

# MENOPAUSE GUIDANCE

This Guidance is an addendum to the Managing Attendance Procedure.

The menopause can potentially be a long-term fluctuating health condition. Taking the menopause seriously and treating it as an occupational health and people management issue can help to mitigate the potential negative impact of symptoms on the individual and the organisation such as reduced job satisfaction and commitment, higher sick absence and an increased desire to leave work altogether (Brewis et al 2017).

One woman's experience of the menopause transition can be entirely different from another's. Therefore PBNI needs to have a framework of guidance that helps managers have a tailored approach, where focus is on providing individualised support, and which may minimise or reduce sick absence associated with menopause symptoms.

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## Introduction

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) recognises that women may need additional consideration, support and adjustments during the time of change, before and after the menopause. The PBNI is committed to ensuring that all staff have a positive attitude to the menopause, that women suffering with menopause symptoms feel confident to discuss it, and ask for support and any workplace adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles.

This guidance provides important information to ensure managers have the knowledge to help them support their team members, whilst also providing women experiencing the menopause with an understanding of what they can expect from the PBNI.

Links to additional information sources are also provided at the end of this document, should further information be required.

## Definitions

- **Menopause** is defined as a biological stage in a women's life that occurs when she stops menstruating and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.
- **Premature menopause** is estimated by the NHS to happen to 1 in every 100 women before they reach the age of 40. In some cases it can happen to women in their teens or twenties. In many cases there is no clear cause for the premature menopause.
- **Medical or surgical menopause** can occur suddenly at any age when the ovaries are damaged by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.
- **Peri-menopause** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.
- **Post menopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not a period for twelve consecutive months.

## Facts

- The menopause is a natural part of female aging, when menstruation stops and the body produces less of the hormone oestrogen
- However, surgical and medical treatments, such as a hysterectomy or chemotherapy, can cause women to go through the menopause.
- The menopause normally occurs between 45 and 55 years of age
- the average age for a woman in the UK to reach menopause is 51
- around 1% of women experience menopause before 40 years of age – this is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI)
- every woman will experience the menopause differently
- around 80% of women experience noticeable symptoms, however the severity of these differs for each woman
- some women report no difficulty in managing their life or work whilst going through the menopause, for others the impact is severe
- 45% of women have symptoms which they find difficult to deal with
- symptoms of the menopause usually last between 4-8 years

## Symptoms

There are a range of symptoms associated with the menopause, including both physical and psychological symptoms.

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

On average women continue to experience symptoms for four years after their last period, but around 10% of women continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years after their last period.

## Personal Support/Self-Help Measures

How is the menopause affecting you? What do you have control over to change?

Current health promotion advice to women highlights the importance of lifestyle choices before, during and after the menopause. Some of the following are possible personal steps that you may be able to take to help you manage the impact of the menopause.

- **Are you maintaining a healthy weight?**  
Healthy eating – research has shown that a balanced diet can help alleviate some symptoms and help keep ones healthy. Eating regularly, cutting down on caffeine, alcohol and spicy food.
- **Are you drinking enough water?**  
Drinking plenty of water, some women find chilled water helpful.
- **Do you smoke?**  
Stopping smoking can benefit your overall health.
- **Are you regularly exercising?**  
Exercising regularly can help to reduce hot flushes and improve sleep. It can also boost mood and maintain strong bones.
- **Would wearing layered clothes help you?**  
Wearing layered clothes or natural fibres can assist.
- **Are you getting enough sleep?**  
Getting adequate rest and relaxation.
- **Have you spoken to your own doctor/nurse?**  
Consulting with your GP on the management of the menopause and to ensure that any symptoms are not due to other causes.

These measures can help with some of the symptoms of menopause and may also help reduce the risk of osteoporosis (brittle bones), diabetes and heart disease in later life.

Consider thinking of the fuller picture and how you are being impacted in all aspects of your life. Some refer to this as the 'biopsychosocial approach' – consider the biological, the social, and the psychological impact the menopause may be having on your life.

Once you have considered the above and feel the organisation can help support you further to help you maintain day to day duties, bring a clear idea for discussion with your line manager.

## Management Support

PBNI recognise that every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines. If a person discloses they are experiencing the menopause it is important to acknowledge that this is a normal stage in life and that adjustment can be looked at to help accommodate symptoms.

The role of the line manager in supporting women experiencing menopause transition is crucial. Managers should make themselves aware of the symptoms of menopause and the range of support available.

