

MENOPAUSE POLICY

Health, Safety & Wellbeing Guidance Children's Services Department

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Introduction

Menopause is a normal part of life. This policy recognises that the menopause is an equality and employee wellbeing issue and that individuals who are going through menopause may need appropriate flexibility, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during and after the menopause.

1. Background

The menopause is a natural part of ageing and represents a major change in life. It can also occur during other hormonal changes and as a result of treatment relating to gender re-assignment. For many, symptoms can impact daily life both inside and outside work.

2. Menopause and the law

Menopause and perimenopause are specifically protected under the Equality Act. If an employee is treated unfairly because of the menopause and perimenopause, this may amount to discrimination because of, for example, their sex, gender re-assignment and/or disability, and/or age. Menopause or perimenopause could potentially be regarded as a disability and “reasonable adjustments” must be made where possible to ensure that those experiencing menopausal symptoms are not disadvantaged.

3. Aims

To create a more open, supportive and inclusive culture and environment so that anyone who is going through the menopause feels able to discuss how this is impacting upon them personally and whilst at work and thus gets the support they require.

4. Scope

This School / Academy Menopause Policy has been determined by the Governing Board of Swanwick School and Sports College. It applies to all staff employed within the staffing complement of the School/Academy.

Where this policy is adopted by an academy or multi-academy trust, substitutions should be made throughout to utilise the actual titles of leaders (e.g. Principal / Head of School etc.) and to reflect the appropriate levels of delegation to such leaders, governing Boards and CEOs.

5. Definition

The medical definition of the menopause is when a woman has her last period. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur prematurely (before 40) and to mid-60s. Certain surgery, rather than natural aging, will also trigger the menopause in a woman.

Perimenopause is the period that leads to the menopause when many women experience symptoms. This can last between 4 and 5 years but can be much shorter or longer and may involve painful, intermittent and heavy periods.

Some people going through the perimenopausal stage may not be aware that any symptoms they are experiencing are attributed to it, it is therefore important that they are given support and advice. (The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team are able to provide assistance if required)

In some cases, people who are undergoing gender reassignment may be affected by the menopause. Trans people may be affected by symptoms due to the menopausal process or treatment / surgeries.

Trans men – someone who is going through or has gone through the process, or part of a process, to change their gender from a woman to a man may go through perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms if their ovaries remain in place and no hormone therapy is given. If the ovaries and uterus are surgically removed, then a trans man will experience menopausal symptoms at whatever age that occurs. Menopausal symptoms may be reduced or complicated if hormone treatment (such as testosterone hormone therapy) is being undertaken.

Trans women - someone who is going through or has gone through the process, or part of a process, to change their gender from a man to a woman – usually undertake hormone therapy for life and will generally experience limited menopausal like symptoms unless this therapy is interrupted, or their hormone levels become unstable.

Please note: under the Equality Act 2010 individuals do not need to be undergoing medical treatment in order to have protection from discrimination.

6. Symptoms

Research suggests that 30-60% of women experience intermittent physical and / or psychological symptoms around the menopause. Menopause symptoms vary widely. On average someone experiencing the menopause can experience symptoms for a period of 4-8 years.

It is important to note that not everyone going through menopause will notice every symptom, or need any support or help. However, 25% of women are likely to experience some symptoms which could be classed as severe, and it is likely that these will need support or help. This may impact upon their wellbeing and time at work more significantly.

Symptoms of the menopause can be both physical and emotional.

Typical physical symptoms include:

- Hot flushes
- Loss of libido
- Palpitations / irregular heartbeat
- Difficulty sleeping and night sweats
- Fatigue
- Joint and muscle pain
- Weakened bladder function/ urinary problems
- Skin irritation and dryness including dry eyes
- Dizziness / balance issues
- Headaches including migraines
- Taking longer to recover from illness
- Irregular periods which can become heavier
- Weight gain
- Breast soreness
- Dry / burning mouth
- Osteoporosis

Typical psychological symptoms include:

- Anxiety / Panic attacks
- Depression
- Poor concentration / focus
- Memory loss
- Decreased confidence
- Loss of confidence
- Irritability/mood swings
- Insomnia

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; which can cause dizziness, discomfort, sweating and heart palpitations. These are some of the most common symptoms of the menopause.

