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Developed by



The Shrewsbury and
Telford Hospital
NHS Trust



meno pause

Shared with ICS partners



Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
Integrated Care System



Every woman will experience the **menopause** irrespective of whether or not they have had children.

It can be a really difficult time in a woman's life, for some they just 'sail through it' whilst for others it causes significant health issues which require treatment and/or is life changing for the period of time when it affects them.

Over 80% of our workforce is female, with 15-20% being in the age range where menopause is most likely to affect them.

In general, 3 in 4 women experience symptoms, 1 in 4 women consider leaving work due to menopause symptoms and 10% go on to terminate their employment. Very few women raise this with their manager as a health condition which requires support and understanding, as it is still deemed to be a 'taboo' subject. In the worst case scenario, symptoms impact general health and wellbeing, sickness absence, health and safety, job performance, conduct and behaviours.



It is our intention that this toolkit will support women to:

- Understand more about their menopause, the symptoms which may affect them and possible treatments
- Give confidence to enable women to discuss this with their manager
- Provide reassurance regarding adjustments which could be made to support women at work while experiencing menopause

And for managers to:

- understand how menopause affects their staff
- Understand how our women may need support and be more confident to have a conversation with them about this
- Understand the ways in which menopause may affect a woman's performance in her role either due to conduct or capability
- Be able to signpost women towards support which may be available for them

Every woman is different therefore it is important that we all demonstrate understanding to support our colleagues who are going through this stage in their life.



What is menopause?



The menopause occurs in all women.
It can occur when:



- the ovaries spontaneously fail to produce the hormones oestrogen and progesterone
- when the ovaries fail due to specific treatment such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy, or when the ovaries are removed, often at the time of a hysterectomy

The resulting low and changing levels of hormones, particularly oestrogen, are thought to be the cause of menopausal symptoms in many women.

Menopause means the last menstrual period. Periods stop because the low levels of oestrogen and progesterone do not stimulate the endometrium (lining of the womb), in the normal cycle.

Hormone levels can fluctuate for many years before eventually becoming so low that the endometrium stays thin and does not bleed.

Perimenopause

Perimenopause is the stage from the beginning of menopausal symptoms to postmenopause.



Postmenopause

Postmenopause is the time following the last period and is usually defined as more than 12 months with no periods in someone who has their ovaries, or immediately following surgery if the ovaries are removed.

The average age of the menopause is 51 years but can occur much earlier or later. Menopause occurring before the age of 45 is called an **early menopause** and before the age of 40 is a **premature ovarian insufficiency (POI)**.



What are the **symptoms?**

Early menopausal symptoms include physical, sexual and psychological problems.





Psychological symptoms include:

Mood swings

Difficulty coping

Irritability

Forgetfulness

Difficulty concentrating

Anxiety

These may be related to hormonal changes, either directly or indirectly, for example due to sleep disturbance. However, other life events such as worry over teenage children, elderly relatives and stresses of work may also contribute to such “symptoms” around the time of the menopause.

Sexual problems may be caused by vaginal dryness due to low oestrogen levels, resulting in discomfort during intercourse. Effective treatments are available. As men and women get older, interest in sex may decrease but this particularly affects women. Treatment of other menopausal symptoms may indirectly improve libido by improving feelings of wellbeing and energy levels e.g. by improving sleep through control of night sweats, but restoring hormone levels can also improve sensation. Hormonal treatment may not however be the “magic” answer as relationship problems can also affect libido.



Later menopause

symptoms are due to the effects of lack of oestrogen on the bladder and vagina and include:

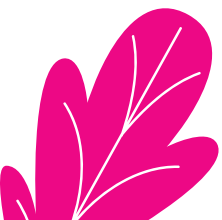
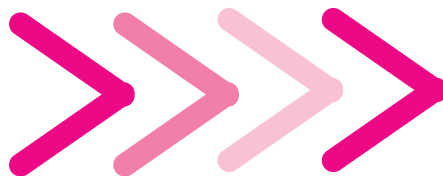
Passing urine more frequently by day and night

Discomfort on passing urine

Urine infection

Leakage of urine

Vaginal dryness, discomfort, burning and itching



These symptoms are extremely common and can cause significant distress but, often due to embarrassment, are under-reported and hence under-treated. Local oestrogen preparations (vaginal tablet, creams, or vaginal ring) can be very helpful in relieving these symptoms. Low dose vaginal oestrogen can be used when systemic oestrogen is inappropriate, and can be continued in the long term without any known adverse effects. Non hormonal vaginal moisturizers can also be used (see separate information sheet. See link below.

