



Devon and Severn IFCA

Menopause Policy

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D&S IFCA Menopause Policy and Guidance

Policy Statement

D&S IFCA is committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees and, in this context, specifically members of staff suffering from menopause-related symptoms.

Menopause is a part of every woman's life, and it is not always an easy transition. With the right support it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

D&S IFCA acknowledges the menopause as an important occupational and equality issue, and the policy is inclusive of all gender identities, including trans and non-binary employees. D&S IFCA understands that others may experience menopause-type symptoms or the impacts of these symptoms. Whilst the use of words woman/she/her is evident throughout this document, this support is designed for all D&S IFCA colleagues.

D&S IFCA recognises that there will be colleagues who are going through menopausal symptoms and colleagues who are supporting those with menopausal symptoms.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. D&S IFCA wants all employees to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, men should be aware too.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.

This policy sets out the guidelines for all members of staff on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. It is not contractual and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment.

Aim of the Policy

D&S IFCA's aim is to be a fully inclusive organisation and help all our colleagues be at their best. This purpose of this policy is to:

- provide support to affected employees through guidance and direction;
- support employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms to remain at work.
- raise awareness of the menopause amongst all staff;
- break the stigma and taboo surrounding this issue;
- foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations and engage in discussions about menopause;
- ensure sufferers feel confident enough to raise issues and engage in discussions about their symptoms and, where needed, to ask for support and reasonable adjustments at work so that they can continue to be successful in their roles;
- inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause and their responsibility to support women at work;
- support colleagues who are affected indirectly, for example partners, colleagues or line managers;
- signpost to information and support available to anyone affected by the menopause
- provide an advice sheet on how to talk to a GP about menopause

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life when she has not had a period for 12 months – the following day is classed as menopause.

Menopause is a part of the ageing process that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, as an individual's oestrogen levels decline. The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons. The age at which someone can begin to experience menopausal symptoms can also vary, where a fraction of individuals, around 1 in 100, goes through the menopause before the age of 40. This is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI). Periods usually start to become less frequent over a few months or years before they stop altogether, although they can sometimes stop suddenly.

Perimenopause is the time leading up to this, which is when a woman may experience symptoms and side effects due to changes in hormonal balance. This can be years before menopause. For some women this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late forties.

Post menopause is the time beyond menopause, starting when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months. During post-menopause, a person can continue to suffer ongoing effects.

Menopause Symptoms

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom and or even need help and support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms and 25% could be classed as severe.

Throughout the three menopausal stages, a sufferer can present with a number of different and often debilitating physical or psychological symptoms, including:

- insomnia and night sweats
- hot flushes and dizziness
- palpitations and breathlessness
- irregular periods and heavy bleeding
- painful menstrual cramps
- weight gain and slowed metabolism
- thinning hair and menopausal hair loss
- skin irritation, dryness and itching
- dry eyes and discomfort
- vaginal dryness, itching and discomfort
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- joint and muscular aches and stiffness
- headaches and migraines
- low energy levels and fatigue
- low mood and irritability
- anxiety and panic attacks
- reduced concentration/difficulty concentrating and memory loss
- increased emotional sensitivity and loss of self-confidence
- mental health issues

Stages and symptoms of the menopause can vary from person to person, and range from very mild to severe, as can the length of time over which these symptoms are experienced. These symptoms can begin months or even years before an individual's menstrual cycles

stop and persist for several years after their last period. Less well-known symptoms of menopause can be found in Appendix 1.

Menopause Facts

What and why do we need to know about the menopause?

- There are 3.5 million women over 50 in the workplace in the UK.
- 8 in 10 menopausal women are in work
- In the UK, the average age for a person to go through menopause is 51.
- Symptoms of the menopause can last up to 10 years.
- Symptoms range from cognitive, physical and psychological symptoms (for example hot flushes, muscular aches, poor concentration, anxiety and headaches).
- Around 1 in 100 people that experience the menopause, will go through the transition before age of 40.
- 3 out of 4 people experience symptoms: 1 in 4 can experience severe symptoms, which impact on their day-to-day life.
- Menopause is an occupational health issue
- Most women are un-willing to disclose menopause-related health problems to their line managers.
- 1 in 4 women consider leaving work due to menopause symptoms

Legal Framework

All employers are under a statutory duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work, including an employee's physical and emotional wellbeing. This includes providing adequate support to anyone going through the menopause, where any failure to provide such support can irreparably damage the employer-employee relationship, such that the contract of employment can be treated by the employee as having been brought to an end.