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.

7. Key responsibilities

The Employer / Governing Board will:

- Develop and embed an open inclusive and supportive culture which promotes a positive attitude towards anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms and a commitment to treat all individuals with dignity and respect during this time.

- provide access to health, safety and wellbeing, and other advisory services including specific advice and information in relation to menopause and work.
- establish effective monitoring processes to enable evaluation of the impact of menopause policy.
- protect those who are experiencing menopausal symptoms from harassment e.g. unwanted comments, jokes banter or ridicule and take action to deal with this behaviour.

The Senior Leadership Team will:

- provide a positive culture to help educate and inform managers and staff to be aware of how the menopause can affect individual workers who are likely to experience symptoms, taking account of the particular circumstances in schools, about the potential symptoms of menopause and how they can change throughout the process, and what they can do to actively support individuals experiencing them. (See Appendix 1).
- as far as is reasonably practicable create an environment where staff members experiencing symptoms of menopause are treated sensitively so that they feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support and adjustments at work.
- create conditions in the workplace that do not make menopausal symptoms worse including making reasonable adjustments to the physical environment, working patterns and other arrangements.
- ensure that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place, recognising that the menopause and perimenopause is an individual experience and therefore there is no 'one size fits all' solution.
- ensure that an alternative contact is available, in circumstances where members of staff who are vulnerable to symptoms feel uncomfortable going to their line manager. (Ensure that the person feels "at ease" with whomever is asked to support them)
- ensure that generic risk assessments undertaken by the school which considers the specific needs of those experiencing menopausal symptoms. This should include consideration of temperature and ventilation issues as well as welfare issues; such as access to toilet facilities and cold water, during and outside break and lunch times and it is shared with all staff.

- Ensure, where necessary and in consultation, an individual risk assessment is undertaken for an individual who is experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Managers will:

- familiarise themselves with this menopause policy and if available undertake awareness training.
- be aware of the potential impact of menopause on performance; if someone's performance suddenly dips, consideration will be given as to whether the menopause may be playing a part in this.
- provide a safe place to allow the member of staff to speak openly and honestly.
- be ready and willing to listen and have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and confidentially and allowing adequate time for the discussion.
- check whether they have been to the GP and consider an Occupational Health referral if the team member is finding it difficult to manage the symptoms.
- complete a risk assessment to ensure an employee's symptoms are not being exacerbated by their job.
- discuss appropriate adjustments - simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance.
- record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented, via an action plan.
- ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to and reviewed as regularly as necessary.
- Undertake regular, informal conversations to talk through any changes or other ways to provide support.
- ensure ongoing dialogue via a follow-up meeting and support individuals if they experience unacceptable behaviour from colleagues.

Human Resources, Health, Safety & Wellbeing will:

- provide information and guidance for employees and managers.
- help employees by identifying reasonable adjustments in the workplace where appropriate.
- develop and promote Menopause Awareness training.
- signpost to other appropriate sources of help and advice.

Employees are encouraged to:

- look after their general health whilst experiencing menopausal symptoms.
- be open and honest in conversations with HR and Occupational Health.
- contribute to a respectful and healthy working environment.
- be supportive of their colleagues.

8. Options for support managers can put in place.

Managers have an important role to play in ensuring that anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health issue. Simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance. Where necessary managers should seek advice from HR or Health, Safety and Wellbeing Services on what reasonable adjustments can be made. The following are adjustments that can be discussed:

- Flexibility with breaks,
- Making a quiet room or other suitable location available
- Agreeing an approach to provide assistance or flexibility when symptoms are particularly difficult to manage.
- Making environment changes of ventilation and/or heat source or affecting the classroom or work area and consider getting a fan or changing the work area where possible.
- Allowing time off during the working day to attend medical appointments.
- Ensuring access to toilet and washroom facilities is easily available.
- Ensuring access to cold drinking water is easily available.

