
A Guide to Supporting The Menopause at Work

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Tameside Council and Tameside & Glossop CCG are committed to ensuring all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment.
- 1.2. The menopause is a natural stage of life and most women will experience menopausal symptoms at some point.
- 1.3. We understand that some employees may be reluctant to discuss their experiences and symptoms which, in some circumstances, could be severe.
- 1.4. However, the menopause does not need to be an embarrassing topic, and should not be placing additional pressures on our workforce.
- 1.5. The Council and CCG encourage open and honest discussions between affected employees and their line managers, or another supportive individual, in order to ensure those employees feel supported at work.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. This guidance applies to all employees of Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Tameside & Glossop CCG and the Governing Body of a School that are affected by menopausal symptoms.
- 2.2. Trans and non-binary employees may be affected in the same or similar ways and are equally covered by this guidance.
- 2.3. Throughout this guidance, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Tameside & Glossop CCG and School Governing Bodies will be collectively referred to as 'the organisation.'

3. WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSE?

- 3.1. **Menopause** - a natural event in most women's lives during which they stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels.
- 3.2. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years. However, each woman's experience will differ, and menopausal symptoms can occasionally begin before the age of 40.
- 3.3. **Perimenopause** – also known as menopause transition; begins several years before menopause. Women may start to experience menopausal symptoms during the final two years of perimenopause.
- 3.4. **Surgical menopause** - triggered by the removal of a woman's ovaries, even if she is young.
- 3.5. Menopause symptoms will start straight away after the surgery if the woman has had both ovaries removed. If the woman has lost only one ovary, there is a chance the symptoms will start within five years of the surgery.
- 3.6. Surgical menopause can increase the risks of cancer, heart disease, weaker bones, depression and anxiety.
- 3.7. **Premature Ovarian Sufficiency** – also known as 'premature menopause.' This is when women experience the menopause before the age of 40. Approximately 1 in 100 women experience Premature Ovarian Sufficiency.

- 3.8. **Post Menopause** - a term used when a woman's periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However, other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon.

4. WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- 4.1. Some of the most typical symptoms of the menopause include:

- psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- hot flushes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night)
- irregular periods and / or periods can become light or heavy
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- headaches
- weight gain
- palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- reduced sex drive

- 4.2. Each of these symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work.

- 4.3. Equally, in some cases symptoms can be exacerbated by the work environment, for example if office temperature is too high this can worsen or increase the frequency of hot flushes. A hot flush is a sudden onset of feverish heat all over the body; these can cause dizziness, discomfort, sweating and heart palpitations and are one of the most common symptoms of the menopause.

- 4.4. Symptoms such as insomnia can reduce the ability to concentrate and stay focused. Decreased confidence could affect a woman's feelings towards carrying out certain aspects of her role. Changes in mood and irritability could impact on relationships with others at work.

- 4.5. The organisation has a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees and therefore commits to ensuring that adjustments and additional support are available to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.

5. SUPPORT AT WORK

- 5.1. Managers have an important role to play in ensuring that anyone who experiences menopausal symptoms is offered the same support and understanding as they would if they had any other health issue.

- 5.2. Line managers are typically the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs an adjustment to their work or working hours to enable them to perform efficiently.

- 5.3. Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for employees to feel comfortable about raising health issues like the menopause.

- 5.4. Having regular one-to-ones with employees can provide a forum for health situations, including the menopause.

- 5.5. Confidentiality – all conversations with an employee regarding their health, including menopausal symptoms, must remain confidential. If an employee wants information about

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their condition to be shared, consent must be explicit. Line managers should discuss with employees who will be told and by whom, as well as the information they do or don't want shared with colleagues.

- 5.6. Line managers should review this brief checklist before approaching sensitive conversations with employees:
- 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
 - Show empathy and understanding
 - Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive
- 5.7. While any health condition can understandably be a sensitive and personal issue, for many, some of the issues associated with the menopause can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate and even visible way.
- 5.8. It is 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.
- 5.9. Conversations should be approached with empathy, and line managers should try not to be embarrassed by the issue and how the individual is feeling. Regular conversations including catch ups or one-to-one which should always be in a private, confidential setting where the employee feels comfortable and at ease.
- 5.10. Managers should also recognise however, that not all employees will want to discuss this health matter, and this decision should be respected.

6. CARRYING OUT A RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. The organisation has a legal duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees. This includes:
- ensuring menopausal symptoms are not made worse by the workplace and/or its work practices
 - making changes to help a worker manage their symptoms when doing their job
- 6.2. Regarding the perimenopause and menopause, a risk assessment should, for example, include:
- the temperature and ventilation in the workplace
 - somewhere suitable for the worker to rest
 - whether toilet and washroom facilities are easily available
 - whether cold drinking water is easily available
- 6.3. See the organisation's 'Reducing and Preventing Stress in the Workplace - Stress Risk Assessment Procedure' for more information.

