

**Menopause Policy**

**Introduction**

1.1 Menopause is a normal part of every woman’s life. This policy recognises that the menopause is an equality and occupational health and safety issue and that women may need appropriate flexibility, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during and after the menopause.

1.2 Epinay School has a positive attitude towards the menopause and will treat all individuals with dignity and respect during this time and ensure that the workplace does not exacerbate symptoms. Epinay School is committed to ensuring that women feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms openly, without embarrassment, and are able to ask for support and adjustments in order to continue to work safely in the organisation. For this reason, the menopause at work is an issue for men as well as women.

**2. Definitions**

2.1 Peri-menopause

This is the period that leads to the menopause when many women may experience symptoms. A woman can usually tell if she is experiencing symptoms characteristic of the peri-menopause because her menstrual periods start changing and they can become heavy and prolonged. The changes of peri-menopause typically begin several years before the natural menopause. This is a time when the levels of hormones produced by the ovaries fluctuate, leading to irregular menstrual patterns (irregularity in the length of the period, the time between periods and the level of flow) and hot flushes (a sudden warm feeling with blushing).

2.2 Menopause

The menopause is the medical term given to a woman who is in the final stages of a menstrual period. It is a natural part of aging that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, as a women’s oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age for women to reach the menopause is 51. Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40 years of age. This is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency. An early menopause can also be triggered by women who are experiencing ill health or medical treatment.

The menopause is when a woman stops having periods (for 12 consecutive months) and is no longer able to get pregnant. It is often referred to as “the change of life”.

Surgical and medical treatments, such as a hysterectomy, fertility treatment, endometriosis and hormone therapy can bring about menopause symptoms. The changes involved in the body can be mild to severe and in some case the symptoms can be debilitating. Without the appropriate support many women may be left feeling isolated and vulnerable.

Women can experience both physical and psychological effects of the menopause. The changes involved only happen to women (men don’t have a menstrual cycle). Some experience few or no symptoms, whilst others can have symptoms that can debilitate them which effects their work and the role that they do.

**3. Symptoms**

Changes in oestrogen levels can result in intermittent symptoms, which can be quite severe and have a significant impact on a woman’s everyday activities such as:

• Hot flushes

• Palpitations

• Headaches

• Night sweats

• Difficulty sleeping

• Skin irritation

• Vaginal dryness

• Low mood or anxiety

• Depression

• Reduced sex drive (libido)

• Problems with memory and concentration.

Menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before a woman’s periods stop and last around four years after the last period, although some women experience them for much longer and can need medication to alleviate the symptoms.

**4. How is the Menopause Diagnosed?**

If a woman is over the age of 45 years, has irregular periods and has symptoms of the menopause there is no need to have a menopause blood test (if a woman is younger than 45 years then it may be beneficial to have a blood test). The blood test measures the follicle stimulating hormone in the blood known as FSH. This can confirm if she is going through the menopause, if unsure advice should be sought from a GP.

**5.Treatment Options**

Some women do not need any assistance with the menopause and they can go through this natural stage with no requirement for medical interventions. For others, there are a number of treatment options available, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT), alternative medication like anti-depressants, natural treatments and changing to a healthier lifestyle (see below). It is vital that women are aware of all the different treatments available and if unsure they should speak to their GP.

• Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

There are a number of different types of HRT that can be prescribed for women. HRT is known to be the most effective treatment for women suffering with symptoms of the menopause. HRT replaces the oestrogen that the body no longer produces after the menopause and can be taken in many forms such as tablets, gel or patches.

• Alternative Medications

Anti-depressants or other medication can be given to help ease some of the symptoms such as depression and headaches.

• Natural Treatments

There are a number of natural products available in chemists, supermarkets and pharmacies.

• Healthier Lifestyle

Eating a balanced diet, exercise, stopping smoking and stopping drinking alcohol can all benefit the body to improve the symptoms during this time. Lack of sleep, stress, unhealthy eating and unhealthy lifestyle can increase the symptoms of menopause.

• Self-help Alternatives

Such as strategies for managing stress, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, going for a short walk whilst at work may also help.

6. Legislation

Epinay School undertakes to comply with its legal obligations as set out below:

6.1 The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to undertake general risk assessments which should include specific risks to menopausal women, see section 5.3.

6.2 The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain ‘protected characteristics’ including sex, age and disability. Conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an ‘impairment’ under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

**7. Status**

7.1. This policy sets out procedures for members of staff and managers to follow in providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work.

**8. Aims**

8.1 To create an environment where female staff members feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support and adjustments at work.

8.2 To ensure that conditions in the workplace do not exacerbate menopausal symptoms and that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place, recognising that the menopause and perimenopause is an individual experience and therefore there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution.

8.3 To reduce sickness absence due to menopausal symptoms and retain valued staff in the workplace.

**9. What steps we will take as an employer**

9.1 Epinay School will educate and inform managers and staff to be aware of how the menopause can affect working women, taking account of the particular circumstances in schools, and about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women experiencing them.

9.2 Where female members of staff feel uncomfortable speaking to their line manager, we will ensure that an alternative contact is available. Confidentiality will always be respected.

9.3 The risk assessments which we undertake will consider the specific needs of menopausal women. Risk assessments will include consideration of temperature and ventilation issues and will also address welfare issues; such as access to toilet facilities and cold water, during and outside break and lunch times.

9.4 Epinay School will make adjustments where necessary to support individuals experiencing the menopause, and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse. These could include simple measures such as:

• leaving doors open

• ensuring that windows can be safely opened

• ensuring that it is possible to regulate the temperature in a classroom or other room by turning down radiators (as long as the temperature does not drop below 18 degrees Celsius)

• provision of fans

• fitting blinds to windows

• establishing a system that a allows cover for women who need access to toilet/washing facilities while they are teaching (to deal with heavy and recurring bleeding)

• permission for absence to attend menopause related medical appointments

NB. This is not a definitive list of measures and Epinay School will actively listen to female staff and take on board other suggestions.

**10. Roles and responsibilities**

It is recognised that everyone who works at Epinay School has a role to play in ensuring a comfortable working environment for all staff, including women experiencing the menopause.

10.1 All staff are responsible for:

• taking responsibility for looking after their health

• being open and honest in conversations with HR and occupational health

• contributing to a respectful and healthy working environment

• being willing to help and support their colleagues

• accepting and supporting any necessary adjustments their colleagues request or are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

10.2 Line managers

10.2.1 Senior Managers will:

• familiarise themselves with this menopause policy

• be aware of the potential impact of menopause on performance

• provide a safe place to allow the member of staff to speak openly and honestly

• be ready and willing to listen and have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and confidentially and allowing adequate time for the discussion

• record adjustments agreed and actions to be implemented

• ensure ongoing dialogue via a follow-up meeting

• ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to and reviewed as regularly as necessary.

10.2.2 Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving particularly severe, the senior manager may:

• discuss with the employee a referral to occupational health for further advice

• review occupational health advice and implement any additional recommendations

The following websites provide more detailed information and guidance:

<http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>

<http://www.menopausesupport.co.uk/>

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| Policy approved by Governors: Sept 2022  Policy to be Reviewed: Sept 2023 |