

Runnymede Borough Council Menopause Policy

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Introduction

Runnymede Borough Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone.

The menopause is a natural part of life for women, as well as trans men and some non-binary, gender fluid or intersex people.

For some, it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, the experience can be much better. Whilst not everyone suffers with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, all people should be aware too. The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of those going through the menopause are in work.

It is important that we equip managers with information so that they can understand and discuss menopausal symptoms if the employee concerned wishes to do so. This is especially important as good practice advises that often just talking or making simple changes to a working environment can make a world of difference to an individual's experience.

Scope

This document applies to all employees of the Council. It sets out information and guidelines to help employees and managers understand the possible effects of menopause and to provide simple, positive and proactive ways to support employees during this time.

Aims

This guidance provides managers with information on the potential effects and symptoms of menopause and what they can do to support their employees by;

- Fostering an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably start conversations or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Ensuring managers understand what menopause is, can confidently discuss the topic with their employee, and are clear on Runnymede Borough Council's guidance.
- Creating an environment where employees feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and can request simple adjustments at work.
- Providing advice on simple adjustments.
- Outlining the employer's requirements for supporting employee.
- Providing advice on where managers and employees can get further information or support.

Background information

All people managers should know what the menopause is, when it can happen and how it can affect their employees.

What is it?

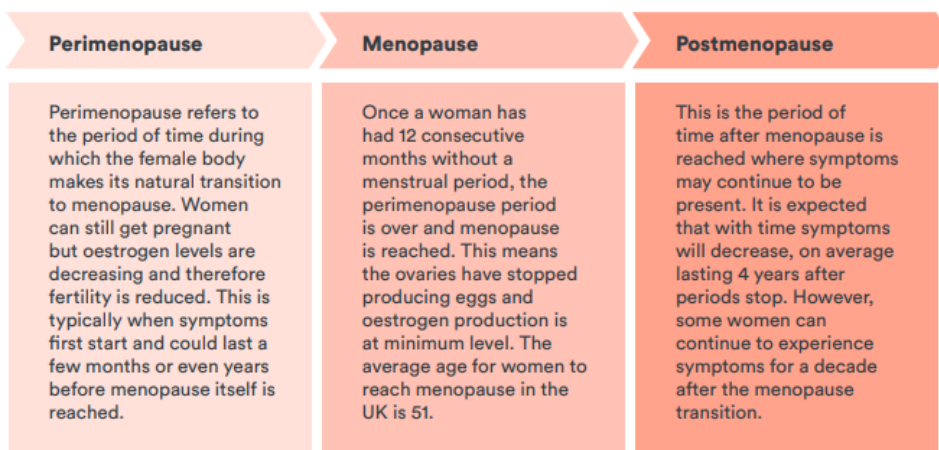
It's a natural stage of life when oestrogen levels decline, and periods stop. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

When does it happen?

The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55. The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause, when hormone balance starts to change.

For some people, this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late fifties. The average age to undergo the menopause in the UK is 51, but around 1 in 100 experience it before the age of 40. This is known as 'premature menopause'.

Stages of menopause



Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can be as a result of surgery (for example hysterectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy).

What are the symptoms?

The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years.

Many people experience symptoms, but not everyone does. It is important to note that not everyone will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of those going through menopause experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for employees, dependent on severity, as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

Typical symptoms of the menopause can include:

Joint stiffness, aches and pains	Hot flushes	Night sweats	Low mood
Poor memory	Fatigue	Depression	Anxiety and panic attacks
Trouble concentrating	Change in sex drive	Urinary problems	Headaches
Irregular, heavy and/or painful periods	Sleep problems	Hair thinning or loss	Dry skin, mouth and eyes
Chills	Vaginal dryness	Weight gain	Heart palpitations
Taking longer to recover from illness	Exacerbation of existing conditions	Digestive problems	Dizzy spells

What can employees do?

Employees can familiarise themselves by recognising what the menopause is and be aware that there is support to self-manage menopause as well as other areas of support both within the Council and externally.

What can managers do?

