



Managers Guide: Handling Menopause in the Workplace

Introduction

By following this guide, managers can create a supportive environment for employees experiencing menopause, helping them to thrive and maintain their performance at work.

Understanding and addressing menopause in the workplace is not only good practice but also enhances employee well-being and organisational productivity.

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a significant life stage that can impact employee's well-being and performance at work.

As a manager, understanding and supporting employees through this period is crucial.

This guide provides you with the knowledge and tools to create a menopause-friendly workplace, ensuring all employees feel valued and supported

Definition: Menopause occurs when menstruation stops permanently due to hormonal changes, typically around ages 45-55.

Stages:

Perimenopause: The transitional phase leading up to menopause.

Menopause: When a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

Postmenopause: The time after menopause has occurred.

What are the symptoms?

Physical:

- Hot flushes
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Skin Irritation
- Urinary problems
- Joint aches
- Weight gain

Psychological:

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Memory problems
- Loss of confidence





What impact can this have on work?

Menopause can affect concentration, attendance and performance due to the range of symptoms experienced. It affects everyone differently, in terms of their relationships, family life and work. For some it can affect their mental health, by triggering changes to their mood, and problems such as brain fog.

Menopause

is a natural part of your life, but despite this it has been a taboo subject. There has been very little information available, and there is a culture of where women don't tell anyone they are experiencing the menopause in case they get discriminated against. So it's important to create a menopause-friendly workplace

Communication and Culture

Normalise Conversations:

Encourage open dialogue about menopause to reduce stigma. Menopause should not be a taboo subject.

Supportive Environment:

Foster a culture where employees feel comfortable discussing menopause-related issues with Managers or HR.

Workplace Adjustments:

Assess any adjustments that may help to support employees with Menopause.

Making Adjustments

Personalised Support:

Adjustments may be tailored based on individual needs.

Review and Follow up:

Regularly review the effectiveness of adjustments and make changes as needed.

Legal considerations:

Equality Act 2010:

Be aware of your obligations under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments for employees experiencing menopausal symptoms that may classify as a disability.

Health and Safety:

Ensure compliance with health and safety legislation to support the well-being of menopausal employees.

Additional Resources:

Menopause Matters:

A comprehensive resource for information on menopause.

NICE Guidelines:

Guidelines for managing menopause symptoms and treatments.

Questions for Individual Conversations

1. Are you experiencing any symptoms of menopause that are affecting your work?
2. What type of support do you think would help you most in managing these symptoms at work?
3. Are there any specific adjustments to your work environment or schedule that would make you more comfortable?
4. Do you have access to the resources or information you need about menopause and how it might impact your work?
5. How can I, as your line manager, assist you better during this time?



Questions for Open Discussions

1. How can we better support employees experiencing menopause symptoms in the workplace?
2. Are there specific challenges you face related to menopause that affect your work?
3. What adjustments or accommodations would help you manage menopause symptoms while at work?
4. Do you feel comfortable discussing menopause-related issues with your line manager or HR? If not, what can we do to make this easier?
5. Are there any specific workplace policies or practices that could be improved to better support those going through menopause?



Everything you need to know about menopause in the workplace

Experiencing menopause at work can be challenging for a number of reasons, and the physiological and psychological symptoms of menopause can vary greatly from person to person.

While menopause isn't explicitly a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2020, a recent landmark employment tribunal case (Mrs M Lynskey v Direct Line Insurance) found that menopause symptoms can, in fact, be considered a disability if they have a long-term and substantial impact on a woman's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

A key takeaway from the case is that it may be possible to discriminate against employees experiencing menopause symptoms, by refusing to make reasonable adjustments and by penalising them for poor performance.

The ET ruled that the employer failed to make reasonable adjustments for Mrs Lynskey's menopausal symptoms – namely: low mood, anxiety, mood swings, poor self-esteem and impact on memory and concentration - and that these symptoms were legally classed as a disability. This led to unfavourable treatment and her resignation.

Case Summary

The employee joined the Company in 2016 and had performed well for four years. However, in 2019, she began to experience menopausal symptoms, including poor concentration and memory issues and was also frequently tearful.

After initial support, in 2020 she was transferred to a lower paid role, rather than reasonable adjustments being made to her existing role. She struggled with the new job, including difficulty with accessing computer systems, experiencing 'brain fog' and struggling for words.

In 2021, she was told she would not receive a pay rise and her performance was criticised, wrongly attributed to low confidence.

Subsequently, she was placed on a formal performance-improvement and, although she had repeatedly mentioned her menopausal symptoms, her manager claimed there were no mitigating reasons for her performance.

She resigned the next year, claiming against the Company for unfavourable treatment and lack of reasonable adjustments.

At tribunal, the claimant was awarded £23,000 for injury to feelings, £2,500 for aggravated damages, and more than £30,000 for loss of past and future earnings, plus interest.

Be aware of the law

Menopause isn't explicitly a protected characteristic under the law.

However, recent ET claims, along with guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in February 2024, clarify that menopause symptoms could qualify as a disability if they have a long-term and substantial impact on a woman's ability to carry out her normal day-to-day activities.

This would then place an automatic legal duty on an employer to make reasonable adjustments - and not doing so could amount to unlawful disability discrimination.

Do all you can to prevent discrimination

As a manager, you're likely to be aware of the proactive steps you can take to prevent discrimination. Please find examples below.

Some examples include:

- Discouraging unwanted comments, jokes, 'banter' or ridicule about a woman's menopause or perimenopause symptoms. Not only are they completely unacceptable in a modern workplace but could amount to harassment or sexual harassment.
- Record menopause-related absences separately from other sickness absences. If later down the line you were to take disciplinary action due to menopause-related absence, this could potentially constitute unlawful discrimination, unless there's an objective justification for these actions.

Create an open and inclusive culture

Menopause is a natural process and shouldn't be a taboo subject. Yet, remarkably in 2024, there's still a lack of understanding and support at work for employees going through the menopause, which can make things awkward and uncomfortable for everyone.

Creating a workplace culture that openly acknowledges and supports employees during the menopause should be a key part of your strategy. By fostering an environment where discussions about menopause are welcomed and supported, you can help reduce stigma, encourage early disclosure of symptoms and help facilitate access to the support available.



Get in touch

This document is intended as a guide. If you have any concerns regarding its content, or for further information about handling menopause in the workplace or anything else to help make managing your HR easier then please get in touch. We'd love to help.

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