



Aston University

Menopause - Guidance for Managers and Employees

What is the menopause?

The menopause refers to the time when a woman stops having menstrual periods, and is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51. The menopause is the result of a significant change in women's hormone levels. For example, the level of oestrogen that is produced reduces dramatically. This, and other hormonal changes, can result in debilitating physical symptoms, and can have a significant impact on mental wellbeing.

The menopause often does not occur abruptly, and can last for several years on either side of a woman's last menstrual period. The period of time over which a woman experiences hormonal changes associated with the menopause is sometimes known as the perimenopause.

The menopause can also occur at a younger age, and this happens for around 1% of women. When the menopause occurs before the age of 45 years, it is normally known as early menopause. When the menopause occurs before the age of 40 years, it is normally known as premature ovarian insufficiency.

Some women experience the menopause early, but temporarily, when it is medically induced, for example as part of a treatment plan for gynaecological conditions. In some cases, women will enter the menopause permanently and abruptly as a result of surgery, or treatment for conditions such as breast cancer.

Guidance for Employees

Process: Staff experiencing menopausal symptoms

1. Throughout your discussions it is important to ensure strict confidentiality and discretion are maintained in accordance with GDPR requirements. If you are unsure, please refer to your HR Business Partner.
2. Speak to your Line Manager about your symptoms and discuss with them what support and adjustments may be available to you to help manage them. If your doctor made any recommendations, remember to raise these with your manager as well. If you feel unable to discuss your symptoms with your Line Manager, contact HR or, if a member, your trade union representative.
3. Meet regularly with your Line Manager, or alternative source of support, to update them on how you are feeling, if the support and adjustments put in place have been helpful, or if they are not sufficient. You may need to experiment with different types of support before you find something that works for you, so do not be discouraged if things do not work immediately.
4. If the support and adjustments put in place are not sufficient to help you manage your symptoms, your Line Manager may suggest arranging a meeting with Occupational Health (OH). They can better assess your needs and can make recommendations for adjustments that would otherwise be unavailable to you.
5. Maintain an open dialogue with your Line Manager, ensuring that any further adjustments and support agreed by Occupational Health are logged in your menopause support plan.

6. Think about talking to your GP. If you are suffering from symptoms to the extent that it is impacting your ability to work, or getting in the way of you enjoying life, you could speak with your doctor. Additionally, some support may only be available to you after you have consulted with a medical professional or Occupational Health.

To help you prepare for your appointment, and ensure that you get the most out of your meeting with your doctor, we recommend that you:

- **Read the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidelines for patients** before you meet with your doctor, so you know what to expect.
- **Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to speak to about menopausal symptoms.** There might be someone with special training in the area, and it might not be your usual GP.
- **Ask about 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.
- **Request a longer appointment.** If you are worried that your standard appointment would not be long enough, ask your surgery if it would be possible to book a double appointment.
- **Bring a friend or partner along.** Your partner, or a close friend, may know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment, and also find out how they can continue supporting you through the menopause.
- **Keep a list of your symptoms** that you can refer to when you meet with your doctor. This will help them consider what recommendations to make to help you manage your symptoms.
- **Speak up about your preferences!** If you have any preferences in terms of how you'd like to manage your symptoms, make sure to tell your doctor about them. For example, whether or not you would be interested in trying hormone replacement therapy (HRT).
- **Do not be afraid to ask for a second opinion!** If you do not feel that you have received the help you need, ask to speak with someone else. You know how you are feeling and how it is affecting you!

Guidance for managers

Process: For managers

1. Throughout your discussions it is important to ensure strict confidentiality and discretion are maintained in accordance with GDPR requirements. If you are unsure, please refer to your HR Business Partner.
2. If an employee you manage tells you they are experiencing menopausal symptoms and that these are impacting their work, you should arrange a meeting with them as soon as possible to develop a menopause support plan with them. If your employee would like to bring a work colleague or trade union representative along for support, they should be allowed to do so. You may wish to invite your HR Business Partner. Bear in mind that staff may not feel comfortable discussing their menopause symptoms with male colleagues.

3. You may not be familiar with the menopause, and that is OK. Here ([What we wish we'd known about the menopause](#)) is a useful resource to view in advance of the meeting. Bear in mind that you are not expected to know exactly what to do in each individual circumstance, but that just by listening you will start the process of support.
4. Remind your employee that some people find it helpful to visit their GP to discuss their symptoms, especially if they are struggling to sleep, or are experiencing anxiety and panic attacks. However, support is not dependent on staff seeking medical advice, and you should discuss things that can be done to support them in any case. There are links at the end of this document that might be useful.
5. Collaborate with your employee to produce a menopause support plan, outlining the symptoms they are experiencing and the supportive measures. You can find an example menopause support plan on the HR section of the Intranet.
6. Prior to agreeing adjustments, you should discuss these with your HR Business Partner in case an Occupational Health referral or GP note is required.
7. Both you and your employee should save a copy of the agreed support plan.
8. Make sure that you, or your employee, make appropriate updates with HR systems if any adjustments have been agreed that affect their working hours, working patterns or similar.
9. Ensure that you meet regularly with your employee to review that the support and adjustments are sufficiently helping them manage their symptoms. Use these meetings to review any changes to the support or adjustments that may be needed. Remember that symptoms can be experienced for several years.
10. If the adjustments and support are not helping your employee manage their symptoms, you should discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice and support.
11. Review any advice provided by Occupational Health and implement their recommendation where reasonably practical.
12. Maintain regular communication with your employee to ensure the adjustment and support they have received is sufficient.

