If there are changes in work performance and capability issues
- When the individual has a sickness absence
- In your regular 1:1 meetings with them

When approaching conversations about any aspect of wellbeing, especially a subject as sensitive and personal as the menopause, there are a few key principles to bear in mind:

- Ask simple, open questions to encourage them to talk
- Let them explain in their own words
- Allow them time to think
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient
- Listen actively and carefully
- Listen to understand, rather than to respond
- Avoid making assumptions or being judgmental
- Avoid bringing your own experiences to the conversation unless they ask
- Maintain good eye contact
- Have open body language
- Remain calm and be reassuring
- Show empathy and understanding
- Avoid feeling sorry for them and being patronising
- Ask them what they think will help them.



ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF WORK

Work itself can also directly impact a woman's experience of menopause, presenting a number of challenges that can exacerbate symptoms or make them harder to manage. We have listed some of these challenges below.





Physical and practical challenges

- Poor ventilation and air quality
- High temperature
- Limited access to drinking water
- Inadequate toilet / washing facilities
- Long shifts
- Inflexible break times
- Excessive workloads / workplace stress
- Travelling / staying away from home
- Having to wear uncomfortable uniforms or PPE

Interpersonal challenges

- Negative attitudes
- Unsympathetic line management
- Unsupportive team / colleagues
- Bullying and harassment
- Lack of suitable policies, processes and risk assessments
- Limited awareness and knowledge among colleagues about the menopause
- Lack of management training on women's health issues



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WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

There are lots of simple, low-cost adjustments that you can introduce to make it easier for employees to deal with menopause symptoms and help them feel more comfortable at work. Adjustments to consider include:

Pain and fatigue

- Offering flexible working or adjusted hours
- Reducing travel requirements and allowing the option to work from home
- Permitting more frequent or longer breaks
- Providing a quiet room for rest
- Reviewing workstation setup and location to reduce discomfort
- Allowing the ability to move around or providing access to seating for rest breaks

Physical Sensations

- Ensuring good ventilation and providing access to fresh air/fans
- Providing access to cold drinks
- Providing seating or somewhere for them to rest
- Exempting them from wearing uniform or PPE or relaxing your dress code

Emotional and psychological symptoms

- Conducting an awareness session with their team or colleagues (if the employee consents to this)
- Offering additional 1:1 meetings or allocating a workplace buddy to conduct wellbeing check-ins with the employee to allow them an opportunity to discuss any concerns or difficulties
- Managing workloads, targets and deadlines sympathetically
- Signposting sources of support available within your organisation (e.g. Employee Assistance Programme/ counselling services) or externally (e.g. Access to Work's mental health support service)

Cognitive issues

- Providing information in advance of meetings as much as possible
- Following up verbal communications and instructions in writing
- Offering help with planning, prioritising and organising, and utilising alarms and checklists for deadlines and projects
- Providing quiet space for employees to work from or moving their workstation to minimise distractions
- Providing noise cancelling headphones

Other physical symptoms

- Relocating their workstation to allow easy access to toilets
- Providing access to wash facilities and sanitary products
- Allowing flexible working and working from home
- Reducing travel requirements



If an employee's symptoms are significantly impacting their daily activities or they are experiencing issues such as osteoporosis, breathing difficulties, irregular heartbeat or heart palpitations, it is important to encourage them to seek medical advice and support from their doctor or healthcare professional. You may also wish to refer them to your occupational health provider for guidance on how best to support them at work.

IMPROVING MENOPAUSE SUPPORT IN YOUR WORKPLACE – TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

Why awareness is important

As we've seen, menopause symptoms can greatly affect every aspect of an individual's daily life, and work is no exception. If employees are not given the right support to manage their symptoms effectively, the impact on their wellbeing and, in turn, on organisational productivity can be significant. Research has found that 73%* of women feel unsupported at work while experiencing menopause, while 1 in 10** leave work because of menopause symptoms, representing a huge drain in knowledge and expertise from the workplace.

If you're looking to go further to make your organisation more menopause friendly at every level, here are some of the strategies you may want to consider.

The shocking statistics



76%

of women going through the menopause find symptoms moderately or extremely problematic at work

19%

reported being absent for more than 8 weeks due to symptoms

31%

have thought about reducing their working hours or leaving their job.

- The Menopause Survey 2018

Organisations

Developing a dedicated menopause policy and integrating it into your Sickness Absence, Equality, Flexible Working, Health & Safety and other relevant policies is a key first step. It shows that you recognise the impact that menopause can have on your employees and demonstrates your commitment to supporting them. Providing information and resources and ensuring that employees have ready access to menopause support services, for example through Occupational Health or an Employee Assistance Programme, is also crucial in creating an inclusive and supportive work environment.

Managers

Providing line managers with appropriate training is essential to help improve awareness of menopause and its impact and facilitate effective support and workplace adjustments. Make sure managers are aware of your menopause policy and the support and resources available through your organisation, and ensure they know where to signpost colleagues for further guidance and support.

Individuals

The impact of menopause symptoms can be felt not only by the individual experiencing them, but by their colleagues, partners and families as well. To create a supportive workplace, it's therefore vital to educate all colleagues on menopause and how they can help someone who may be struggling with the effects. Campaigns, posters, newsletter articles, blog posts and training can all help to boost awareness, promote inclusivity and prevent conflicts arising from perceived favouritism around adjustments. You could also consider setting up an employee support group, where people can openly share their experience with others.

**Source: https://workplacewellbeing.pro/news/two-fifths-of-women-dont-feel-supported-through-menopause-at-work/*
***Source: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/menopause-workplace-guidance employers#:~:text=Further%20research%20by%20the%20Fawcett,work%20due%20to%20menopause%20symptoms.*

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HOW MEDIGOLD CAN HELP



DESIGNED BY EXPERTS

Our menopause training programmes have been created and approved by disability and wellbeing experts who are experienced in advising organisations on menopause in the workplace.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS TRAINING

Delivered by our experienced trainers, our engaging and insightful menopause training programmes will help you to:

- Improve awareness and understanding among your employees of menopause and its impact in the workplace.
- Equip your teams with the knowledge and tools necessary to be able to confidently support the wellbeing of menopausal colleagues, to ensure they remain happy, productive and successful at work.
- Consider strategies to help you develop a menopause-inclusive work environment, including introducing flexible working, workplace adjustments and additional support services.

Delivery: Half day face-to-face session **or** 2 x 2.5hr online facilitated learning sessions
Maximum attendees: 12

All training content and materials can be tailored specifically to your organisation.

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Interested in learning more about how our menopause training and support services could help your organisation?

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medigold-health.com