

Menopause Guidance

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Next Review Due	Change of regulations or guidance
Version	1

Symphony Learning Trust is committed to ensuring the health and wellbeing of all its employees, and recognises that for those who are experiencing menopausal symptoms this may have a significant impact on their physical and mental wellbeing as well as their ability to undertake everyday activities.

Menopausal symptoms vary greatly with some individuals experiencing more severe or debilitating symptoms than others. Symptoms may also impact on an employee's attendance, performance and working relationships. It is therefore essential for managers to understand what the menopause is, how it may affect individuals and how to support those experiencing menopausal symptoms to minimise the impact this has on their working lives.

The purpose of this guidance document is to:

- outline the main symptoms of the menopause (including the perimenopause),
- increase awareness of the menopause and its impact on individuals so that employees feel confident to seek advice, guidance and support from their line manager,
- increase understanding of all elements of the menopause so that all can discuss the subject confidently and appropriately, and
- provide advice to managers on supportive measures that can be considered for those who are experiencing menopausal related symptoms, to help reduce the effect of these symptoms at work.

It is important for managers to recognise that matters involving the menopause should be treated sensitively and effectively to ensure an employee is fully supported during this time of change.

1. What is the Menopause?

1.1 The menopause, a natural part of the ageing process, is usually defined by the point at which someone has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age; the average age for someone to reach the menopause is 51. The menopause may also occur earlier or later than this due to several factors.

1.2 The menopause can affect:

- Women, although it is recognised that there is also a male menopause (see section 8).
- Trans people, i.e. those whose gender is different to the one assigned at birth.
- Intersex people.

- 1.3 Prior to the menopause, an individual may experience menopausal symptoms as their bodies gradually begin to produce less oestrogen. This is known as the “Perimenopause” which can begin 4 to 10 years before the menopause.
- 1.4 Individuals may have very different experiences and symptoms may vary greatly, and with one in three people experiencing severe symptoms. It is therefore important to ensure that all employees who are experiencing symptoms of the menopause are supported appropriately and are able to remain in work during this time of change.
- 1.5 A small number of individuals (around 1%) may experience “early” menopause before the age of 40, this may be related to genetics, an underlying medical condition, or a result of certain cancer treatments.
- 1.6 Woman may also experience “surgical” menopause following a surgical procedure to remove their ovaries. Menopause symptoms will start immediately after surgery where both ovaries are removed. Where one ovary is removed symptoms may start within five years of the surgery.
- 1.7 Menopause can also increase a woman's risk of developing long term health risks, such as weak bones (osteoporosis), raised cholesterol and heart disease.



2. Menopause and the Law

- 2.1 Menopause and perimenopause are not specifically protected under the Equality Act 2010. However, where an employee is treated less favourably because of their menopausal symptoms this may amount to:

Sex discrimination i.e. where an employer treats an individual's menopausal symptoms less seriously than it would a male worker's health condition, for example when considering performance or sickness issues. Similarly, unwelcomed comments regarding menopausal symptoms could amount to sexual harassment.

Disability discrimination: menopausal symptoms could potentially be regarded as a disability. In such circumstances, reasonable adjustments should be considered to support the employee within the workplace, e.g. agreeing to record menopause related absence separately from other sickness absences.

Age discrimination: This may include unfair treatment of those employees who are going through the perimenopause or menopause, who are usually in their mid-forties to early fifties.

- 2.2 In addition, the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 outlines that an employer must ensure the health and safety of their employees. Therefore, health and safety

checks and risk assessments should be in place and reviewed regularly to ensure any risk are minimised, reduced or where possible removed.

3. Symptoms

- 3.1 The menopause may be relatively problem free for some individuals; however, others may experience more severe symptoms or difficulties which have a significant impact on their everyday lives. It is therefore important for managers to understand that each individual will have very different experiences during this time.
- 3.2 Some symptoms of perimenopause and menopause may be the same and include, for example:
- hot flushes (short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest. Skin may appear flushed and sweaty)
 - difficulty sleeping and night sweats (hot flushes that occur at night),
 - feeling tired and lacking energy
 - feeling irritable or short tempered
 - changes in mood, such as low mood or anxiety
 - feeling anxious and/or experiencing panic attacks
 - problems with concentration and memory
 - irregular periods which can be more frequent, become heavier/lighter
 - aches and pains including muscle and joint stiffness
 - urinary problems and recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs)
 - headaches including migraines
 - putting on weight
 - palpitations (where heartbeats suddenly become more noticeable)
 - skin irritation
 - dry eyes

The list above is not exhaustive.

