

Menopause

Support & Guidance

Menopause is a normal and natural life stage, and within Belfast HSC Trust, we want to support our colleagues through this time.

We recognize that menopause can be a health issue, and we hope to create an environment within the Trust where staff can talk about it openly; to provide information for women experiencing symptoms at work, and to guide managers on appropriate support for their staff.

This Guide is designed to provide information about the symptoms of the menopause, provide advice for staff and managers in managing symptoms during work, and signposting to additional sources of support and guidance. The Trust has embedded this menopause guidance into our wellbeing health and wellbeing strategy, and our commitment to being an age inclusive workforce. We believe this supports our overall commitment as an employer of choice who is committed to supporting longer, healthier working lives.

This guide should be read in conjunction with our Harmonious Working Environment Policy, which highlights that all Trust staff should be able to expect respectful behaviours at work, including those that relate to their gender and age.



Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust

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Why is Menopause a Workplace Issue?

Around 75 – 80% of women of menopausal age are in work, therefore at any one time, a significant proportion of older female workers will experience symptoms which might feasibly impact on working life.

(figures from Office of National Statistics, 2016)

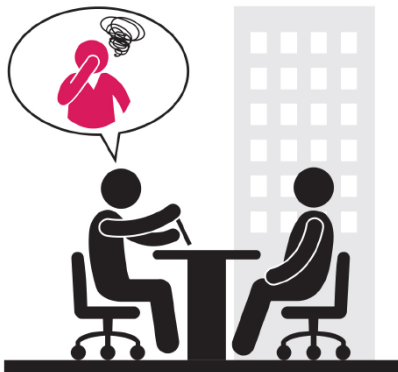
WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

Menopause is where a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. It is a natural part of every woman's life but it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support it can be much better. Menopause usually happens naturally between 45 and 55 years of age. The average age for women to reach menopause is 51. However, menopause can happen naturally much earlier or as a result of surgery, serious illness or medication. 1 in 100 women experience menopause by the age of 40.

Around 30-60% of women experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause. These are associated with a decrease in the body's production of the hormone oestrogen. Symptoms, on average, continue for 6 years from the last period, and 1 in 10 women can have symptoms that persist longterm.

The time leading up to the menopause is called perimenopause, which can start years before menopause. Perimenopause is when a woman's body prepares for menopause and changes start to happen, though they may not always be that obvious.

WHY IS MENOPAUSE A WORKPLACE ISSUE?



The Trust has a responsibility for the health and safety of all staff and we are committed to proactively supporting and managing our age-diverse workforce. Within the Trust, 28% of all our staff are within the 45 – 54 age bracket, and with 78% of our staff being female, it is clear that the menopause is an issue of particular importance for the Trust. The Trust is cognisant that women of menopausal age may need specific considerations, and this guide should assist staff and their managers to utilise a range of clear processes to support women coping with menopausal symptoms.

Every woman is different. Some hardly experience any symptoms at all. However, many do and some women experience severe symptoms. These can last for a long period of time and differ over time. It can be difficult to predict. Women should be aware of the symptoms, understand the impact it is having within the workplace and most importantly talk about them to their line manager, colleagues, friends or family members. It is important not to wait until symptoms are severe before asking for help. The method chosen to manage menopause symptoms may work quickly, but in some instances may take some adjustments before the right solution is found.

Regular, informal conversations between line manager and staff member may enable discussion of changes in health, including issues relating to the menopause. For women who may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience with menopause with their manager, Occupational Health can play a supportive role.

Menopause is a normal stage of life and most adjustments can easily be made. Some examples of adjustments which can be made to the working environment which can assist in the management of menopausal symptoms include:

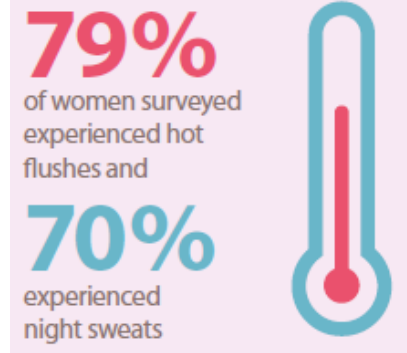
- Provide training for staff and managers to raise awareness and convey that the menopause can present challenges for some women at work. The effects on a woman's physical and emotional health can significantly impact on how she does her work and her relationships with her colleagues. Negative workplace attitudes may add to stress at work when a female staff member may be dealing with a wide range of difficult issues related to menopause.
- Facilitate discussion about troublesome symptoms. Managers can help by communicating with staff that health-related problems such as those experienced during the menopause are normal.
- Consider flexible working hours or shift changes, where possible. If sleep is disturbed, consideration of later start times, where possible, might be helpful.
- Review control of workplace temperature and ventilation, where possible, and consider how they may be adapted to meet the needs of individuals – a woman's body temperature may rise by up to 5 degrees during a hot flush. This might include having a desktop fan or locating a workstation near an opening window or away from a heat source.
- Provide access to fresh drinking water in all work situations, including off site venues.
- Ensure access to wash room facilities, toilets and showers where available.
- Where uniforms or personal protective equipment is compulsory, flexibility from managers is helpful. This may include the use of optional layers, as well as the provision of changing and shower facilities.
- Where work requires prolonged standing or sitting, provision of access to a rest room e.g. to sit during work breaks as well as space to move about for women working in sedentary roles.
- Access to a quiet room may be useful for a short break so as to manage a severe hot flush.