Many sufferers feel they have been driven from their jobs because they find that adapting their menopausal symptoms around inflexible work expectations is far too difficult, typically exacerbated by negative or discriminatory attitudes in the workplace. Sadly, there remains considerable ignorance and misunderstanding around the menopause and its effects, with it often being treated as an embarrassing or taboo subject, or even something to be ridiculed.

Employers should make sure they know how the menopause relates to the law, including the:

- Equality Act 2010, which protects workers against discrimination
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which says an employer must, where reasonably practical, ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare at work

The menopause is not a specific protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. But if an employee or worker is put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of their menopause symptoms, this could be discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, for example:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- sex

Age discrimination

Employees are protected from being put at a disadvantage or treated less favourably because of their age. This could include less favourable treatment because they're going through the menopause, because it is usually related to the age of the person.

It's important for employers to remember that age discrimination and harassment can also affect younger people who go through medical or early menopause. For example, it could be age discrimination if a colleague makes a rude joke about young people going through the menopause.

Disability discrimination

In some cases, where menopausal symptoms are having a substantial and long-term negative effect on someone's ability to do normal daily activities, the employee may be classed as having a disability, under discrimination law, giving rise to an additional risk of unlawful disability discrimination. A disability could be wholly caused by the menopause, or because menopausal symptoms are exacerbating an existing physical and/or psychological impairment. In either case, the employer will be under a separate statutory duty to make reasonable adjustments to reduce or remove any disadvantage experienced by a disabled employee because of this.

If someone is disabled, their employer must make reasonable adjustments to reduce or remove any disadvantages they might experience because of it. For example, this might include agreeing to record absence because of the menopause separately from other sickness absence. It's a good idea for employers to focus on supporting the person, rather than trying to work out if someone's condition is a disability.

If someone affected by the menopause is put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of something related to their disability, this could be 'discrimination arising from disability'.

Roles and Responsibilities

This can refer to the individual going through menopause, managers and other members of staff. For example, any employee experiencing menopausal symptoms has a certain responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, and should be open to having conversations with line managers or any other appropriate person; equally, managers should be open to discussions around the menopause and putting in place appropriate adjustments to support an affected employee; whilst other members of staff should be helping to create a positive and supportive working environment for anyone who may be going through the menopause and struggling to cope. The individual going through menopause may wish to talk to their GP. Appendix 5 provides a menopause advice sheet on how an employee can talk to their GP about menopause.

All staff are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health;
- Being open and honest in conversations with line managers who can further discuss issues with senior managers

- If a member of staff is unable to speak to their line manager, or if their line manager is not supporting them, they can speak to a senior manager who if necessary can talk with HROne (Devon County Council)
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment;
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues;
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Line Managers/Senior Managers should:

- Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance;
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally;
- Use the guidance in Appendices 2 and 3, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required;
- Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented;
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates;
- Ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager/Senior Manager may:

- Discuss a referral to an Occupational Health advisor through guidance from HROne for further advice;
- Refer the employee to an Occupational Health; advisor
- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical;
- Update the action plan and continue to review.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments will vary depending on the individual's symptoms and their impacts upon their wellbeing. Menopause is a different experience with different symptoms for every individual.

Examples may include a desk fan for cooling or flexible working for those impacted by sleep difficulties or heavy periods.

Suggested reasonable adjustments can be seen in Appendix 3 although this is not an exhaustive list and others can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Appendix 1 - Less well-known Symptoms of Menopause

- tooth decay
- electric shocks
- tingling extremities
- allergies
- breast pain
- brittle nails
- bloating (water retention)
- blurred vision
- constipation
- dry mouth
- leg cramps
- nausea incontinence
- digestive problems
- dizziness
- fatigue
- hair loss
- itchy skin and/or Formication (sensation of skin crawling)
- acne
- anaemia
- fainting (syncope)
- burning mouth syndrome
- ovarian cysts or uterine fibroids
- polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- high blood pressure
- cold hands and feet
- bruising
- oral thrush
- ringing ears (tinnitus)

Appendix 2a - Managers' Guidance for Colleague Discussions

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a male employee wishes to speak about a family member, please ensure that as a Line Manager, you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation;
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality;
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly;
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see Appendix 3 Symptoms Support) – and refer them to the Menopause Support Resources (Appendix 4);
- Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use the template at Appendix 2b to record the meeting, so that all parties agree what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom;
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or break room.

