Menopause Toolkit:

Supporting Menopause at Work

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## Introduction

Whilst we predominantly talk about women in relation to the menopause in this guidance, we also recognise and appreciate that menopause can impact on trans and non-binary employees who don’t identify as female. Menopause can be experienced by trans and non-binary identified people therefore, for the purposes of this toolkit, we use gender neutral language and terminology.

With the number of older people in the workforce expected to rise, more colleagues are likely to be working through perimenopause and menopause, which can mean managing the demands of work and home life, whilst also dealing with sometimes severe menopausal symptoms. It should be noted that for some people the menopause can occur early naturally or for medical reasons such as surgery; hysterectomy, chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

## Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide a source of support for colleagues and line managers. The menopause can affect individuals differently, such as those of a younger age, partners and families of individuals going through the menopause, those who are transitioning and those with a disability. The focus is on the support of anyone affected by the menopause in the workplace either directly or indirectly.

## Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work

**Menopause affects everyone**

Whether experiencing the menopause first hand or second hand as a colleague or partner, education and information help to educate all and remove barriers.

**Supportive conversations make the difference**

Equipping colleagues and line managers to have conversations about the menopause and providing an effective framework allows individuals to feel supported in the workplace.

**A healthy environment and culture is better for everyone**

Creating an open, honest environment means we can all flourish at work.

**Retaining our talent**

Twenty-five per cent of menopausal employees within the UK workforce have considered leaving work because of their symptoms. Providing the right support can retain experienced employees and save on recruitment costs which is beneficial to colleagues and Barnardo’s.

**Enabling everyone to be their best at work**

Wide-ranging physical and psychological symptoms can seriously inhibit careers. By providing the right support and communicating openly enables colleagues – and their teams – to perform at their best.

## How you can support your colleagues with the menopause

Because a colleague may be affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, it is important to have an open mind, be sensitive to the issues and not make any assumptions. When someone has spoken to you in confidence, it is important to respect that and to keep the information confidential. Traditionally, the menopause has not been widely discussed in workplaces, with some finding it difficult and embarrassing to raise the subject.

Managers and colleagues who want to support colleagues going through the menopause are therefore often uncertain how to do this. Due to the increased coverage of the menopause in the media and the increased availability of online support and guidance, conversations around managing the menopause in the workplace are becoming more normalised. Menopause transition does not necessarily lead to reduced performance at work and may be managed with consideration, understanding and in some circumstances, with workplace adjustments or adaptations.

It is important not to ignore the impact of menopausal symptoms at work or use sweeping statements or generalisations in relation to the menopause. Similarly, workplace “banter” which has historically been the acceptable way menopause has been dealt with in some organisations, could be interpreted as harassment. It is critical that we act with kindness and tolerance to all of our colleagues in line with our Basis and Values. 

## What is the menopause?

The menopause occurs when periods stop and hormonal changes occur, such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and can last between four and eight years, although it can last longer. However, it’s important to note that every experience will be different and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40, and for lots of different reasons. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

For some the menopause may be medically induced. Surgery such as a hysterectomy and/ or chemotherapy can affect people, creating severe symptoms and psychological aspects.

**Menopause** - A biological stage when you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

* **Perimenopause** - The time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen.
* **Premature menopause** - Can happen naturally, or because of illness or surgery.
* **Andropause** – Also known as the ‘Male Menopause’. (Note: Andropause is not covered in this guidance; further information can be accessed on the [*NHS website*](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/male-menopause/))

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## The symptoms of menopause:

During menopause the brain and mood can be affected which could result in depression and anxiety; sleep problems which then leads to tiredness, fatigue and/or dizziness; brain fog leading to reduced concentration, poor information retention and a reduced ability to learn; unexplained mood swings, irritability and emotional outbursts. These symptoms could impact on an individual’s performance in terms of coping strategies, pressure of dealing with deadlines and priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence.

Individuals can experience hair loss or hair can become thin, lacklustre and brittle. Individuals can have mouth problems such as bleeding gums and a dry mouth.

The heart can be affected, causing palpitations and an increased risk of heart disease. The lungs can be affected as individuals may develop new allergies or existing allergies can become worse.

Individuals’ abdomen and gut can be affected as they may gain weight, develop bloating, abdominal cramps, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), sickness or nausea; and urogenital problems can bring about greater urgency and/or the need for more frequent trips to the toilet.

Periods can become irregular brought about by an unpredictable pre-menstrual tension and menstrual cycle.