Severe menopausal symptoms and their consequences may combine to have a substantial adverse impact on normal day to day activities – potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act and the need to make reasonable adjustments. Further guidance is available from the HR Management of Attendance Team.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE?

Menopause can cause a range of physical, psychological and emotional symptoms. Not all women will experience the same symptoms, but the most common are:

- Hot flushes affecting the face and neck
- Night sweats
- Weight gain
- General irritability
- Heavier and more irregular periods
- Headaches



Women may also experience other symptoms such as short-term memory loss, need to urinate frequently, aches and pains, mood swings, dry skin and eyes, dizziness, tiredness and lack of energy. But don't forget, some symptoms may occur for other reasons and you should contact your GP for advice.

Women will also experience physical changes to their bodies particularly in their reproductive organs. Many symptoms and physical changes to women's bodies after menopause result from the loss of oestrogen. After the menopause women may be more prone to heart attacks and strokes, acceleration of loss of bone bulk and osteoporosis and bladder trouble.

HOW CAN MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS BE MANAGED?

- Seek your GP's advice on available treatment options.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another colleague you feel comfortable talking to
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking
- Avoid hot flush triggers e.g. hot food or drinks, especially before presentations or meetings
- Consider talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as these can reduce the impact of symptoms
- Consider lifestyle changes such as weight reduction, smoking cessation and exercise. Have a look at the [Mind Ur Mind Toolkit](#), and the B Well app and [website](#) have guidance on mindfulness.
- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at end of this guidance)

HRT: KNOW THE FACTS

Many of the things said about Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) have not been accurate. This is what the science really says:



Myth

Vs



Fact

HRT is dangerous

HRT will protect the bones and heart, and may help women's memory. This is important if periods stop very early and a factor to consider at the average menopause age. For women who have had a hysterectomy, only oestrogen is required. Where the womb is still present, oestrogen and progestogen are usually used.

HRT causes breast cancer

HRT with oestrogen alone is associated with little or no change in the risk in breast cancer. Combined HRT can be associated with a small increased risk, however, this is related to treatment duration and reduces once HRT is stopped

HRT has a vascular risk

HRT in any form does not increase the risk of heart attack if started within 10 years of first experiencing menopause, and before age 60. HRT as tablets can increase the risk of stroke and blood clot though generally the effect is very small. This is avoided by using patches and gels.

HRT causes weight gain

There is no evidence that HRT causes weight gain. Women generally have a tendency to gain weight in the middle years, and a healthy diet and exercise are important.

If you need HRT you are beyond getting pregnant

HRT is not a contraceptive and women should continue to use contraception until the age of 55. The Mirena Intrauterine System can be very useful as it provides contraception and can act as the progesterone component of HRT.

HRT only delays the inevitable

HRT effectively manages the symptoms of the menopause and lower doses of HRT continue to work when women are older

Natural methods to treat menopausal symptoms are safer than HRT

Just because it is natural, doesn't mean it is safe – studies are lacking as to the efficacy and safety of the use of these remedies in the long term. Some may also have harmful interactions with medications.





Myth

Vs



Fact

Women stop having sex after the menopause

Some do, but don't need to. Local oestrogen treatments alleviate the vaginal changes and restore comfort but can require long term treatment.

You can only have HRT for 5 years, no matter what age you are

HRT may be taken for as long as necessary at the lowest effective dose. This is particularly important for younger women, who should not stop before 50 years of age. The need for ongoing treatment should be reviewed annually with your GP.



Source: Adapted from Primary Care Women's Health Forum (June 2016)

FURTHER SOURCES OF INTERNAL TRUST SUPPORT:

- b well website and app
- Mind ur mind Toolkit
- Improving Working Lives Policies
- Management of Attendance Protocol
- Staff Care
- Chaplaincy Services
- Occupational Health Service

WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER INFORMATION?

Menopause Matters

www.menopausematters.co.uk

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)

POI Information and support on very early menopause.

www.daisynetwork.org.uk

British Menopause Society

www.thbms.org.uk

Women's Health

www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause/

Menopause information

This provides an overview of Menopause.

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>

Information on hysterectomy

This provides an insight into surgical induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy.

www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk

Henpicked

This provides information on managing menopause and an insight into women's stories.

<https://henpicked.net/menopause/>

Menopause Doctor

This provides support on Menopause from a specialist doctor.

<https://menopausedoctor.co.uk/what-is-the-menopause/>

National Health Services

This provides an overview of Menopause.

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines

These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you.

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/Seeking-help>

Natural health website for women

This provides information on the natural approach to managing menopause symptoms.

www.marilynglenville.com/womens-health-issues/menopause/

Patient Information

<https://patient.info/health/menopause-and-hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt>

Royal College of Nursing
RCN: Healthy Workplace, Healthy You
www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace

Simply Hormones
www.simplyhormones.com

The Work Foundation
www.theworkfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/419_morethanwomensissues.pdf

TUC
Working Through the Change: Health and Safety and the Menopause
www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/tuc-6316-fo

Women's Health
www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause/

Unison
The Menopause and Work: A Guide for Unison Safety Reps
www.unison.org.uk/onlinecatalogue