[The menopause and the pelvic floor](#)



Other later menopause symptoms include:

Skin and hair changes due to the falling oestrogen levels.

Skin may become dryer, thinner, less elastic and more prone to bruising. Skin itching can also occur. Skin symptoms often respond to oestrogen replacement.

Hair thinning, dryness and the growth of unwanted hair can also be explained by the lack of oestrogen.





Lifestyle **factors**

A healthy lifestyle can minimize the effects of the menopause, helping to keep the heart and bones strong.

Many women feel that this is a good time to review the way they treat their body. Here are some tips to give your body the easiest ride:



Chew over your diet:

The fall in hormone levels (namely, oestrogen) that accompanies the menopause can increase the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. A healthy diet is essential at this stage: keep it low in saturated fat and salt to reduce blood pressure, and rich in calcium and vitamin D to strengthen bones. Some women take dietary supplements to help get the balance right

Keep on your feet:

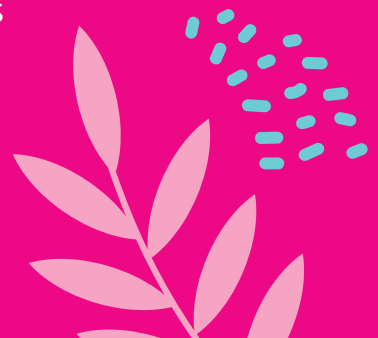
Some women experience increased anxiety during the menopause. Regular exercise helps to convert stress into positive energy, while guarding against heart disease. A regular, varied programme is best: try cycling, swimming, running or aerobics

Stop smoking:

Smoking has been shown to lead to an earlier menopause and trigger hot flushes. If you smoke you also run a higher risk of developing osteoporosis and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), which is the most common form of death in women

Drink within reason:

The combination of excessive alcohol and hormonal instability is a risky one!





What can **Line Managers** do to support?

It's a natural stage of life experienced by half of the workforce at some point, and yet it's a taboo subject in many workplaces. Many employees suffer in silence when they are being affected by menopause even though their symptoms may be severe. Often a few simple changes to someone's working environment can make a world of difference - enabling someone experiencing menopausal symptoms to continue performing and contributing to their full potential, even just talking about it openly can **reduce the impact on someone's symptoms.**

The role of line managers in supporting women experiencing menopause transition is crucial. Effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms that are impacting on their work will help to improve team's morale, retain valuable skills and talent, and reduce sickness absence. Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee health and well-being, spotting early signs of ill health or distress, and initiating early intervention.



Line Managers can help by:

- Being the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs a change or adjustment to their work or working hours, to enable them to perform to their full potential.
- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect to make it easier for an individual to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of their team to provide a safe space for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause.

Remember...

- Don't make assumptions - everyone is different, so take your lead from the individual.
- The level of trust you build with individuals will determine the extent to which female colleagues are able to discuss menopausal symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work.



How to start a conversation with an employee who you think may be experiencing **menopause symptoms**





It is difficult to know how to begin a conversation with a woman who you believe may be experiencing some menopause symptoms, especially if they haven't divulged this to you or any colleagues. A Health and wellbeing conversation could help you approach this with your member of staff.

Health and Wellbeing conversations are regular and supportive one to one conversations focussed on looking after the wellbeing of all our staff and we encourage managers, teams and departments to introduce these into working life.

The aim of these conversations is to hold a confidential discussion around an individual's whole wellbeing including physical, mental, emotional, financial and lifestyle and to identify areas where an individual may need support, signposting or regular check ins on their wellbeing and to create a wellbeing action plan.



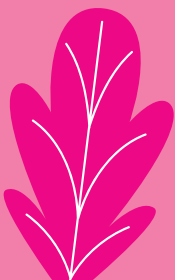
Wellbeing Wheel



Action plan

While any health condition can understandably be a sensitive and personal issue for many, some of the symptoms associated with the menopause can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate, even visible, way. It's therefore understandable why many women could feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss the impact of their symptoms. However, most people would prefer a concerned and genuine enquiry about how they are as opposed to silence. Don't make assumptions about someone's health condition or ask them a direct question as to whether they have menopause symptoms.