Individuals can suffer from general skin itchiness and formication (feels like something crawling about under the skin), allergies such as dermatitis and thinning skin.

Problems may develop with muscles, joints, nerves and bones. This can lead to muscle pain and weakness, joint pain, osteoporosis / loss of bone density.

It can trigger sudden changes to body temperature, which include daytime sweats and flushes; sudden heat or redness in face; night time sweats and flushes.

Top workplace environments that make symptoms worse:

* High temperature
* Poor ventilation
* Humidity
* No (accesses to) quiet or restful space
* Noise
* Dryness and lack of natural light

## Need more support with menopausal symptoms?

GPs can arrange for blood tests to be undertaken to confirm menopause. However, NICE guidance suggests that tests for the over 45s are unnecessary. Colleagues should consult their GP for any symptoms that they are concerned about, or think are connected to the menopause.

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## The Positive Menopause

There is a positive side to menopause.

* Many do not experience any adverse symptoms of menopause.
* Post-menopause individuals may be more confident; some have gone on to create their own successful businesses and creativity may increase.
* Freedom from some of the more annoying and painful aspects of having periods.
* No more Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMT) every month.

## Colleagues may find it useful to consider:

* Researching the menopause. (See useful links below in Appendix B).
* Buddying with someone or joining the Workplace Menopause group.
* Discussing with your family, friends etc. and seeking support.
* Having a confidential discussion with your manager, sharing relevant information about your needs and possible impact on your work if any.
* Discussing and recording any workplace adjustments that you might need –Appendix A can be used as an addendum to the Accessibility Passport [Accessibility passport | Inside Barnardos](https://inside.barnardos.org.uk/people-and-culture/wellbeing/accessibility-passport) to help capture menopause specific considerations.
* Recording your symptoms, frequency and when they occur.
* Considering a potential occupational health referral.
* Referring to support offered by our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services include counselling, webinars and fact sheets to support colleagues.
* Accessing support through the Women’s and EDI networks.
* Recognise that colleagues can have a lot going on both in and outside of work (such as caring responsibilities) on top of the menopause, which can make it feel more difficult to cope.

## Menopause at work: how managers can help

The role of the manager is to provide support through discussions with their team member, if required. Managers are not expected to be an expert or take the role of a healthcare professional when discussing the menopause and should advise colleagues to consult their GP for further support and medical opinion.

When a colleague tells their manager about their issues with the menopause, the manager should gain an understanding of what the colleague is likely to need by way of support and use this toolkit to support those discussions.

**The role of Occupational Health (OH)**

Consideration may also be given to the need for an OH referral. As the menopause transition can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms, the manager may need expert advice and guidance from OH to help them understand how the symptoms may impact on an individual’s capacity to perform certain tasks.

Expert OH advice can help managers understand how to manage health issues connected with someone’s menopause transition. OH can also provide specialist advice on making tailored adjustments and support to someone on an ongoing basis, particularly if the individual’s symptoms are severe. Managers should speak with the People Team if they think an OH referral may be required.

**Line Managers should:**

* Remember that every individual’s issues are unique to them, do not make assumptions.
* Use the resources in Appendix B to increase impact and awareness relating to the menopause.
* Ensure that all information shared by the colleague is treated in the strictest confidence and is not shared further without their consent.
* Listen to and gain an understanding of any concerns the colleague has about their issues or symptoms.
* Discuss timescales and leave requirements if this has been raised as part of the discussion. It is worth underlining that perimenopause and menopause symptoms do not have an indicative timeline for resolution.
* Take account of individual and business needs when dealing with requests for time off for medical appointments / treatment, being mindful of the importance of being supportive of attendance at appointments.
* Outline the support available to the colleague as mentioned throughout this Toolkit.
* Contact the People Teamfor advice if unsure of any aspect of the policy or process.

## Adjustments that may help at work

Workplace adjustments are used to remove barriers or a disadvantage. This can be an adjustment to policy, working arrangements or the equipment provided to do a job. An ‘Accessibility Passport’ can be helpful during menopause for agreeing and recording temporary and permanent changes – Appendix A can be used as specific addendum to the Accessibility Passport to capture menopause specific considerations.

Colleagues and managers should discuss any workplace adjustments that might help the colleague to manage their menopausal symptoms at work. Managers are encouraged to consider ways they can be flexible about how a job is done and discuss options with the employee. By having a sensitive and supportive conversation, the employee is likely to have the best ideas on what changes can make the biggest difference to how well they can do their job.

