



From mountain to sea

Menopause Guidance

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1. What is the Menopause?

1.1 The menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life, usually occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, but this can vary widely. The medical definition is when a woman has her last period.

1.2 Menopause can generally last from between 4 to 8 years and can also be marked by changes in a woman's hormones, specifically a decrease in the production of the hormone oestrogen. The years during which oestrogen levels decline before a woman has her last period is called the perimenopause.

1.3 Post Menopause is the time after the menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

2. The Purpose of the Menopause Guidance:

2.1 A Scottish Trade Union Council survey on menopause in the workplace investigated the experience of women in the workplace and how Scottish employers were responding. Many respondents believed men at work did not feel comfortable talking about the menopause, were embarrassed about it, or did not understand enough about it to equip them to talk about it. This guidance aims to highlight the Council has a positive attitude towards this issue and discourage any embarrassment about its discussion.

2.2 Additionally some women themselves commented that they would feel uncomfortable talking about the menopause, other's view was some women at work may also find it hard or uncomfortable to talk about the menopause if they have not yet experienced it, or if they did not have any particularly negative experience with it.

2.3 Whatever the case, there is sometimes a reluctance to have open and honest discussion about the menopause and the effect it may have on the individual experiencing this, and indirectly any effect on their colleagues.

2.4 There may also be a lack of awareness of some of the supports and assistance that can be put in place to help. This can lead to this issue being treated negatively in the workplace or indeed being treated as a joke.

2.5 There is no specific legislation addressing the impact of the menopause on the workplace, however there are regulations requiring employers to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all employees, including those experiencing the menopause.

2.6 This guidance aims to encourage open discussion, to better inform all employees of the supports which can be accessed and provide clarity on how this links into the Attendance Management Procedure.



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3. What symptoms can be experienced?

3.1 Some women do not experience any symptoms of the menopause. For the 30-60% of women who do, they can experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms. These can include hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disruption, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. For some women discussing these symptoms can be embarrassing.

- Heavy Periods. These and clots are common in the menopause and some periods may last longer. Where periods are irregular, this makes this harder for a woman to prepare for.
- This means consideration of Health and Safety Issues, such as inadequate access to toileting and washing facilities. A woman may need more frequent access to toilets, or may, due to erratic periods, need access to washing facilities.
- Mental Health Issues. Including stress and anxiety. The Health and Safety Executive has reports 60% of those suffering work related stress are women. This can be due to several reasons including juggling multiple responsibilities such as caring. Sometimes where there is a limited understanding of the issue this can add to a sense of isolation and further stress.
- Hot flushes. Can start in the face, neck, or chest, before spreading upwards and downwards. At night they are felt as night sweats. Most only last a few minutes but can cause sweating and redness. The heartbeat can also be quicker and stronger during a hot flush.
- Tiredness. The menopause can cause insomnia and night sweats sleep disturbance, but sleep loss can also be caused by anxiety that some women feel during the menopause. Sleep loss can cause irritability and a lack of concentration at work.
- Vaginal symptoms. Including vaginal dryness, itching or discomfort are common. These happen not only during the menopause and shortly after but can occur in the period leading up to the menopause.
- Urinary problem. Can also occur during the menopause and many women have recurring urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It can be common to have an urgent need to pass urine or need to pass it more often than usual.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council will:

- Ensure line managers are informed for them to support employees experiencing the menopause.
- Encourage management and Trade Unions to work in partnership to assist in raising awareness understanding of the menopause and how it can affect women in the workplace.
- Ensure line managers adopt a fair and consistent approach, taking account of individual circumstances, while seeking to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of attendance.
- Ensure all parties fulfil their obligations in line with the Equalities Act 2010.

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- Encourage employees to seek help and support with any problems which result in them having difficulties while at work or which result in them not attending work.
- Ensure employees are made aware of the support mechanisms available within the Council.

Line Managers

4.2 Line managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring they are aware of their responsibilities within the Menopause guidance.
- Promoting the health, safety, and wellbeing of all employees, including the use of risk assessments to identify and manage hazards impacting on both physical and mental health in the workplace.
- Being aware of and encouraging the use of all Council support mechanisms.
- Support open discussion and communication on the menopause.
- Maintaining a positive and proactive approach to supporting understanding of the menopause.
- Being sensitive and supportive to those experiencing the effects of the menopause.
- Fairly, consistently, and timeously applying procedures to support employees and manage employee absence.

4.3 Employees are responsible for:

- Understanding their responsibilities within the guidance.
- Looking after their general health and wellbeing and seeking medical or other support where necessary.
- Communicating with their line manager about their experience of the menopause.
- Where they feel not able to speak to their line manager, seeking assistance and advice from another line manager, HR, Health, Safety & Wellbeing team or a trade union representative.
- Advising their line manager of any symptom/s which may or does affect their ability to attend work or to undertake the duties of their post.
- Raising concerns at an early stage with their line manager.
- Attending any appointments and co-operating fully with the Occupational Health (OH) Service and other organisations that provide support to the Council and its employees.
- Ensuring that any medical advice and treatment received, is followed as quickly as possible.