Where symptoms are more severe managers could discuss with the member of staff whether a referral to the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Section for further advice may be useful in identifying any further adjustments which might prove helpful.

It is important to remember that not all employees want to discuss this health matter with their manager and similar symptoms may be caused by something else.

For further advice on support mechanisms please refer to Appendix 1

9. Menopause and sickness absence.

Managing absence from work should be handled sympathetically because the menopause is a long-term and fluctuating health change. See the school absence management policy for further information in relation to the recording of sickness absence in relation to menopausal symptoms.

10. Advice for individuals managing menopause at work.

It is recommended that any individuals who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and their capacity to work:

- Where you feel able, to discuss what you are going through with your manager – in particular what they can do to support your practical needs.
- Where you feel able, to talk about your symptoms and solutions with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing symptoms and work out your preferred coping strategies. This can reduce pressure and stress and support wellbeing.
- stay hydrated, breathing exercises, yoga and meditation can all help relieve menopause symptoms.
- find out more about information and support, see useful links below.
- Consult your GP for advice on available treatment options which may require time off during the working day.
- access Health, Safety and Wellbeing Section for information on the menopause or counselling support – this might be especially relevant for those experiencing early menopause or perimenopause symptoms.

11. Support & Links

Additional information and support can be access from:

- NHS (guidance on menopause symptoms and treatment)
- British Menopause Society (provides ‘education, information and guidance to healthcare professionals specialising in all aspects of post reproductive health’)
- Women’s Health Concern (the patient arm of the British Menopause Society)
- Daisy Network (support for premature menopause or ‘premature ovarian insufficiency’)
- Faculty of Occupational Medicine (provides guidance on the menopause at work)
- Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace (‘making it easy for you to introduce the right menopause awareness, training, policies and practices’)

- Talking Menopause (provides ‘seminars, coaching and individually tailored programmes helping organisations transform their culture and create menopause-friendly workplaces’)
- The Menopause Exchange (provides ‘independent advice about the menopause, midlife and post-menopausal health’)
- Menopause Matters (‘an independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options’)
- Menopause Support (provides personal and business support)
- Meg’s Menopause (‘an open source of information and advice dedicated to empowering women through an honest and frank discussion of all things menopause’)
- CIPD’s The Menopause at Work -A practical guide for people managers
- ACAS Guidance – Menopause at work
- TUC – Menopause Toolkit

Practical Supportive Measures

It is important when looking at possible adjustments to discuss them with the individuals concerned as everyone suffering from perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms will be affected differently. It is also important to ensure that any adjustments implemented are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain effective as the symptoms and their severity change throughout the process.

Below are a few suggestions to help identify possible adjustments (this list is not exhaustive)

Symptom	Examples of working factors that may possibly exacerbate symptoms.	Possible adjustments
Daytime sweats, hot flushes and palpitations	<p>Warm rooms, periods of hot weather poorly ventilated / "stuffy" areas</p> <p>Workwear made from closely woven or non-breathable fabric (such as nylon) or the use of PPE (personal protective equipment) for extended periods of time.</p> <p>Lack of opportunity to take rest breaks (hot flushes may embarrass some people affecting their concentration)</p>	<p>Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water and washroom facilities. Look at ways to cool the working environment for those affected, for example fans at workstations, move desks nearer to windows, opening windows and adjust air conditioning.</p> <p>Ensure any workwear provided is loose fitting and breathable wherever possible. (Cotton lab coats for example are more comfortable to wear than nylon ones) Ensure PPE provided to staff fits properly and is made from a suitable material which protects against the hazard but also allows the wearer an acceptable level of comfort.</p> <p>Where possible be flexible about breaks and ensure these can be taken in a suitable environment.</p>
Night-time sweats and hot flushes. Insomnia or sleep disturbance.	Rigid start / finish times and lack of flexible working options may increase fatigue at work due to lack of sleep.	Consider temporary adjustment of shift patterns or hours to accommodate any difficulties. Allow flexible / home working if possible. Provide the option of alternative tasks / duties. Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence. Reassure workers that they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets.

