

# Menopause and the workplace: guidelines for employers

## What is menopause?

The menopause transition is a normal and natural life process that all women will go through. It will typically begin in a woman's mid-to-late 40s, and this stage is known as the perimenopause.

The menopause itself is said to occur after 12 consecutive months of no periods because the ovaries have stopped producing hormones, and it lasts a day. After that, a woman is postmenopausal.

The average age of the menopause in the UK is 51 and for most women, their periods have naturally stopped by the age of 55. Premature menopause or Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) occurs when a woman experiences menopause under the age of 40. This occurs in 1% of women.

Around [8 in 10 women](#) will experience symptoms of the menopause (with an [average of seven symptoms](#)). These will usually last for between four and eight years, but can last for up to 12 years.

Some of the most common physical symptoms reported by women during menopause include:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Sleep problems
- Changes to flow/frequency of periods
- Low energy levels
- Weight gain
- Joint aches
- Loss of sex drive
- Vaginal dryness
- Increased urinary frequency/urgency
- Headaches
- Palpitations

*“I was chairing meetings and thinking ‘Please don’t let me have a hot flush’. The more I was thinking about it, I was getting more anxious. And thinking everyone is going to be looking at me thinking ‘Oh she’s obviously menopausal’.”*

- Woman, Post-menopausal, Chesterfield  
(BritainThinks and MyMenopauseCentre)

The psychological symptoms are less well known and can impact work life in particular. These can include:

- Mood changes
- Difficulty with memory/forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression/feeling low
- Brain fog
- Anxiety
- Loss of confidence and self-esteem
- Lack of motivation

*“I was in the car driving to the next village sat at the traffic lights thinking ‘What am I doing? Where am I going?’... I was a busy women, I’ve had four children and helped my husband run his business and I just feel so useless.”*

- Woman, Currently menopausal, Glasgow  
(BritainThinks and MyMenopauseCentre)

## Why should menopause matter to employers?

With an estimated [4.3 million women aged 50-65 in the workplace](#), many in senior roles, the menopause is not just a ‘woman’s issue’ - it’s an organisational issue too.

The average age of menopause is 51 (though it can happen earlier or later) - this means that women could have anywhere from 15 to 25 years left of working life, but

may consider leaving their jobs because they feel unable to cope with their symptoms.

Research [from a 2021 report](#) by MyMenopauseCentre and BritainThinks showed that:

- 77% of the menopausal women interviewed agreed that the menopause can negatively impact a woman's performance at work.
- 67% agreed menopause can negatively impact a woman's career.
- Just 1 in 4 said they felt prepared for the menopause.
- Over half agreed that they underestimated the physical and emotional symptoms of the menopause.
- Those who said they felt prepared had a better experience of the menopause.

Other studies show the negative impact that the symptoms of the menopause can have on women's workforce participation i.e. engagement, retention, and performance:

- On average, [women missed 3.27 days of work each year](#) due to their symptoms, with a potential productivity loss of around 14m working days. Almost half of the employed women who took time off because of the menopause, and 47% would not tell their employer the real reason.
- [Studies](#) also suggest that, amongst those experiencing symptoms, for some women their symptoms are leading them to consider reducing their hours, leaving their jobs altogether, or are the reason they have left their jobs.
- Furthermore, [a survey by Nuffield Health](#) found 72% of female workers suffering symptoms said they felt unsupported at work, even though 1 in 5 said their symptoms have a detrimental impact on their work.

*“One of my senior colleagues took a demotion as she was embarrassed, she made some mistakes, and I felt she didn’t feel like she could say, and it was just too much.”*

– Workplace manager (BritainThinks and My MenopauseCentre)

Menopause symptoms can have a devastating impact on all aspects of a woman’s quality of life - work, home, social and sex life. But, by normalising conversations about menopause and putting some simple workplace practices in place, employers can help to make this transition much easier - and in turn, improve employees’ health, happiness, performance, and productivity.

Companies who successfully implement menopause policies and can demonstrate that they care about the safety and wellbeing of *all* employees will be more likely to attract new talent, as well as retain and engage existing talent.

## Supporting employees and breaking the menopause taboo - what can companies do?

Though menopause is a normal and natural process, it’s still a taboo subject in many workplaces. While things like colds, stomach upsets, and migraines are typically seen as valid reasons to call in sick and can be discussed openly, too few women feel comfortable talking about the physical and/or mental impact of their menopause symptoms.

Around half of women interviewed in a [survey by the University of Nottingham](#) say they didn’t discuss their symptoms with their line manager because...

- It’s private/personal (62%)
- It has no effect on work (43%)
- My line manager is a man (42%)
- It’s embarrassing (32%)
- I don’t know my line manager well enough (29%)
- My line manager is younger (15%)

Though menopause is a legal matter, covered by the Equality Act 2010 under age, gender, and disability, there's still a substantial lack of awareness and support for employees. A [survey by IPSOS Mori](#) last October also showed that

employers have a long way to go to meet the needs of women experiencing the menopause. It found that:

- Only 1 in 20 women aged 40-65 in employment are aware of their employer offering proactive policies to support women around the menopause.
- Most women don't currently feel supported at work.
- The majority of women would like to see their employer do more.