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly
- Don't make assumptions – everyone is different, so take the lead from the individual.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see below)
- Agree actions, and how to implement them
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting(s) if necessary outside normal supervision.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively; Menopause symptoms can fluctuate so a flexible approach in terms of support for women should be considered as detailed as below:

- Access to drinking water
- Provision of desk fans
- Access to an open window
- Moving away from a heat source
- Adjust air conditioning
- Where possible access to a quiet area if needed to manage a severe hot flush
- Ensure sanitary products are available in toilets/washrooms
- Where possible have storage space available for change of clothing.
- Allow more frequent breaks to go to the toilet or to take medication
- On occasions consider allowing to work from home
- Permit a '**well-being**'\* day ie a short-notice request to take annual leave
- Short-term temporary flexibility of start and finish times

- Allow TOIL/flexi or annual leave to go home early.
- If practicable offer a quiet space to work or allow time out from others when needed, to have some quiet time.
- Encourage the member of staff to discuss concerns one-to-one in addition to normal supervision.
- Agree some protected time to catch up on work if needed
- Discuss possible temporary adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge
- Sign-post the member of staff to other services such as the Counselling Service Inspire (Carecall).
- Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps
- Carry out a work station assessment

\* **Well-being days.** Under Section 11 (paragraph 11.6) of the Managing Attendance Procedure staff can request 3 well-being days in any leave year. A well-being day is a short notice annual leave day. This is taken from the member of staff's normal annual leave entitlement. To assist staff with menopause symptoms, particularly with fatigue or sleep disturbance, it may be reasonable to permit additional well-being days above the normal maximum of 3 in any leave year.

### **Other Supportive Measures within the Workplace**

In addition to the temporary or short-term practical measures outlined above that can be discussed/agreed directly with the line managers other supportive actions may be appropriate.

- Encourage the member of staff to undertake relaxation or mindfulness activities.
- Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their GP, if they haven't already.
- Discuss whether a referral to Occupational Health would be appropriate, particularly if the member of staff has an existing medical condition and it appears that the menopause symptoms are making this worse, or when the menopause symptoms coincide with the onset of a new condition. The Occupational Health can advise whether the menopause may be contributing to symptoms/well-being.
- If a member of staff is seeking a more long-term alteration to her working pattern she can formally apply for a permanent flexible working arrangement (reduced hours, compressed hours). This should be applied via the Flexible Working Procedure.

- In some cases, menopausal symptoms can be so serious they can affect a person's performance at work. In this situation it is in everyone's interest to discuss potential adjustments that could help the member of staff perform to their full potential. Where there are serious menopause symptoms and/or any other known health issues, these should be explored prior to any consideration of formal performance capability procedure. Performance management will be most effective if it is proactive, regular and informal, and when constructive feedback and discussion is provided. This may also avoid the need for any sick absence.
- HR Business Partners are available to speak/meet with members of staff and/or line managers and can give advice to managers on the interpretation of this guidance.
- Union representatives can provide member of staff with help, support and guidance.

### **Reasonable Adjustments**

Although it is relatively unusual for the symptoms associated with menopause to be regarded as a disability, they can be. As mentioned previously some women may experience relatively minor symptoms and the support measures referred to above may be sufficient to assist in managing the menopausal menopause.

If a woman experiences serious symptoms from the menopause transition that amount to a mental or physical impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on her ability to carry out day-to-day activities, this could be assessed as disability under the Disability Discrimination Act. Managers should understand that adjustments may be necessary to support women who are going through the menopause and experiencing problematic symptoms. This will include those who are peri-menopausal. The purpose of a reasonable adjustment is to remove barriers, where possible, which get in the way of an individual doing their job. In such cases, a referral to Occupational Health will be made to seek advice on possible reasonable adjustments.

### **Signposts to Other Useful Resources**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)

[www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)

British Menopause Society - <https://thebms.org.uk>

Menopause Matters – [www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)

Support for premature menopause [www.daisynetwork.org.uk](http://www.daisynetwork.org.uk)

Henpicked, Menopause in the Workplace <https://henpicked.net/menopause-at-work>



Menopause Café - [www.menopausecafe.net](http://www.menopausecafe.net)

The Menopause Exchange – [www.menopause-exchange.co.uk](http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk)

Information on hysterectomy – <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk/>

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. These will explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you.

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>