Symptoms and support: information for staff and managers

This section outlines symptoms of the menopause that may impact on an individual's ability to work. It also lists a number of suggested types of support that the university should consider, this is not an exhaustive list and may not be suitable for all job roles.

Hot Flushes

- Request a temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk, ideally a USB connected desk fan to ensure it is environmentally friendly. Alternatively, look at options for moving their work area to be closer to a window or away from radiators or other heat sources.
- Ensure that drinking water can be easily and quickly accessed.
- If they have a prescribed uniform, allow them to adapt this to help manage hot flushes. Such as allowing them to remove a jacket. Layering can be helpful.
- It may also be helpful to discuss changes to working patterns which allow for a more comfortable commute (i.e. to avoid very crowded trains or buses).
- Ensure they have access to a restroom for breaks if their work involves long periods of sitting or standing, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

Heavy or Light Periods

- Ensure that they can have access to washroom facilities.
- Request extra uniforms so these can be changed quickly and discreetly if needed.
- Ensure that staff feel able to obtain sanitary products at short notice. This may involve taking time out to go to a washroom that has sanitary products, or to a shop on campus.
- Provide a locker, cupboard or another storage area where they can keep a change of clothing.

Headaches

- Ensure that drinking water can be easily and quickly accessed.
- Offer a quiet place to work.
- Ensure that they are able to take some time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Consider making a request for flexible working, particularly if suffering from a lack of sleep.

Low Mood

- Identify a 'buddy' they can talk to – outside of the work area.
- Identify a time out space where they can go if they need to clear their head.
- Contact [employee care/assistance programme].
- Consider the possibility of working at home/flexible working, if this is helpful.

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure that you have regular meetings to discuss Personal Development.
- Have regular catch-ups with your manager where you can raise and discuss any issues.

Poor Concentration

- Discuss if there are times of day when concentration is better or worse and explore options of adjusting their work pattern to work around this.
- Review task allocation and workload, including avoidance of last minute requests, which may heighten anxiety levels.
- Provide means and equipment to assist with memory and organisation, such as books, sticky notes and action boards.
- Offer a quiet space to work.

- Reduce interruptions where possible.
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual has ‘protected time’ when they are not to be disturbed.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

Anxiety

- Promote counselling services such as PAM Assist.
- Identify a buddy for the individual to talk to – outside of their work area.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Undertake mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.
- Review task allocation and workload, including avoidance of last minute requests, which may heighten anxiety levels.
- Encourage physical exercise.

Panic Attacks

- Take a look at some advice on supporting someone through a panic attack here.
- Agree that they can take time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Undertake mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.
- Identify a buddy for the individual to talk to – outside of their work area.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.

Resources

Websites

Human Resources and Organisational Development – The contact details for the HR Business Partner for your School/ Department.

PAM Assist – Employee Assistance Programme providing confidential support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The contact details are www.pamassist.co.uk 0800 882 4102.

Aston University Trade Unions - Details of Aston University Trade Union representatives for UCU and Unite.

<https://www.daisynetwork.org/> - This network is specifically for young women who are going through the menopause.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/> - This is the NHS website, which provides a general overview of Menopause providing recommendations of support, what your GP can advise, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) and symptoms that may be experienced.

www.menopausesupport.co.uk - This website provides useful guides especially in relation to getting the most out of doctor’s appointment.

[https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk) - This website provides up to date information about the menopause and treatment options.

Women's Health Concern - The website is the online portal Women's Health Concern (WHC), which is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society (BMS). The WHC provide confidential, independent service to advice, reassure and educate women of all ages about their gynecological and sexual health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns.

My Menopause Doctor - The website for Dr Louise R Newsom GP and Menopause Specialist. Provides advice and guidance on menopause through a range of factsheets, podcasts, articles and videos.

Heppicked - Website for women's health issues.

Access to Work Mental Health Support Service - This is a confidential service currently delivered by Remploy, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. It is available at no charge to any employees with depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues affecting their work.

Articles/ documents

BBC guides:

What it's like to go through early menopause

Tips to help you cope with the menopause

What we wish we'd known about the menopause

TUC guidance for Trade Union representatives:

Supporting women through the menopause

Author and owner:	Human Resources
Date implemented:	17/09/2019

Version	Date	Change
1	09/09/2019	New Policy