

Menopause in the Workplace

The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness of menopause related issues at work, and in particular assist managers in supporting staff who are experiencing the menopause and their associated symptoms. . The University is committed to the wellbeing of its staff, and aims to create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support at work, and where managers feel confident in holding relevant conversations and providing appropriate support.

Introduction

Women comprise approximately half (47%) of the UK's workforce. Of those employed people aged over 50, 45% are women, representing 3.5 million workers. Thus, many of today's women workers are, or will be, working through the menopause and managing associated symptoms at work. Around 75% of women experience some symptoms of the menopause, and 25% could be classed as severe.

Symptoms associated with the menopause include hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats, sleep disturbance, fatigue, poor concentration / memory, irritability, mood disturbance, depression and anxiety, skin irritation and dryness. Overall, this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years.

Studies show that some women felt the menopause had negatively affected their job performance; including believing that it had a negative impact on their managers and colleagues' perceptions of their competence at work. Managing symptoms in the workplace can also lead to increased levels of stress.

Taking a proactive stance to supporting women through the menopause can ensure that they are able to ask for help and adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles, reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms and assure women that we are a responsible employer committed to supporting their needs during this transitional stage of their lives.

Definitions

Menopause: when a woman ceases menstruation for 12 consecutive months. Typically occurring between the ages of 45-55. It is a natural part of the aging process for women. For some women this can happen earlier in life for example due to an auto-immune disease or cancer treatment.

Peri-menopause: the transition period leading up to the menopause during which women may experience symptoms due to fluctuating hormones.

Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40; this is known as premature menopause. This can occur naturally or because of some cancer treatments or a hysterectomy.

Key Principles

- The University recognises the menopause as an Occupational Health issue and will seek to support women during this change of life.
- Staff who are experiencing symptoms at work relating to the menopause are encouraged to discuss their needs with their manager if they feel able to do so.
- The University recognises that some women are not comfortable discussing such issues with their manager, so they may contact the HR department for a confidential discussion in the first instance.
- The University wishes to support women experiencing menopause related symptoms at work, and will accommodate reasonable adjustments to the working environment and working patterns where it is possible to do so.
- Advice will be available from Occupational Health where required.

Manager Support

Women experience the menopause in a multitude of ways. Some women do not need any assistance with the menopause and require no medical intervention. Some women have much more severe symptoms and

require medical treatment or support. Each situation is different and there is no standard approach to supporting women at work.

As with any longstanding health-related condition, sympathetic and appropriate support from employers and managers is crucial in order to provide staff with the support that they need. Above all, it is important to listen to women and respond sympathetically to any requests for adjustments at work.

Some possible support or adjustments may include:

- Flexibility working arrangements for those experience debilitating symptoms. For example, where the role permits, allowing staff to work around their symptoms, perhaps by allowing them to rest when they are tired and make the time up later, or permitting occasional homeworking when symptoms are severe. Some women experiencing the menopause will find that they have times of the day where symptoms are more or less problematic and start and finish times could be adjusted to take this into account. For example, women with disturbed sleep patterns may find they are more productive with a later start time.
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day.
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments.
- Changing/ washing facilities for women to change clothes during the working day.
- Where uniforms are provided, consider if natural fibres where possible, and provide additional uniforms to ensure it is possible to change during the day. Uniform requirements may also be adjusted if necessary.
- Facilitating a more comfortable working environment, taking into account temperature and lighting, to help women manage their body temperature. Make desk fans easily available and consider if ventilation is sufficient or can be improved.

It is important to recognise that some women may not want to discuss the menopause.

Advice on adjustments can be sought from HR.

Manager Responsibilities

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that no one experiences less favourable treatment as a result of the menopause.
- Ensuring that any conversations are kept strictly confidential.
- Putting in place any required support / adjustments.
- Recording any agreements made.
- Holding regular dialogue with members of staff regarding support required, including follow up meetings to review adjustments that have been made.
- Seeking additional advice from Occupational Health where necessary.
- Signposting relevant sources of support, such as the University Counselling Service.
- Agreeing with the member of staff if other colleagues should be informed about any adjustments that have been agreed (even if the reason is not disclosed).

Managers can contact HR for additional guidance and information where necessary.