

## Menopause Guidance

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## Menopause Guidance

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council 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.
- 1.2 Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst not every woman suffers with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.
- 1.3 Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to feel able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, men should be aware too. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.
- 1.4 The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness of menopause related issues at work and assist managers in supporting employees who are experiencing the menopause.
- 1.5 The Council recognises that partners can be indirectly affected by the menopause – for example if a woman is experiencing insomnia and night sweats their partner may also experience disrupted sleep and fatigue. If a woman experiences significant physical or psychological symptoms (such as depression) their partner may be concerned for her wellbeing and feel increased levels of stress. In some cases people can experience relationship problems or difficulties at home at this time. Ultimately, these issues may affect women and their partners in the workplace.
- 1.6 The following policies which should be read in conjunction with this guidance:
  - Attendance Management
  - Dignity and Respect
  - Disability – including Reasonable Adjustments
  - Discipline
  - Flexible Working
  - Line Managers Guidance (conversations)
  - Managing Work performance
  - Stress in the Workplace

## 2 Background

- 2.1 Currently between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in the UK's workforce; approximately 60.1% of Scottish Borders Council women employees are aged 45 and above. According to the Faculty of Occupational Medicine, around 10% of women stop work entirely due to severe symptoms. For others, symptoms are less severe but for the majority, they struggle on and try to manage the symptoms, whilst still trying to perform at work.
- 2.2 **Menopause** is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating, and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.
- 2.3 **A premature Menopause** can occur with periods stopping before the age of 40.
- 2.4 **Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods, hot flushes, night sweats, bloating, weight gain, difficulty concentrating and lethargy as well as many other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.
- 2.5 **Post menopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months. Symptoms can continue for 4 years after the last period with 1 in 10 experiencing symptoms for up to 12 years.
- 2.6 Sometimes there is reluctance to have open and honest discussion about the menopause and the effect it may have on employees experiencing the menopause.
- 2.7 There may also be a lack of awareness of some of the supports and assistance that can be put in place to help employees. This can lead to the menopause being treated negatively in the workplace or indeed being treated as a joke.

## 3 Responsibilities

- 3.1 Scottish Borders Council will:
- Ensure line managers are informed in order for them to support employees experiencing the menopause
  - Encourage management and Trades Unions to work in partnership to assist in raising awareness and understanding of the menopause and how it can affect women in the workplace
  - Ensure line managers adopt a fair and consistent approach, taking account of individual circumstances, while seeking to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of attendance

- Ensure all parties fulfil their obligations in line with the Equality Act 2010
- Encourage employees to seek help and support with any problems which result in them having difficulties while at work or which result in them not attending work
- Ensure employees are made aware of support mechanisms available within the council.

3.2 All employees are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their own health (see section 4.12)
- Talking to their GP if/when symptoms become difficult
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers and Occupational Health
- Where they feel not able to speak to their line manager, seek assistance and advice from another line manager, HR, Health and Safety, or a Trade Union representative
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

3.3 All line managers should :

- Familiarise themselves with this Guidance
- Be ready to have open discussions about the impact of menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally
- Promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees, including the use of risk assessments to identify and manage hazards impacting on both physical and mental health at work
- Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented;
- Ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to
- Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager may:
  - Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice
  - Refer the employee to Occupational Health
  - Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical.

3.4 The role of Occupational Health is to:

- Carry out a holistic assessment of individuals as to whether or not menopause may be contributing to symptoms/wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with up-to-date research
- Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice
- Provide support and advise Managers in determining and agreeing reasonable adjustments, if required.

## 4 Menopause symptoms/reasonable adjustments

4.1 It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

4.2 Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Some women also experience difficulty sleeping. The occurrence of some symptoms can be very unpredictable or random, whilst some symptoms seem to be triggered by certain situations such as hot flushes when feeling stressed so it's helpful to consider different scenarios.

### 4.3 Hot Flushes

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source
- Easy access to drinking water
- Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

### 4.4 Heavy periods

- Have permanent access to washroom facilities
- Request an extra uniform
- Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.

### 4.5 Headaches

- Have access to fresh drinking water
- Offer a quiet space to work
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

### 4.6 Difficulty Sleeping

- Ask to be considered for flexible working, particularly if suffering from a lack of sleep.

### 4.7 Low Mood

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – outside of the work area
- Identify a 'time out space' to be able to go to 'clear their head'.

#### 4.8 **Loss of Confidence**

- Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

#### 4.9 **Poor Concentration**

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly
- Review task allocation and workload
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment
- Offer quiet space to work
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices
- Reduce interruptions
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having 'protected time', so that they are not disturbed
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

#### 4.10 **Anxiety**

- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague 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.

#### 4.11 **Panic Attacks**

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a 'buddy' 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.

#### 4.12 **What can women experiencing the menopause do to help themselves?**

For women who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and/or their capacity to work:

- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at end of this guidance)
- See your GP or medical professional for advice on available treatment options
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager you feel comfortable talking to

- Use technology where this is helpful such as reminders or note taking
- Speak to your Line Manager or an HR Advisor about accessing Occupational Health for advice and guidance
- Avoid your hot flushes triggers
- Consider lifestyle changes such as weight reduction, smoking cessation and exercise
- Carry a bottle of water and eat healthily and regularly, research has shown this can alleviate symptoms
- Get advice from your pharmacist on vitamins and supplements that may help alleviate symptoms
- Wear natural fibres as man-made fibres can exacerbate hot flushes and sweating.

## **5 Confidential conversations**

5.1 Some women find it particularly hard to talk to a line manager who they feel may not understand enough about the impact of menopausal symptoms, or just because they find menopause embarrassing to talk about.

### **5.2 Preparing for a talk with your Line Manager**

Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you. Think about the practical, reasonable adjustments that would help you, being flexible and ideally with different options. It may be that these are only for a short period of time while you work with your medical professional to alleviate your symptoms. Include a timeframe too.

### **5.3 Prepare what to say**

Mentally rehearse, or make a note of what you're going to say so you are prepared when you talk to your Line Manager.

### **5.4 Explain your situation clearly**

Talk to your Line Manager about your current situation, what's happening and most importantly how's it affecting your work. For example, you're experiencing hot flushes which are embarrassing you and preventing you from speaking up in meetings. Maybe night sweats mean you're not sleeping so you're too tired to think clearly and it's taking you longer to make decisions or complete tasks.

### **5.5 Offer a solution**

Think about how your circumstances could be improved and offer a reasonable solution. Could you work from home or come into work later on some days if poor sleep is an issue for you? If the temperature in your office is making hot flushes worse, can you have a fan or move to a desk near an air conditioning unit or window you can open? Have you got adequate access to drinking water and toilet facilities – if not, how could this be rectified?

Talk these through with your manager and request that some or all of these are put in place as reasonable adjustments, perhaps on a flexible basis so they can be reviewed as appropriate.

Don't expect an answer immediately. Remember, this may have been bothering you for a long time, you've been mentally rehearsing and gathering your courage but it may be the first time your Line Manager has heard about it. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary.

#### 5.6 **Line Manager**

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for any follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or break room.

At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update.

Remember, each situation is different and there is no standard approach to supporting women at work.

### 6 **Supporting Attendance**

6.1 The Council's policy and procedure for Attendance Management is designed to ensure all employees receive support for any health issue they are experiencing at the earliest possible stage. The supports and help detailed in the policy are available to women who are experiencing the menopause and are there to be accessed while a woman is present at work and not only if they become absent. Remember Partners may also be affected by the menopause and should be supported too.

6.2 Where a woman does have absences due to the menopause, these should be considered as an underlying health reason and supports in the form of reasonable adjustments should be identified and considered. In severe cases some women may experience symptoms which are classified as a disability within the Equality Act 2010 which requires formal consideration of any reasonable adjustments.

### 7 **Review, Monitoring and Evaluation**

7.1 This guidance will be reviewed at least every two years from the date of publication and data from the uptake of this policy will be monitored and evaluated in order to ensure that the policy remains effective and fit for purpose.

## 8 Further Information

- **Health Talk** – Website that talks about women’s experiences of menopause  
[Menopause - Overview \(healthtalk.org\)](http://healthtalk.org)
- **Henpicked.** This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories. <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>.
- **Information on hysterectomy.** This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at [Hysterectomy - Hysterectomy.org - Awareness](http://Hysterectomy - Hysterectomy.org - Awareness)
- [Lets talk Menopause.](#) Information, talks, blogs, books.
- **Menopause information.** The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>.
- **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.** These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you.
- [The menopause | NHS inform](#) Information about all aspects of the menopause.
- **Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)** information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org/>
- [Strong by Nature](#) This site offers a five element natural lifestyle system to help manage menopause and emerge into a post menopause phase.
- [The British Menopause Society](#) This site informs on menopause and all aspects of post reproductive health
- **The National Health Service** provides an overview of menopause. [www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx).
- **TUC Menopause guidance**
- **UNISON** – [Menopause factsheet](#)
- **Women’s Health Concern** – A website that provides information about aspects of women’s health. [www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)

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