7. MAKING APPROPRIATE ADJUSTMENTS

- 7.1. Simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance.
- 7.2. Line managers have a responsibility to consider, and put in place, reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove barriers wherever possible, so that women can carry on performing in their role.
- 7.3. Adjustments should always be tailored to an individual's specific need. Some of the changes that may be considered include:
 - Flexibility around working hours
 - Flexibility around uniform and/or to change clothes
 - Adequate drinking supplies
 - Access to toilets
 - Provision of a fan or access to an open window
- 7.4. Line managers should record any specific needs or agreed adjustments and review these at least annually. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so regular discussions should be had with the person concerned to ensure the support still meets their needs.
- 7.5. Line Managers should also discuss with the employee whether they have been to their GP, and should consider an occupational health referral if the employee is finding it difficult to manage the symptoms.
- 7.6. See Appendix A for 'Practical Tips for Supporting the Menopause Transition.'

8. MANAGING PERFORMANCE PROACTIVELY AND POSITIVELY

- 8.1. If someone's performance is suffering, it's important to help them address the root cause.
- 8.2. In some cases, menopausal symptoms can be so serious that they affect a person's performance at work. In this situation, it's in everyone's interest to discuss potential adjustments that could help the individual perform to their full potential.
- 8.3. Where there are suspected or known health issues, these should be explored, prior to initiating any formal processes for performance.
- 8.4. Performance management is most effective when it's proactive, informal and based on regular and constructive feedback and discussion. This helps to build trust-based relationships and two-way dialogue, making it easier to address any underlying health issues. If managers and employees don't address the root causes of poor performance, any solutions are unlikely to fully resolve the issue and problems can spiral, most likely leading to sickness absence.
- 8.5. Where there is a performance concern approach conversations supportively and positively, taking any health issues fully into account.
- 8.6. Identify any extra support or coaching the person may benefit from, and set reasonable timescales for improvements.

9. SELF – MANAGEMENT FOR WOMEN EXPERIENCING THE MENOPAUSE

- 9.1. Employees are encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:
- Eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight
 - Drinking plenty of water
 - Exercising regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels
 - Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke
 - Ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes
 - Having access to natural light
 - Staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats
 - Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi).

10. USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- 10.1. [Women's Health Concern Menopause factsheet](#) - Women's Health Concern is a charitable organisation – the patient arm of the British Menopause Society – that aims to help educate and support women with their healthcare by providing unbiased, accurate information.
- 10.2. [NHS Menopause](#) - Up-to-date medical guidance from the NHS.
- 10.3. [Menopause matters](#) - An award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.
- 10.4. [the Daisy Network](#) - The Daisy Network is dedicated to providing information and support to women diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Sufficiency, also known as Premature Menopause.
- 10.5. [ACAS - Menopause at Work](#) – Guidance on supporting women experiencing the menopause, in the workplace.
- 10.6. [The Menopause Doctor](#) – A website that aims to help empower women with necessary information to make informed decisions regarding any treatment they may take to help turn the menopause into a positive experience that does not negatively impact their lives.
- 10.7. [NICE guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment'](#) - NICE guidelines provide advice on the care and support that should be offered to people who use health and care services.
- 10.8. [The Menopause Exchange](#) - The Menopause Exchange gives independent advice about the menopause, midlife and post-menopausal health. They send out a free quarterly newsletter with useful impartial help and support.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE MENOPAUSE TRANSITION

The menopause affects people in different ways, but there are some practical steps a manager can take to support women experiencing the menopause at work, and help to minimise some of the most common symptoms.

Sleep disruption and/or night sweats

- Recognise someone may take more short-term absence if they've had a difficult night.
- Consider a change to shift patterns or the ability to swap shifts on a temporary basis.
- Offer a flexible working arrangement, for example a later start and finish time.

Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats

- Look at ways to cool the working environment, for example provide a fan, move a desk close to a window or adjust the air conditioning.
- Provide easy access to cold drinking water and washrooms.
- Adapt uniforms to improve comfort.
- Limit the time wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks.

Heavy or irregular periods

- Provide easy access to washroom and toilet facilities.
- Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet.
- Make sanitary products available in washrooms.
- Make it easy to request extra uniforms if needed.

Headaches and fatigue

- Consider a temporary adjustment to someone's work duties.
- Provide a quiet area to work.
- Provide access to a rest room.
- Offer easy access to drinking water.
- Allow regular breaks and opportunities to take medication.

Muscular aches, and bone and joint pain

- Make any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules.
- Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps.

Psychological issues (for example loss of confidence, poor concentration, anxiety etc)

- Encourage employees to discuss concerns at one-to-one meetings with you and/or occupational health.
- Discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
- Address work-related stress by carrying out a stress risk assessment recommended by the HSE.
- Signpost to counselling services.
- Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the office or work area.
- Allow time out from others when needed, to have some quiet time or undertake relaxation or mindfulness activities.
- Provide access to a quiet space to work or the opportunity to work from home, where service operations permit.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.
- Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their GP, if they haven't already.