It's up to the individual to disclose any particular symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.



How to approach a **sensitive conversation**

It's important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issue. But try not to worry too much - being over-sensitive will stop you from doing or saying anything.



Here are some tips to consider...



Avoid interruptions - switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.

Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.

Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.

Speak calmly.

Maintain good eye contact.

Listen actively and carefully.

Encourage the employee to talk.

Give the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words, avoid jargon.

Show empathy and understanding.

Be prepared for some silences and be patient.

Focus on the person, not the problem.

Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.



A full guide on how to hold a Wellbeing Conversation can be found [here](#)



Discussing reasonable adjustments

Simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier within their day to day job. Managers have a responsibility to consider, and put in place, reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible, so that women experiencing symptoms can carry on performing in their role.





How do I start a conversation about workplace adjustments?

Start by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the individual concerned, to identify the specific issues that that person is experiencing.

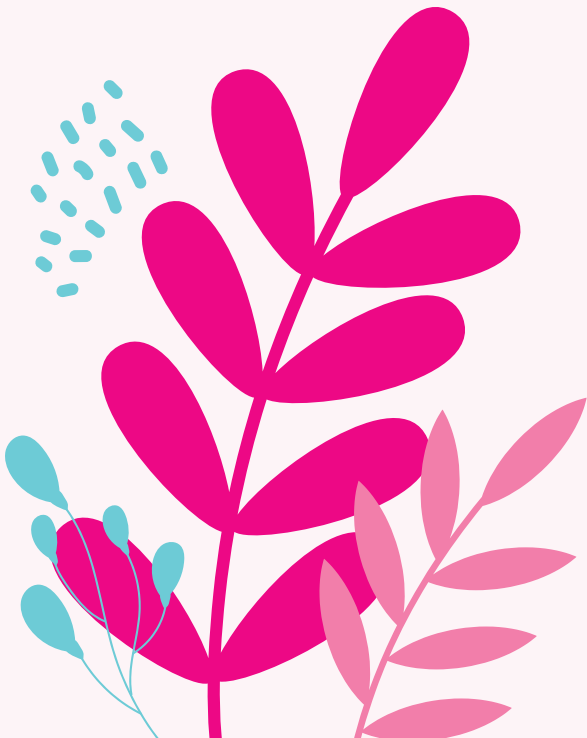
Record any specific needs (and agreed adjustments) and review these on a regular basis. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so make sure you have regular discussions with the person concerned to ensure that the support is sufficient and suiting their needs. Any adjustments will usually be agreed on a temporary basis and with a service to operate and other staff requiring support it may only be possible to agree adjustments on temporary basis.

Appendix 2 shows a table outlining possible menopause symptoms, how they may affect women in work and possible adjustments which could be made.

Any adjustments which are agreed need to suit both parties and will be dependent upon service delivery restrictions, this doesn't mean that we can't challenge existing 'thinking' however not all suggestions may be possible.

Summary

Hopefully you will have found this toolkit useful to support yourself and /or your staff. It is important to remember that women experience this at different ages, with varying symptoms therefore it is crucial that we manage this on a case-by-case basis but more importantly that we create the right environment in our teams where people feel comfortable to discuss this sensitive matter.





Appendix 1

Further Support

Care First (Employee Assistance Programme)

Care First provides confidential, impartial advice and support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is free for you to access whenever you need. To contact care first, call **0800 174319** or visit their website for useful resources <https://carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk/> Username: **sath** Password: **employee**

Team Prevent Occupational Health

Team Prevent provide individuals and managers with advice, guidance and recommendations on physical and mental health concerns following a management referral and employee consultation, sometimes involving other Healthcare professionals. Management referrals are made via the Occupational Health portal.

Telephone: 01327 810777 Email: sath@teamprevent.co.uk

HR Advice and Support

If you need to speak to a member of the HR team we are available on **01952 641 222 ext 2891** (Monday to Friday 9am until 5pm). Mobile numbers for the HR Advisory Team are available on the Intranet Phone book (please take into consideration that our team work a variety of work patterns and may not respond immediately to your call).