- 3.3 Employees may find it helpful to keep a record of their symptoms including the relevant dates, frequency, and the impact they are having. Advice can also be sought from the employee's GP.

4. How the Female Menopause is Diagnosed

- 4.1 Menopause can be diagnosed as the point at which an individual has had 12 months without a period.
- 4.2 A GP will also usually be able to confirm whether an individual is menopausal based on their symptoms. Where an individual is under the age of 45, a blood test to measure hormone levels may also be required.



5. Treatment for Menopausal Symptoms

- 5.1 An employees' GP may be able to prescribe a number of treatments to help relieve symptoms of the menopause, these include:
- **Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)**: to replace the declining levels of oestrogen to alleviate menopausal symptoms (in particular hot flushes). HRT is available in tablets, skin patches, gels and implants.
 - There are risks and benefits of HRT, which should be discussed with a GP. If HRT isn't suitable, other medications may be prescribed.

Where treatment does not alleviate symptoms or where an individual is unable to take HRT a GP may refer an individual to a menopause specialist.

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**: talking therapy that can help with low mood and anxiety.
- **Lifestyle changes**: may assist with managing symptoms, e.g.
 - eating a [healthy, balanced diet](#),
 - regular [exercise](#),
 - getting plenty of rest,
 - stopping smoking,
 - reducing alcohol and caffeine consumption,
 - managing stress,
 - having sufficient calcium and vitamin D.
- **Alternative therapies**: such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology and practising relaxation techniques such as yoga, tai chi or mindfulness. Advice should be taken prior to any medicinal herbal remedies are considered.



6. Supporting an Employee During the Menopause

- 6.1 Line managers are best placed to support their employees and should listen openly and non-judgementally (if an individual wishes to discuss their current situation and their symptoms and/or experiences) to fully understand how the menopause may be impacting on them and their work. Line managers should take concerns raised seriously and keep discussions confidential.
- 6.2 Line managers should have regular conversations with their employees to enable them to understand the individual's needs, and make sure support is in place to enable the employee to continue to work effectively. Line managers and employees in collaboration may wish to consider:

- how symptoms are impacting on the individual employee,
- a workplace risk assessment to identify any potential support measures to ensure that menopausal symptoms are not made worse by the workplace and to help employees manage their symptoms whilst at work,
- any possible reasonable adjustments that could be considered, either on a temporary or permanent basis. See appendix A for further information,
- whether any other members of the team should be informed and by whom,
- undertaking a stress risk assessment,
- a referral to Occupational Health,
- signposting to other sources of support. See appendix B.

6.3 Changes to working practices, may include:

- Supporting flexible working options, such as undertaking non-contact times at home, reducing hours or changing hours on a temporary basis.
- Recording menopause-related absences separately and/or adjusting absence-monitoring arrangements.
- Adjustments to the appraisal process or appraisal objectives to take account of menopause-related absence or where menopause symptoms may have impacted on performance.

6.4 Changes to the working environment/facilities may include:

- Allowing individual employees to control their immediate working environments such as temperature and ventilation,
- Providing areas for individuals to rest, if required,
- Allowing employees to work from home, where appropriate and service needs allow this,
- An adjustment to the employee's role, if operationally feasible,
- Providing access to cold water, toilets and washing facilities,
- Improving awareness of menopause for those with line management responsibilities and across the Trust generally,
- Nurturing a menopause-aware workplace to enable individuals to disclose their condition, to seek advice, support and any appropriate adjustments.
- Consider having a menopause or wellbeing champion who can provide advice, support and assistance to individuals.
- Encouraging individual's to seek the support from their GP, Counsellor, Trade Union etc. for counselling and/or emotional support.