Line Managers' support is crucial and can make a huge difference to employee experiencing symptoms. Supporting and creating a positive and open environment can help prevent the person from:

- losing confidence in their skills and abilities
- feeling like they need to take time off work and hide the reasons for it
- having increased mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression
- leaving their job

They can ensure that anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health issue.

For example by:

- Familiarising themselves with this guidance and put it into practice within their work areas
- Being the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs a small adjustment to their work or immediate environment, to enable them to perform to their full potential.
- Being ready to listen and offer support.
- Using the guidance to signpost to other available support.
- Agreeing an Action Plan, reviewing support and adjustments periodically as symptoms can change over time.
- Managing absence and return to work.
- Timetabling regular and informal one to ones, this can provide a forum to discuss changes to someone's health situation.
- Acknowledging that this can be a sensitive and personal issue and that some employees do not want to discuss this with colleagues or managers. If appropriate, ask if they would prefer to discuss any issues with a female manager or a member of HR.
- Ensuring that they do not make assumptions about how the person is being affected
- Managers should also recognise that some employees will not want to discuss the menopause, or their experiences and they should be supported in this choice.
- Signpost to appropriate support, eg, own GP, information websites.
- Remembering symptoms may not be easily recognisable or treatable. Some employees may not get relief from symptoms quickly and it may take time to get the right balance of drugs where these are taken.

If support or adjustments are not working as well as expected, managers may also:

- Discuss with HR
- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice
- Speak to HR to organise a referral to Occupational Health
- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical
- Update the action plan and continue to review.

Managing performance positively

There should never be assumptions about someone's ability to perform to a high standard, but it should be recognised that people can experience a wide range of uncomfortable symptoms for many years as part of the menopause transition.

It's not surprising that they can pose a challenge for people as they go about their daily lives, including at work, where performance can be impacted. CIPD research (2019) found that three in five employees experiencing menopause transition believe their symptoms have a negative impact on them at work.

Addressing the stigma about the menopause means challenging negative and stereotypical attitudes by changing the culture, but policies and practices such as performance management also have an important role to play.

It's important to remember that performance management should, in essence, be a positive process and focus on the support needed to help everyone perform to the best of their ability, including taking on board any underlying health issues.

There could be occasions where performance may be affected and as a line manager, you may wish to raise your observations and concern with the employee. If the employee considers that menopausal symptoms may be contributing to the changes to their performance, the discussion needs to be a proactive exploration considering whether adjustments could be trialled to address the issues raised. A referral to Occupational Health could assist in providing more specific objective advice.

The Council is committed to supporting employees and will take a flexible and creative approach to enable employees to manage symptoms whilst working. Creating an open, inclusive, and supportive culture is important. This will enable employees to talk candidly about their experience to enable a proactive approach.

It is important that employees are given a reasonable amount of time to trial any adjustments.

The Council will ensure that all adjustments have been considered (and trialled if appropriate) before any performance management or capability processes are considered.

Managing absence from work

As the menopause can be long term and affects everyone differently, managing absence from work should be handled sensitively.

When returning from a period of absence, line managers should routinely be arranging return to work discussions with all members of their team. Managers should aim to create an environment where the employee feels they can share the real reasons for their absence should this be the menopause. Managers should encourage an ongoing dialogue and be prepared to make changes to help employees continue to work and take into consideration any performance issues which might be due to menopause symptoms.

The Council's Sickness Management triggers (as stated in the [Sickness Management Policy](#)) would still be used to initiate an informal sickness discussion, as would happen with any other reasons for absence. However, managers should be considerate of the wide ranging and varying degrees of symptoms that employees may experience and show flexibility to enable employees to continue attending work and carrying out their duties. Consideration will be

taken when deciding to progress to the formal stages of the Sickness Management Policy. If unsure seek guidance from your HR Business Partner.

Flexibility should be offered wherever possible to enable employees to attend any medical appointments relating to the menopause. Employees can request to use flexi-time to attend GP appointments, or those with fixed hours roles should feel able to ask their manager for a degree of flexibility on break times if this will assist them in attending an appointment.