[Health and Wellbeing Support Pack](#)



[Menopause Intranet Page](#)



Appendix 2 - Checklist to support women to identify their symptoms

Review the attached list to see if there are any symptoms which you are experiencing:

	All the time	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Physical Symptoms				
Palpitations (heart beating faster)				
Hot flushes/night sweats				
Struggling with sleep				
Skin issues(dryness, itching, acne)				
Weight gain or bloating				
Bladder leakage/need to go to toilet more frequently				
Vaginal dryness				
Pain 'down below'				
Heavy dragging feeling in vagina				
Breast tenderness				
Changes to periods				
Feeling dizzy or faint				
Numbness in parts of body				
Aching joints				
Psychological Symptoms				
Tearful				
Anxious/worrying				
Mood swings				

	All the time	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Low confidence				
Memory problems				
Low mood or depression				
Panic attacks				
Irritability				
Unable to concentrate				
Inability to multi task				
Brain fog				

- This list is not exhaustive
- Remember some of these symptoms may be indicators of other medical conditions so don't just ignore them
- If you are in the age range 45-55 and you present yourself to your GP with a range of these symptom you would not necessarily need a blood test to confirm whether you are in menopause



Appendix 3 - Menopause symptoms, how that may affect you in work and possible adjustment

Symptom	Potential Impact on Work	Adjustments for you and your Line Manager to consider
Daytime sweats and hot flushes	Less tolerant of workplace temperatures; work wear / uniform may become uncomfortable; personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, face masks/ visors and lead aprons may be uncomfortable if worn for long periods.	<p>Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water.</p> <p>Ensure easy access to washroom facilities.</p> <p>Consider alternatives to hosiery or Trust uniforms if available.</p> <p>Look at ways to cool the working environment for staff affected, for example, fans at workstations; move desks to near windows/ open windows and adjust air conditioning.</p> <p>Take account of mobile workers (porters, community, people working between sites etc) schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day.</p> <p>Limit the time wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) if appropriate.</p>





Symptom	Potential Impact on Work	Adjustments for you and your Line Manager to consider
Night time sweats and flushes	Fatigue at work due to lack of sleep	<p>Provide support and advice on sleep.</p> <p>Consider temporary adjustment of work patterns to accommodate any difficulties if possible within service requirements.</p> <p>Consider flexible working options.</p> <p>Should be given due consideration when managing sickness absence.</p>
Unable to sleep	Fatigue at work due to lack of sleep (may be compounded if shift work is carried out)	<p>Consider temporary adjustment of work patterns to accommodate any difficulties.</p> <p>Consider flexible working options.</p>
Psychological problems, for example: loss of confidence, forgetfulness/ memory loss; difficulty concentrating; change in mood; anxiety depression	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected	<p>Encourage employee to discuss concerns openly at one to one meetings with manager or occupational health and discuss reasonable adjustments if required.</p> <p>Provide access to Psychological services if required.</p> <p>Address any subsequent work related stress through wellbeing conversations and action plan.</p> <p>Suggest a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to if possible and required.</p>

Appendix 3 - Menopause symptoms, how that may affect you in work and possible adjustment (cont.)

Symptom	Potential Impact on Work	Adjustments for you and your Line Manager to consider
Headaches	May impact on ability to work and concentrate	<p>Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water.</p> <p>Provide a quiet place to work if available and meets service requirements.</p> <p>Provide resources to enable staff to undertake mindfulness.</p>
Psychosocial and social impact	May feel isolated from work colleagues	<p>Promote physical and mental wellbeing at work.</p> <p>Provide access to counselling if required.</p> <p>Provide ability to network with colleagues experiencing similar issues, attendance at support groups, awareness sessions.</p>
Urogenital problems, for example increased frequency, urgency	Need to access toilet facilities more frequently	<p>Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities.</p> <p>Consider the need for more frequent breaks in work to go to toilet.</p> <p>Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water.</p> <p>Take account of mobile workers schedules and their access to facilities during their working day.</p>
Heavy/Light Irregular Periods	May need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently	<p>Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities.</p> <p>Consider the need for more frequent breaks in work to go to toilet.</p> <p>Take account of mobile workers schedules and their access to facilities during their working day.</p>



