

Support within the workplace during menopause

The reality for many women is that menopause related symptoms last between four and eight years. For some the symptoms don't affect day to day activities too much, for others this can be a very challenging chapter of life. With more women in the workplace than ever before and increasing numbers are within the menopausal chapter, it is an opportune time to consider what can be helpful in the workplace for yourself, your colleagues or those you manage. Read on to explore more.



Why consider menopause implications within the workplace?

Employers have health & safety responsibilities for all their employees. There are clear business reasons too for attending to the needs of an age diverse workforce.

A particular concern has been the number of women who have felt sufficiently challenged by their menopausal symptoms that they've felt the need to leave paid employment. In recent years studies suggest this is about 10% of those going through menopause. Many others chose to reduce their working hours, seniority level or change career to enable them to cope alongside this chapter of life. Reducing this unnecessary loss of talent and experience has become important to many employers.

Most helpful measures are relatively simple

Women have reported difficulties with asking for support or opening up about their struggles with menopause related symptoms. It is hoped that this is easier as it becomes a more widely discussed issue, and there is broader awareness.

Many measures within the workplace are relatively simple and may be able to be actioned by employees alone, some may need managers' support.

Working conditions which tend to be helpful include having access to cold drinking water and adequate washroom facilities. When travelling or working in temporary facilities this can be more difficult but considering the options usually provides for solutions.

Within the office the ambient temperature has historically been the cause of many workplace conflicts. Having some control is helpful for those experiencing symptoms but consideration of others is always important too. Many newer workplaces are in climate-controlled buildings without access to opening windows. So, options include whether small desk fans can be used to alleviate hot flush symptoms, or if there are temperature variations within the office space, flexibility to use a desk which provides relief from heat can make a significant difference to some.

Opportunities to take a short break in a rest room or quiet area if experiencing a significant hot flush can help with preserving self-esteem and confidence alongside managing the more practical aspects particularly if the role is customer facing.

Sometimes additional support is needed

Being able to discuss the impact of menopausal symptoms with your manager can potentially enable additional support mechanisms to be put in place, just as they may be for any other health condition.

If you wear a uniform, the fabric can make a difference as can having layering options, to managing hot flushes - for individuals and when the ambient temperature for a group is being considered. Talk to your Manager if you need additional uniform tops so that you can change uniform regularly if you are struggling with the effects of hot flushes.

Sleep can become very disturbed due to wakefulness or night sweats. Using any opportunities for flexibility at work can help navigate this. A later start time, if that's possible can make a difference, or if home working having a longer lunch break might help with sustainability at work.

Technology can help with reminders, scheduling and planning if you feel your memory is letting you down. Get help with this if the technology aspects aren't usually your strength.

The psychological aspects can be just as troublesome as the physical aspects of menopause. If anxiety or low mood concerns are affecting you at work, find out about any counselling or coaching available to you within the workplace. Or ask your GP Practice about support available.

The management of gender-specific health issues, other than pregnancy, are rarely discussed in the workplace.

Being able to discuss symptoms with Manager's is helpful, so support can be provided as appropriate.

Embracing the change

Menopause affects all women. It can provide feelings of being more liberated and provide renewed opportunity to consider your health and wellbeing. Investing in understanding your symptoms, the options for treatment and how you can manage symptoms at work mean this chapter of life can be at least as rich in opportunity and fulfilment as others.