Collectively, these findings highlight that more work is needed to break the stigma surrounding menopause, so that women can gain greater access to help and support during what can be an incredibly stressful time.

*"It needs to be talked about... It would be nice to have someone you could reach out to."*

– Woman, Currently menopausal, Glasgow  
(BritainThinks and MyMenopauseCentre)

Some [companies](#), including [Channel 4](#) and [Publicis.Poke](#), have already started to lead the way in implementing workplace menopause policies that aim to create a more comfortable and manageable working environment for employees. Channel 4's menopause policy, for example, includes things like flexible working, access to a cool/quiet space where employees can go to manage symptoms, and paid sick leave.

A [2017 report written for the Government Equalities Office](#) further emphasised the essential need for employers to put the right support in place, and MPs have since called for it to become a legal requirement for all employers to have a menopause policy.

# What is a good menopause policy, and what should it contain?

Menopause policies might vary slightly from company to company, but the objective should always be the same: to provide a supportive working environment for employees experiencing menopause. An effective menopause policy will typically:

1. Create an inclusive culture
  - Raise awareness
  - Normalise the conversation
  - Share factual information
2. Train managers and support teams (HR, OH, EAP)
  - Make workplace arrangements for this to happen
3. Provide access to specialist, clinical menopause advice

Examples of actions that employers could take to implement policies in these areas could include:

- Providing a cool, quiet room where women can take time out to manage a range of different menopause symptoms including anxiety, hot flushes, and headaches.
- Providing desk fans, to help women stay cool during hot flushes.
- Organising occupational health assessments, to make sure that a woman's working environment, whether that be at home or in the office, isn't making her menopause symptoms worse.
- Paid sick leave for women who are feeling unwell or unfit for work as a result of menopause symptoms.
- Flexible working, including the option to adjust working hours so that staff aren't having to travel during peak hours.
- Providing access to specialist confidential counselling services.

- Encouraging employees to speak to a GP if they are experiencing menopause symptoms.
- Providing access to menopause specialists.
- Making sure that line managers and HR staff have had menopause awareness training, and are well-informed about how they can help women manage their symptoms at work.
- Encouraging all employees to educate themselves on menopause matters, so that they can be more supportive and understanding of team members.
- Working directly with women who are going through menopause to better understand their needs, and create arrangements that work for both the employer and the employee.
- Making sure that line managers are willing to listen to employees, and are open to having confidential discussions about menopause.
- Recognising that there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Employees will have different needs and what works for some women, might not work for others.
- Allowing women to wear an alternative uniform if the current uniform is causing discomfort. Hot flushes can be particularly difficult to deal with if a uniform isn't made from fabric that allows the skin to breathe, or if it reveals sweat patches easily.

## Tips and advice on creating a menopause policy

A menopause policy is a powerful document that could help to shape the future for companies and their employees. When writing a menopause policy, it's important to make sure that it is:

- Easily accessible and regularly publicised so that people, both internally and externally, are aware the policy exists and can find the details easily.

- Written in clear and supportive language. An employee who is struggling with symptoms will look to a menopause policy for reassurance on how her employer can help her. It's important that she can read the policy, and feel hopeful about the support that's on offer. One way to make a policy feel warmer and more inclusive, could be to write it in the first person, so it's 'you' and 'we', rather than 'us' and 'them'.
- A document that will be understood and taken seriously within an organisation. The word 'policy' might not always be the right fit for every company. Some companies might relate more to terms such as 'guidelines' or 'strategy'.
- Not a replacement for workplace training. A menopause policy means nothing if line managers and HR staff have a lack of awareness and understanding about menopause.

## The importance of implementing your menopause policy and creating a healthy workplace culture

While it's important that companies create menopause policies, it's essential that they take steps to implement these policies and are committed - from the top down - to creating an inclusive culture. Managers must proactively lead for creating a culture where menopause can be openly talked about so that women no longer have to feel shame or embarrassment. It's no good simply having a menopause policy published online that no one is aware of, and that isn't visible in the workplace culture.

One of the best ways that companies can understand whether a menopause policy is helping is to follow up with employees at regular intervals to get their feedback, and to ask whether there are more (or alternative) supportive methods that can be used.

## Where can I find further information about menopause?

- [MyMenopauseCentre](#) is a site that raises awareness of menopause. It aims to empower women to take control of their menopause, by providing evidence-based information and advice on what the menopause is, and what

the symptoms and treatment options are. It also has an online menopause clinic run by female doctors who have years of experience in treating and supporting women going through the menopause.

- This [CIPD guide](#) for line managers offers advice on what managers need to know about the menopause to effectively support their team.
- Henpicked: [Menopause in the workplace](#) has been supporting employers with menopause training for five years. As the UK's leading menopause in the workplace experts, the team has supported leading employers to put the right awareness, training, education, and support in place. They're also the organisation that supports Menopause Friendly accreditation.
- [Talking menopause](#) aims to help you get your organisation talking about menopause.
- [Menopause Matters](#) has information, tips, and advice on all menopausal matters.
- [The Menopause Cafe](#) encourages people across the UK to get together over a cup of tea and talk about menopause.
- [The Daisy Network](#) is a charity that provides support for women who are going through early menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency.