



Menopause

Early Years Alliance mini-guide



A recent study shows that 99% of perimenopausal and menopausal women reported that their symptoms had negatively impacted their work, with 59% taking time off work, and 50% of those women resigning or taking early retirement. (Newson Health Research and Education 2021) With the childcare and education sector being 96% female, it is absolutely critical for early years providers to commit to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for employees and volunteers experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Understanding the impact of menopause on employees at work

Menopausal symptoms can have a significant impact on an employee's attendance and performance at work. For example, an early years educator may find it difficult to concentrate if they are experiencing hot flushes and profuse sweating but are unable to leave the children in their care.

What will be helpful for individual staff members will depend on their symptoms and their individual circumstances. The type and severity of symptoms can vary significantly between women. Therefore, where a staff member is experiencing adverse menopausal symptoms, their line manager should discuss with them what practical support would be helpful and avoid making assumptions.



Managers should encourage staff to let them know if any absence is menopause related and the manager should record it as such. This will assist managers to make any appropriate adjustments (see below). If a staff member records a series of unrelated reasons for absence, e.g. fatigue or headache, it is more difficult for line managers to know if there is an underlying condition, such as menopause. It will also make it more difficult to know what measures may be appropriate to take to assist the staff member on their return to work.

If there are performance issues that are known to be caused by menopause-related symptoms, managers should consider adjustments to the role or working conditions that could help the staff member. It may be appropriate to obtain a medical report.

Managers are required to approach performance conversations supportively and positively and take any health issues fully into account where there is underperformance on the part of an individual.

Supporting individuals with their symptoms

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively.



Hot flushes and/or headaches

The working environment can make menopausal symptoms more difficult for employees where the room temperature cannot be controlled. Managers should consider what practical steps they could take to address this. For example, it may be possible to work nearer to a window, which may be cooler, and/or to provide a fan for use to regulate temperature. In addition:

- Easy access to fresh drinking water
- 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
- Time out to take medication, if needed

Low Mood

Symptoms of menopause can include depression, low mood and/or anxiety. Where a staff member has such symptoms, managers should encourage individuals to consider counselling/cognitive behavioural therapy and/or mindfulness as these may be beneficial. If necessary, managers should direct individuals to speak to a Mental Health First Aider (if available) who can signpost employees to access these themselves.

- 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'

Anxiety and/or panic attacks

An altered work pattern could also benefit someone who is suffering from anxiety or depression related to menopause. Managers could also aim to accommodate occasional requests to come in late or go home early. In addition:

- Promote the Mental Health First Aider
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – outside of work their 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
- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission

Poor Concentration

If a staff member's symptoms include difficulty concentrating, a manager could consider making temporary changes to work allocation, in consultation with the staff member, to ensure that the type and volume of work is appropriate.

- 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 pads for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment
- Offer quiet space to work, where possible
- Reduce interruptions
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work

Difficulty Sleeping

For staff experiencing adverse menopausal symptoms, a temporary change to working arrangements may be more appropriate. For example, agreeing to a later start time on a temporary basis if a staff member is suffering from sleepless nights and thinks that this could help them feel less tired at work.



Heavy/ light Periods

A staff member who is experiencing menopause might need to take frequent and/or urgent toilet breaks, for example if they have a heavy or unexpected period or have continence issues. This can be a challenge when staff work, for example, in teams, where there is little flexibility. However, a discussion should take place with the staff member to identify how to support in this situation.

- Have permanent access to washroom facilities
- Access to a spare uniform, if appropriate
- Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing

Loss of Confidence

- Provide support through regular supervision meetings
- Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work

Discussions

Every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines. If a staff member 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 a male employee wishes to speak about a family member, please ensure:

- Adequate time to have the conversation
- An appropriate room to preserve confidentiality

- That they are encouraged to speak openly and honestly
- They are provided with supportive measures, such as listed above
- Keep a record of agreed actions, and how they will be implemented
- Discuss whether the individual has visited their GP. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested. If they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make a medical referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or break room



Further information

People Management (Alliance, 2016)

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists:

www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause



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