Appendix 2b - Confidential Colleague Discussion – Template

Member of staff details:			
Name		Job Title	

Staff Present at meeting (line or senior manager):			
Name		Job Title	
Date of Discussion			

Summary of Discussion
Agreed Actions/Adjustments (if applicable)

Date of next review meeting

Signed (Member of staff)

Signed (Manager)

Appendix 3 - Symptoms Support and Reasonable Adjustments

Symptoms	Reasonable adjustments
Sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, • Ensure easy access to washroom/changing facilities, • Access to shower facilities, if required. • Allow for more frequent breaks to manage symptoms, change clothes, etc • Avoid close fitting or non-breathable clothing • Allow flexibility with uniforms (e.g., no jacket required) • Consider providing additional uniforms • Look at ways of cooling the work environment (e.g., desk fan, moving to a desk near a window that opens, adjusting the air conditioning) • Limit the time spent wearing PPE
Insomnia or sleep difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for flexible working (e.g., working at home, temporary adjustment to start time,)
Irregular and/or heavy periods or Urinary problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet • Access to shower facilities, if required • Temporary adjustment to duties, if required
Poor concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider if concentration is better or worse at particular times of the day and adjust working pattern / work tasks accordingly • Review task allocation and workload • Have regular one-to-one meetings so that any issues can be discussed • Provide books for lists or other memory assisting equipment • Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions • Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices • Identify and address work-related stress • Discuss protected time to catch up with work if required
Loss of Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there are regular Personal Development Discussions; • Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues; • Discuss protected time to catch up with work

Symptoms	Reasonable adjustments
Low mood / anxiety / panic attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk • Identify a 'buddy' for the individual to talk to (this could be within or outside of their team) • Allow for more frequent breaks to undertake relaxation techniques or to have time out from others (without needing to ask for permission) • Refer to Stress and Anxiety resources for D&S IFCA Staff • Refer to D&S IFCA's Mental Health Policy
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water, • Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions • Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices
Joint stiffness, aches and pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For desk-based employees, undertake a workstation risk assessment • Allow for more frequent breaks so that the employee can move and stretch
Tinnitus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow headphones to be used at work so an employee can listen to sounds which distract from the buzzing or ringing in the ears. • Ensure employee has face to face conversations when in a noisy environment as hearing can be compromised, lip reading can help.

Appendix 4 - Support Resources

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. You can find out more information by using the following link <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>.

The **National Health Service** provides an overview of menopause. You can find more at <https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.

Menopause information. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/menopause-and-later-life/>

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>.

Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk>.

A **Government Report**, researched by the University of Leicester's own School of Business has been published. Read more here [Menopause transition: effects on women's economic participation](#).

Henpicked. This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories (see <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>).

Menopause and Me. This site is dedicated to supporting women throughout the menopause journey. <https://www.menopauseandme.co.uk/en-gb>

British Menopause Society. The British Menopause Society (BMS) is the specialist authority for menopause. <https://thebms.org.uk/>

The Menopause Charity. This Charity works to help everyone understand perimenopause and menopause <https://www.themenopausecharity.org/>

Balance Menopause – This site and links provide resources and a menopause library which covers many menopause topics and symptoms. <https://www.balance-menopause.com/menopause-library/>

Appendix 5 - Menopause Advice Sheet – How to talk to your GP about menopause

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they're getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. But, sometimes, that's easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's often only ten minutes. And talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We've put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait. It is all too common for women to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are really useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.

Prepare for your appointment. It's easier for your doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren't always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, and any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it's more likely that together, you'll find the right solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. They are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery and can help you find the best person to speak to – it might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

Ask for a longer appointment. If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling, and how it's affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. Occasionally, there are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or a friend with you. The chances are, you spend your life supporting others and, during menopause, it's your turn to ask them for support. Your partner, or a friend, will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment, and also find out how they can continue supporting you.

What to expect from your doctor

There are certain things a GP should – and should not – do during your appointment.

They should:

- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms, and your longer-term health;
- Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options;
- Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment.

They should not:

- Tell you that it's just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don't feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help;
- Tell you they don't prescribe HRT. It's up to you what you want to try, and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history;
- Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them.

Remember, your GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.