

Menopause at Work Policy

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Introduction

This policy is intended to provide clarity and guidance on how the EIS will approach menopause-related issues, either for employees experiencing the menopause or those affected indirectly, for example, colleagues or line managers.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the EIS irrespective of contract type and length of service.

It sets out the key principles to which the EIS will adhere to ensure that individuals affected by the menopause or perimenopause are treated fairly, equitably and provided with the appropriate support.

Throughout this policy, we refer to 'women' – this is because the majority of people experiencing the menopause are women but it is recognised that other employees could be affected too and individuals might need support while their partner is menopausal.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this policy is to create awareness and understanding of the menopause and related issues, how it can affect employees and work colleagues, how the EIS can support them, including reasonable adjustments and the legal context.

The EIS acknowledges that employees may need additional consideration, support and reasonable adjustments during this transitional time before, during and after the menopause and will ensure that employees are treated according to their individual circumstances and needs. Individuals will be treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment.

Key principles

The EIS aims to create an environment where individuals feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support. We are committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not contribute to making menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate reasonable adjustments and support are carefully considered and wherever possible, put in place.

The EIS will seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices for those individuals who are menopausal / perimenopausal.

Definitions and background

The Menopause is the point at which a woman's oestrogen levels decline, and periods stop. Menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years so it's best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

The Perimenopause is the phase leading up to the menopause when a woman's hormone balance starts to change, and when she may begin to experience menopausal symptoms. For some women this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late forties.

Symptoms vary and commonly include, but are not limited to: (source NHS)

- hot flushes
- night sweats
- vaginal dryness and discomfort during sex
- difficulty sleeping
- fatigue
- low mood or anxiety
- reduce sex drive (libido)
- lack of confidence
- problems with memory and concentration

Many individuals do not always realise that they are experiencing the perimenopause and may not understand what is causing their symptoms which can be a barrier to accessing support.

The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. In the UK, the average age is 51 (NHS), but it can happen much earlier. Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before the age of 40 years of age (**premature menopause**).

Some women experience a medical/surgical menopause which can occur suddenly when the ovaries are damaged or removed by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.

Individuals from the non-binary, transgender and intersex communities may also experience menopausal symptoms. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may be different for those within these communities.

Experiences and perceptions of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status. It is important to recognise that for many reasons; peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly.

Some people seek medical advice and treatment to alleviate the symptoms of the perimenopause and menopause. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can be used to alleviate symptoms, however, the individual may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

Menopause and the workplace

Around 10% of our workforce are women between the ages of 46 and 55 (stats taken as at October 2020). This means that a number of employees may be going through the menopause or experiencing perimenopausal symptoms at any time.

In addition, between 1% and 10% of women experience an early or premature menopause and so may be trying to deal with the same symptoms.

Trans employees and the menopause

We understand that many trans employees are likely to experience at least some menopausal symptoms. These may vary depending on the age at which they transitioned and when they transitioned, since treatments have changed and developed over time.

Supporting an employee through the menopause

The EIS should treat an employee with menopause symptoms in the same way they would manage and support someone with any long-term health condition, including making reasonable adjustments.

One employee's experience of the menopause transition can be entirely different from another's, so line managers are encouraged to have a tailored approach, where the focus is on providing individualised support.

Line managers and colleagues should listen and provide sympathetic and appropriate support. In addition, they should make themselves aware of the symptoms associated with the menopause and understand the issues which affect people going through it.

Line managers should respond to any concerns and consider what can be done to reduce the impact that symptoms may be having on the employee, their performance and potentially on the team.

Employees who do not wish to discuss the issue with their direct line manager may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with a trusted colleague or HR.

Reasonable Adjustments

Certain aspects of work and the working environment can aggravate menopausal symptoms. Reasonable adjustments will be considered to support employees who are experiencing symptoms which may impact on work.

Adjustments may include:

- Flexibility to attend clinics, hospital or appointments.

- Flexibility to take breaks when needed rather than at pre-determined times.
- Phased return following long-term absence, for those who may suffer with particularly severe symptoms and impairment.
- Use of private spaces to rest temporarily, to talk with a colleague, take medication or to phone for personal or professional support.
- Temporary reduction of workload – (stressful environments, high work demands, and long hours can aggravate menopausal symptoms and, in some cases, have been shown to bring on an earlier menopause).
- Temporary change in work pattern by making an application under the Flexible Working Request policy.

Employees will not experience any detriment if they need time off during the menopause transition.

The legal context

Employers have a legal duty to make an assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees. Risk assessments should consider the specific needs of menopausal women and ensure that the working environment will not exacerbate their symptoms. Often, making simple changes to the working environment can help to alleviate the impact of some symptoms e.g. providing a desk fan or allowing them to sit in a temperature-controlled area, ensuring easy access to cold water, washing and toilet facilities.

The menopause is also an equalities issue. Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees with regard to their age and gender. As the menopause is a female condition, any detrimental treatment of a woman related to the menopause could represent direct or indirect sex discrimination.

If a woman experiences serious symptoms from the menopause transition that amount to a mental or physical impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on her ability to carry out day-to-day activities, this could be classed as a disability under the Equality Act.

Counselling and support

All employees and their dependants have access to a 24-hour, confidential and free telephone helpline service for counselling. This service is provided by SimplyHealth, the helpline number is 0370 908 3481.

The appendix provides sources of support and information.

Appendix Further Information & advice

Further information can be found on the NHS website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/#>

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk> - An independent website which gives up-to-date information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk > forum> - Provides the opportunity to chat to other women experiencing the same problems and concerns.

<https://thebms.org.uk> (British Menopause Society) - The BMS provides education, information and guidance to healthcare professionals specialising in all aspects of reproductive health.

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org> - WHC is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society and provides factsheets about the menopause, linked articles (e.g. about experiencing a healthy menopause), FAQs and recommended further reading.

<https://www.managemymenopause.co.uk> - A not for profit organisation providing tailored menopausal advice about post reproductive health.

[Womens Experience of Working through the Menopause](#) - A report of research commissioned by the British Occupational Health Research Foundation, to explore women's experience of working through the menopause.

<https://www.daisynetwork.org> - A registered charity providing free information and support to women with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) also known as Premature Menopause.

<https://simplyhormones.com> - Provides blogs and articles about the menopause and opportunity to sign up to receive free Menopause Survival Kit, newsletters and updates

<https://simplyhormones.com/mens-page/> - Information to help men understand more about the menopause, including some "helpful hints".