7. Barriers to Assisting Employees during the Menopause

7.1 Individuals may feel uncomfortable discussing their menopause symptoms at work because:

- they consider it to be a private or personal matter or because they feel their symptoms are embarrassing to share with others,
- they do not know their line manager well or do not feel that their manager will be sympathetic of workplace stigma.
- they may consider that disclosing they are menopausal will mean that managers will consider them less able to do their job,
- they are worried that job security or promotion opportunities might be taken away

7.2 Line managers should be mindful that the menopause may affect different people in different ways throughout their lives.

8. Male Menopause

8.1 Men can also experience the male menopause which occurs as a result of an age-related decline in the male hormone testosterone. Changes are usually experienced by men in their late 40s to 50s. Unlike female menopause, where hormone production stops completely, testosterone decline in men is a slower process.

8.2 The male menopause can cause physical and psychological symptoms which typically worsen with age. They can include:

- Fatigue/weakness;
- Depression;
- Decreased motivation;
- Lowered self-confidence;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Insomnia or difficulty sleeping;
- Increased body fat;
- Decreased bone density;
- Physical bodily changes
- Infertility.

8.3 The duration and severity of these symptoms will vary however some men may experience these uncomfortable effects for many years.

9. How the Male Menopause is Diagnosed

9.1 A GP may be able to diagnose the male menopause by:

- Performing a physical exam,
- Asking about symptoms
- undertaking a blood test, e.g. to measure testosterone levels.

9.2 The most common types of treatment for symptoms of the male menopause are:

- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) - tablets, skin patches, gels, implants and injections that relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing testosterone.
- Lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, managing stress and having enough sleep.

10. Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Employees and the Menopause

10.1 The Trust recognises that the menopausal symptoms identified within this guidance can also be experienced by transgender, non-binary and intersex employees. Transgender employees may be affected due to the natural menopause or as a result of the treatment and/or surgery they are undergoing.

10.2 Some trans employees may choose not to associate their symptoms to the menopause as this will disclose their trans status. Managers are therefore reminded of the importance of responding promptly to requests for support from all employees.

Appendix A - Examples of potential reasonable adjustments

Below are examples of adjustments that may be considered to assist employees to manage their symptoms at work:

Symptom	Potential Adjustments
Daytime sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water. • Ensure access to washroom/changing facilities. • Allow for more frequent breaks to manage symptoms, change clothes, etc. • Look at ways of cooling the work environment (e.g. desk fan, moving to a desk near a window that opens, adjusting the air conditioning).
Night-time sweats and hot flushes Insomnia or sleep difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for flexible working (e.g. working at home, temporary adjustment to start time, alternative shift pattern).
Irregular and/or heavy periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities/allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet. • Temporary adjustment to duties, if required.
Poor concentration / loss of confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If concentration is better or worse at particular times of the day, adjust working pattern/work tasks accordingly. • Review task allocation and workload. • Have regular one-to-one meetings so that any issues can be discussed. • Provide notebooks /other memory-assisting equipment/techniques. • Identify and address any potential work-related stress through risk assessment.
Low mood / anxiety / panic attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the Wellbeing Service for advice and support. • Encourage the employee to undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk. • Identify a 'buddy' for the individual to talk to (this could be within or outside of their team). • Allow for more frequent breaks to undertake relaxation techniques or to have time out from others.
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water.
Urinary problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to drinking water. • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities/allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet.
Joint stiffness, aches and pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For desk-based employees, undertake a workstation risk assessment.

Symptom	Potential Adjustments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow for more frequent breaks so that the employee can stretch.



Appendix B – Further Support & Information

British Menopause Society	https://thebms.org.uk
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for Menopausal Symptoms	www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms
Education Support Partnership:	www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk
Faculty of Occupational Medicine	www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-foremployers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause
Henpicked menopause	https://henpicked.net/menopause/
LCC's Employee Wellbeing Service (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)	Telephone: (0116) 3055515 Email: counsellingandwellbeing@leics.gov.uk
Menopause Charity	https://www.themenopausecharity.org/
Menopause Matters	https://menopausematters.co.uk/index.php
NICE guidelines	https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/Menopause
NHS Guidance on Menopause	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/ https://www.nhs.uk/video/Pages/early-menopause.aspx https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/menopause/Pages/Menopausehome.aspx
NHS Choices - provides information on symptoms of the male menopause	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/male-menopause/
The Daisy Network - support for premature menopause	https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/
Talking Menopause	www.talkingmenopause.co.uk