Employers must not discriminate against someone because of their menopause symptoms. There needs to be a balance between the discretion of the line manager in supporting the employee and the employee meeting the expectations of their job role and meeting service requirements.

Simple but effective support

Simple cost-effective changes to the working environment or the opportunity to talk can make a big difference not only to members of employees, but also their colleagues.

Consider some of the following:

- Look at the work environment identify any basic comfort changes – desk fans, window desks as hot desks, provision of cool drinking water, easy access to washing facilities.
- If possible identify a room(s) or work area that employees can use if they need to cool down, recover or rest, or make a telephone call to access personal or professional support.
- Ensure the [counselling details](#) are circulated and ensure employees know they provide support for a range of issues.
- Consider if a referral to OH would help (this would provide guidance on other adjustments or support).
- Consider if HR policies may help you provide support.
- Other ideas for support are provided in Appendix 1 (Managers Guidance) – page 11.
- There is a lot of information available to anyone who may be experiencing menopausal symptoms especially those that may be affecting their wellbeing and capacity at work (see page 9).

Employees may find the following tips useful

- **Don't wait.** It is all too common for people 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.
- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at the end of this guidance).
- Keep a diary of symptoms to share with your health professional.
- 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.
- See your GP for advice on available treatment or other options. Ask the Receptionist who the best health professional is at your surgery to discuss these matters.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, or another manager you feel comfortable talking to.
- Request an appointment with the Council's OH provider to discuss bespoke support via HR.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks) especially before presentations or meetings.
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- Request a desk fan, a desk near a window or near air conditioning outlets.
- If you feel tired get some fresh air.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and other potentially helpful techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy, as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as, smoking cessation and exercise.

Further sources of information and support (internal)

Human Resources (HR) has developed this guidance which can be used proactively to support employees who are going through the menopause, which may help to give some flexibility and to improve health and wellbeing.

Supporting information includes, for example:

- [Sickness Management Policy](#)
- [Flexible Working](#) process
- Discuss Occupational Health with your line manager and/or HR
- In addition HR can help managers wishing to interpret specific aspects of this guidance and advise with related absence levels.

Further sources of information and support (external)

This information may provide further support to employees effected by menopausal symptoms:

- [Menopause Matters, menopausal symptoms, remedies, advice](#)
- [Charity for Women with POI | The Daisy Network](#)
- [Menopause - Women's Health Concern \(womens-health-concern.org\)](#)
- [Menopause Exchange for unbiased, independent information and advice \(menopause-exchange.co.uk\)](#)
- [Overview | Menopause: diagnosis and management | Guidance | NICE](#)
- [Let's talk menopause | CIPD Guidance](#)

Appendix 1 – Managers’ guidance for discussions and examples of support

These guidelines are designed to support managers in discussions, and to find a tailored set of responses or assistance for their individual employee. In many cases discussions and solutions will be found quite informally, if simple measure suffice.

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 an employee wishes to speak about a family member experiencing menopausal symptoms, please ensure that 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 examples of support below)
- Agree actions, and how to implement them, summarise your discussion, 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;
- Follow up where required.

Examples of support

Hot flushes

- Request temperature control for the work area, such as a fan on the desk or moving near a window, or away from a heat source.
- Confirm there is easy access to drinking water (consider off site workers)
- Agree that the employee can adapt a prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket; if possible do not use nylon
- Where possible identify a room or work area for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe flush.

Migraine

- Have ease of access to fresh drinking water
- Offer a quiet area to recover
- OH referral for advice and support
- Noise reducing headphones may help

Poor or disturbed sleep, concentration or poor memory issues

- OH referral for advice and support
- Review flexible working information (liaise with HR)
- Confirm actions in writing

Anxiety or stress symptoms

- OH referral for advice and support
- Ensure employee has counselling details
- Use Individual Stress Risk Assessment form
- Consider a Wellness Action Plan

Heavy menstrual periods

- Have access to toilet facilities
- Consider if storage space is needed for clothing changes

For all information contained within this document contact:

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