

Menopause Policy / Guidance

Introduction

According to data, over 75% of our employees are female, and given the age profile of our workforce, this means at any given time, we'd expect around a quarter of employees to be experiencing the menopause.

Traditionally, those going through the menopause have faced a lack of support, awareness, and inclusivity in the workplace, leading to 1 in 4 considering leaving their job due to menopause (and 1 in 10 actually do).

Menopause in the Workplace, The Fawcett Society (2022)

One of our priorities is to improve the wellbeing of our employees and ensure they are treated fairly, with dignity and respect in their working environment. As gender-specific health and wellbeing needs are becoming a higher priority for employers, it has become increasingly important for organisations to ensure they are supporting everyone at every life-stage. One way we can do this is by helping to normalise the discussion of menopause – and increasing the understanding about its impact.

By implementing a menopause policy at work, we can all help to ensure that all our employees feel supported by both the organisation and their employees – whether that be those directly impacted, or those who know someone who is impacted by menopause.

Why have the guidance?

The aim of the guidance is to make managers aware of the menopause, its related issues and how they can affect their employees. It is also to create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and if required, ask for reasonable adjustments at work. The guidance outlines the actions for managers that are expected to be extended to employees to maximise their wellbeing. The actions below clarify what the Council expects from its managers.

The guidance also provides direction and clarity on how we may deal with the menopause and its related issues, either for women experiencing this natural stage of life condition; or those who are experiencing an early menopause due to medical treatment or ill health.

This guidance applies to all Council employees including school-based employees where the governing bodies of individual schools have adopted it.

Menopause is predominantly experienced by women, and most existing research on menopause is based upon cisgender women – this guidance will focus on that experience. However, it is important to acknowledge

that transgender, non-binary and intersex workers may also experience the menopause. Some of the information found within this guidance may apply to these individuals, but since they will also have specific needs and experiences, a separate section on trans, non-binary and intersex workers and the menopause has been included.

By offering support to our employees with menopausal symptoms that are impacting on their work will help managers to:

- Improve their team's morale.
- Retain valuable skills and talent.
- Reduce sickness absence.

What is Menopause?

Everyone's experience of menopause is different. People experience different symptoms, have different views about how to manage them and different medical histories too. Those who haven't been through menopause – or may have experienced only minor symptoms – may find it hard to understand the impact that it can have on those who suffer more significant symptoms.

Menopause is defined as '*a biological stage in life that occurs when hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. Someone is said to have reached menopause when they have had no period for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally)*'.

Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Premature menopause can happen naturally for 1 in 100 individuals (or because of illness, Tamoxifen, or surgery). This may also be more common in trans, non-binary or intersex workers where hormonal treatments or surgeries may affect the age at which menopause starts.

There are three stages to menopause:

Perimenopause

The time leading up to menopause when they may experience changes and menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.

→Menopause

A one-day event when menstruation stops.

→ Post menopause

The time after menopause has occurred, starting when periods have ceased for 12 consecutive months and for the rest of life.

When we talk about menopause in this guidance, we are referring to any of these stages.

Symptoms of Menopause

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological. In research, the ones reported as having the biggest effect at work include:

Physical

- Difficulty sleeping, insomnia or fatigue.
- Hot flushes during the day or night.

- Aches and pains.
- Irregular and/or heavy periods.
- Migraines or headaches.
- Urinary issues, e.g., increased frequency.

Psychological

- Nervousness, worry or anxiety.
- Low mood, depression, or changes in mood.
- Problems with memory recall.
- Reduced ability to concentrate or focus.

The above list is not exhaustive. However, these symptoms can impact on an individual's performance in terms of coping strategies, pressure of dealing with deadlines and especially where there are changing priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence, anxiety, or panic disorder.

Trans, non-binary and intersex employees and the menopause

Transgender, non-binary, and intersex workers may experience the menopause, either due to age related hormonal changes or hormone treatments and surgeries. Some trans, non-binary, and intersex workers may not wish to disclose their menopausal symptoms as this may mean disclosing their trans or intersex status. It can therefore be particularly difficult for these employees to access support and/or ask for adjustments. Within each of these groups, people's needs will be different and so it is important to listen to people on an individual level and allow them to take the lead on their required adjustments.