Considerations could be:

### Working conditions and role

* A change in total working hours.
* Remote/ home working when practical.
* Being flexible where possible over start and finish times (particularly where someone is experiencing sleep disturbances).
* A reduction in travel or increased comfort breaks, dialling into meetings.
* A reduction in the amount of face-to-face meetings/ formal presentations.
* Temporary adjustment to certain duties.
* Temporary change in role (where the opportunity exists).
* Allowing time off for medical appointments.

### Workspace (where supported by local facilities)

* Flexible and easy access to bathroom facilities.
* Ensuring there is good ventilation (fan or open window or adjust air conditioning).
* Access to drinking water.
* Regular breaks in a quiet space to be able to take a moment away from the working area.
* A desk fan.

Being flexible with working hours or practices could make a really big difference in helping someone experiencing menopausal symptoms to continue to work to their full potential.

Any adjustment that requires a permanent or temporary change to someone’s overall work pattern should be considered and managed under our flexible working policy and supporting documents [Flexible working policy | Inside Barnardos](https://inside.barnardos.org.uk/people-and-culture/taking-time/flexible-working-policy)

## Wellbeing and mental health

Menopause can challenge both physical and mental wellbeing including;

* Mood swings.
* Difficulty concentrating or memory lapses.
* Anxiety or depression.
* Pain and headaches.
* Sleep disorders or fatigue.

As with all colleagues, Barnardo’s has a duty of care and managers should watch for symptoms of mental ill health. If the individual’s symptoms include depression, anxiety and/or stress a [stress risk assessment](http://livelink.barnardos.org/livelink91/livelink.exe/open/176586832) should be completed. Also refer to support available through our EAP service.

## Handling absences

Absences that are directly related to the symptoms of menopause are treated or recorded as sickness absences which should specifically refer to symptoms of menopause. Please refer to Barnardo’s sickness absence policy for more information.

Individuals and managers should also familiarise themselves with the ‘additional leave policy’ [Additional leave (paid and unpaid) policy | Inside Barnardos](https://inside.barnardos.org.uk/people-and-culture/taking-time/additional-leave-paid-and-unpaid-policy) which covers time for medical appointments.

## Confidentiality and disclosure

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that information is only shared, with the employee’s consent, where necessary in order to appropriately support any medical conditions. Accessibility Passports and associated documents should always be stored securely.

## Appendix A: Self Identification of Menopausal Symptoms (this can be used as an addendum to the Accessibility Passport)

Use the table below to list your main symptoms/effects and identify any adjustments that may be needed to support you at work. This form should be reviewed on a regular basis and/or as your symptoms change. We have included some example symptoms to show you how to complete the form.

| **Symptom/ effect** | **How frequently do you experience the symptom**  e.g. daily, weekly, monthly | **Environmental, physical or job-related adjustments you feel may assist** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [Example - Hot flushes | Daily | Fan/ close to a window/ access to showers if applicable/ temporary adjustment to certain duties to avoid face-to-face meetings or presentations] |
| [Example - Night Sweats | Daily | Flexible start times due to impact on sleep.] |
| [Example - Headaches | Monthly | Inform the team/colleagues to be mindful. Quiet/ Private breakout room.] |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Date of Review**…………………………**Signature of line manager**………………………….………… **Signature of employee**……………………………………..

## Appendix B: Support available regarding Menopause

[(4) Menopause Support Group | Group | Workplace](https://barnardos.workplace.com/groups/2662538127293263)

[NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk)

NHS [Menopause - Treatment - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/treatment/)

NHS [Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt/)

NHS [Early menopause - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause/)

NHS [The 'male menopause' - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/male-menopause/)

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

The Daisy Network [Charity for Women with POI | The Daisy Network](https://www.daisynetwork.org/)

(Provides information on Premature menopause and Premature ovarian insufficient (POI))

NICE <https://www.nice.org.uk/> (National Institute for Health & Care Excellence)

[Faculty of Occupational Medicine](https://www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause) (guidance on menopause in the workplace)

[The British Menopause Society](http://www.thebms.org.uk/)

[Healthtalk.org](http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/later-life/menopause/topics)

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

[balance - Homepage (balance-menopause.com)](https://www.balance-menopause.com/) Provided by Newson Health

[The Menopause Charity - Menopause Facts, Advice and Support](https://www.themenopausecharity.org/)

[Menopause Support UK](http://www.menopausesupport.co.uk/)