Symptom	Examples of working factors that may possibly exacerbate symptoms.	Possible adjustments
Urinary problems, for example increased frequency, urgency and increased risk of urinary infections.	<p>Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress, embarrassment and an increase in stress levels.</p> <p>Staff member may need to access toilet facilities more frequently; may need to drink more fluids, may feel unwell.</p>	<p>Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet.</p> <p>Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water throughout their working day.</p>
Irregular and / or heavy periods.	<p>Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress, embarrassment, and an increase in stress levels. Staff member may need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently.</p>	<p>Ensure easy access to well-maintained toilet and washroom facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet / washroom. Ensure cover is available so staff can leave their posts if needed.</p>
Skin irritation, dryness or itching.	<p>Unsuitable, workwear, PPE or workplace temperatures and ventilation / humidity may increase skin irritation, dryness and itching, there may be discomfort and an increased risk of infection and a reduction in the barrier function of skin.</p>	<p>Avoid non breathable fabrics for workwear. Provide alternatives made from natural fibres with options for layering that can be adjusted. Ensure comfortable working temperatures, ventilation and humidity. Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet/ washroom.</p>

Symptom	Examples of working factors that may possibly exacerbate symptoms.	Possible adjustments
Muscular aches and bone and joint pains	Lifting, moving and manual handling as well as work involving repetitive movements or adopting static postures may be more uncomfortable and there may be an increased risk of injury	Make any necessary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules / tasks and keep under review. Consider providing alternative lower risk tasks. Follow HSE guidance and advice on manual handling and preventing MSDs (Musculo-skeletal Disorders)
Headaches.	Headaches may be triggered or worsened by many workplace factors such as artificial lighting, poor air quality, exposure to chemicals, screen work, workplace stress, poor posture/ unsuitable workstations, unsuitable uniforms or workplace temperatures.	Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity and good air quality. Ensure access to natural light where possible and ability to adjust artificial light. Allow additional rest breaks. Carry out DSE assessment for identified DSE Users in accordance with the legislation.
Dry eyes.	Unsuitable workplace temperatures / humidity, poor air quality and excessive screen work may increase dryness in the eyes, discomfort, eye strain and increase the risk of infection.	Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity and good air quality. Allow additional breaks from screen-based work. Carry out DSE risk assessments.

Symptom	Examples of working factors that may possibly exacerbate symptoms.	Possible adjustments
Psychological symptoms, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Panic Attacks • Mood changes • Loss of confidence 	Excessive workloads, feeling unsupported, perceived stigma around the menopause, bullying and harassment and any form of work-related stress may exacerbate symptoms. Stress can have wide ranging negative effects on mental and physical health and wellbeing. Performance and workplace relationships may be affected.	Carry out a stress risk assessment and address work related stress through implementation of the HSE’s management standards. Ensure that workers will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload, tasks or performance management targets. Ensure that managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that staff may have in a supportive manner. Ensure managers have a positive attitude and understand that they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed. Allow flexible / home working where appropriate. Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence. Raise general awareness of issues around the menopause so colleagues are more likely to be supportive. Ensure managers receive appropriate information and training on the menopause and how to support staff going through it. Ensure a quiet area / room is available. Provide access to counselling services.
Psychological symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory problems • Difficulty concentrating 	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms. Loss of confidence may result.	Carry out a stress risk assessment and address work related stress through implementation of the HSE’s management standards. Reassure workers that they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets. Ensure that managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that staff may have in a supportive manner. Ensure managers have a positive attitude and understand that they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed. Reduce demands if workload identified as an issue. Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed or consider substituting with alternative tasks. Allow flexible / home working where appropriate. Offer and facilitate alternative methods of communicating tasks and planning of work to assist memory. Provide access to counselling services.