Principles

Menopause at work is covered by equality legislation related to age and gender and to the duty to provide a safe workplace under Health and Safety Legislation. Our aim is to handle related matters with privacy for all individuals involved – including confidentiality. This guidance is for implementation alongside additional Occupational Health Services which can also be accessed.

The most recent copies of the Council's policies and procedures are available on the Intranet.

Expectations of Employees

Any employee experiencing menopausal symptoms has a responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and should feel able to have open conversations with their manager. Managers should be open to discussions around the menopause and putting in place appropriate adjustments for support. It is good practice to regularly ask all employees about any health conditions that they may have or experiencing. Any specific needs that are identified (including agreed reasonable adjustments) should be recorded and reviewed as appropriate. Managers need to maintain confidentiality in handling health information in relation to the menopause.

Employees are also reminded to speak to their GP / Nurse Practitioner to get professional advice and support to help control their symptoms. These support services are available for employees to help ease their symptoms.

How managers can support employees going through the menopause

Managers should be supportive and aware of the menopausal symptoms, so that employees do not feel embarrassed to approach them and discuss how the menopause is affecting their health.

Sometimes flexible working adjustments may be required by employees because of menopausal symptoms. At the Council we take a positive attitude to flexible working – which can be seen in our [Flexible Working Policy](#).

Managers should recognise that menopause is a very individual experience and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. Below are some examples of some adjustments that could be made:

Generic adjustments:

- Provide a private area or space for women to rest/recover/make a telephone call to personal or professional support.
- Allowing employees the flexibility to take breaks or rest breaks which will help manage symptoms and allow employees to contribute more fully in the workplace.

Difficulty sleeping, tiredness or fatigue:

This is a common issue during the menopause, often starting during the perimenopause.

- Review start and finish times – could these be adjusted, or is homeworking an option? Could the individual work more flexibly?
- Consider flexibility around breaks.

Hot flushes:

These can start during perimenopause and continue after menopause.

- Offer a fan or consider home working (where appropriate).
- Ensure access to fresh drinking water.
- Allow time away from workstations or meetings to manage hot flushes.
- Consider a flexibility in dress code.

Anxiety or loss of confidence:

Anxiety can cause many different symptoms. It might affect how a person could feel physically or mentally and how they behave.

- Have regular one-to-one discussions.
- Refer to Occupational Health Service for GP support or ask individual to self-refer for the Counselling Service.

Difficulty focussing or concentrating:

Some can experience problems with concentration.

- Consider adjusting working hours to the times of the day when concentration is better, adjust working pattern, or encourage flexible working.
- Provide notebooks or other memory aids.
- Offer a quiet space for work or option to work from home.
- Encourage scheduling time to focus.

Problems with memory recall

This is often referred to as 'brain fog' and includes difficulty processing or retaining information.

- Provide notebooks or other memory aids, following conversations up with an email.
- Reduce interruptions or provide a quiet space to work.

Fluctuating or heavy periods

For many, one of the first signs of the menopause transition is a change in their periods.

- Ensure employees have access to toilet and washing facilities.
- Consider flexible working when periods are heavy.

Points of contact

Menopause symptoms are highly individual; they can be sensitive and cause embarrassment for some, so it is entirely understandable for employees to feel unable to share and explore sensitive and personal symptoms with others. There are options to help employees do this, please see below the different people that can be contacted to talk about menopause in the workplace:

Head Teacher

Employee Wellbeing Team – employeewellbeing@southtyneside.gov.uk

Occupational Health Team – occupational.healthreferrals@southtyneside.gov.uk

Women's Network – contact Leah Collinson or Lisa Fletcher

The following websites also provide more detailed information and guidance:

- Menopause Matters - <http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- Menopause Support - <http://www.menopausesupport.co.uk/>
- The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Menopause) [Menopause \(nice.org.uk\)](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng191)
- The British Menopause Society - <https://thebms.org.uk/>
- Women's Health Concern - <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>
- Henpicked Menopause Hub - [Home | Menopause Hub - Expert information, useful resources, top tips and women's stories \(henpicked.net\)](https://henpicked.net/)
- Balance (website and downloadable app) - [balance - Homepage \(balance-menopause.com\)](https://balance-menopause.com/)
- Talking Therapies - telephone number 0191 283 2937

Equality and Diversity Statement

South Tyneside is committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity. An equality check was carried out in October 2023. No equality implications were identified in this policy.

Policy approved by Governors: November 2023

Policy to be Reviewed: November 2024