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5. How can we support individuals:

5.1 Working environment:

It is important to remember that the menopause is a natural and temporary stage in a woman's life and that not all women experience significant symptoms. Acknowledging and addressing the potential impact when it does affect a woman helps not only stopping the menopause being a taboo subject, but also increases understanding of this and an awareness of supports available. In the working environment we can assist by;

- Line managers being aware of the symptoms of the menopause and of the support that can be put place.
- For line managers not to be embarrassed about talking about the subject, but instead to promote understanding, a positive approach, and to ensure individuals are not treated with criticism or ridicule. Line managers should familiarise themselves with this guidance, *the Menopause guidance and the Attendance Management Procedure*, and seek guidance from HR as required.
- Recognise every woman is different and it is not possible to set a structured 'one size fits all' set of guidance.
- Address high workplace temperatures, poor ventilation, rest facilities, toilet facilities and ensure access to cold drinking water.
- Risk assessment should consider the specific needs of menopausal women and ensure the working environment will not make symptoms worse. For example, are workstations easily accessible to sanitary and rest facilities, are private washing facilities available, is a desktop fan available?
- Everyone has experienced the feeling of being stressed at some point in their life, even if only for a moment. However, among some menopausal women, stress can be a prominent experience. It is a feeling of being under too much pressure, often both emotionally and physically. *The Personal Wellbeing in the Workplace Guidance* can be used to identify issues which may place undue demand on an individual and helps identify supports to address these at an early stage.
- Where a woman feels uncomfortable going to her line manager let her know they can contact another line manager, HR, their trade union representative or the Health, Safety & Wellbeing team.
- Where a woman is experiencing low mood consider agreeing time out from others, is there a time out space for them to clear their head? Also remind her of the Employee Counselling Service provided by Time for Talking.
- For a loss of confidence make sure there is someone the woman can talk to and if that is the Line Manager set time for regular catch-up discussions.



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- Poor concentration can be supported by considering times of the day when concentration is better or worse and temporarily adjusting the working pattern. Review the woman's workload. Consider it a quiet space to work would help or have agreement in an open office that a woman has 'protected time' during which they are not disturbed.
- Occupational Health can provide medical advice and guidance to a woman experiencing the menopause. Generally, symptoms will be managed via the GP. However, if supports are not helping an OH referral can be arranged via the line manager.

5.2 Reasonable Adjustments

Employers could risk facing claims for sexual discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 if they fail to properly support their female employees. The Health and Safety at Work Act also requires ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of employees. This aside, the purpose of considering reasonable adjustments is to enable a woman experiencing menopause symptoms to continue undertaking her job as comfortably as possible. Any adjustments should be discussed with the line manager and consideration to both the woman's needs and the service requirements should be given.

- Private/space area. For a woman to rest/recover/make a telephone call to personal or professional support. Women going through the menopause may need to manage the impact of the symptoms and have access to some personal space before returning to their workspace.
- Uniforms. May be helpful to partly remove certain items where possible and/or to change these where possible during the day. Women going through the menopause may need to be able to control their temperature by removing unnecessary layers of clothing. However, permission not to wear PPI may be considered only subject to an appropriate risk assessment. The provision of additional uniforms may be helpful where changes during the working day are necessary.
- Flexibility in breaks. Flexibility for a woman to take break to help manage symptoms for example when needed to take medication rather than at predetermined times. Opportunity to walk around and ease pain in arthritic joints or for back pain.
- Flexible Working Arrangements. Including flexibility to attend clinics, or hospital appointments. Consideration of temporary variation of start finish times to support dealing with symptoms, for example fatigue.

What can women experiencing the menopause do to help themselves?

5.3 For women who find their menopausal symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and/or their capacity to work;



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- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see suggestions at the end of this guidance).
- See your GP for advice on available treatment options.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager you feel comfortable talking to.
- Use technology where this is helpful, such as for reminders or note taking.
- Speak to your Line Manager or an HR Adviser about accessing Occupational Health for advice and guidance.
- Do not be embarrassed about symptoms and solutions with colleagues, particularly those who are experiencing symptoms.
- Avoid hot flushes triggers such as hot foods and drinks, especially before meetings.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as weight reduction, smoking cessation, and exercise.
- Carry a bottle of water and eat healthily and regularly as research has shown a balanced diet can alleviate symptoms.
- Get advice from your pharmacist on vitamins and supplements that may help alleviate symptoms.
- Wear natural fibres as man-made fibres exacerbate hot flushes and sweating.

6. The Attendance Management Procedure

6.1 The Council's Attendance Management Procedure is designed to ensure all employees receive support for any health issue they are experiencing at the earliest possible stage. The supports and help detailed in the procedure is available to a woman experiencing the menopause and more importantly is there to be accessed while a woman is present at work, not only if they become absent.

6.2 Where a woman does have absences due to the menopause these should be considered as underlying health reason and supports in the form of reasonable adjustments provided. In severe cases some woman may experience symptoms which because classified as a disability within the Equality Act 2010 requires formal consideration of reasonable adjustments. However

7. Where can I get more information?

The Menopause Guidance.

Healthtalk, A website that talks about women's experiences of the menopause:

<http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/late-life/menopause/overview>

Women's Health Concern, a website that has information about different aspects of women's health.

www.womens-health-concern.org



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The British Menopause Society for the factsheets on the menopause:

<http://www.thebms.org.uk/factsheets.php>

Menopause Matters a website that has lots of information about the menopause and is run by a doctor who specialises in this area:

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

NICE Guidelines for Menopause and its treatment:

<http://cks.nice.org.uk/menopause#!topicsummary>

NHS Choices for information on the menopause and its treatment:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/pages/introduction.aspx>

Let's Talk Menopause is a website set up to help raise awareness and to provide accurate information on the menopause.

www.letstalkmenopause.co.uk

Time for Talking, our EAP's website has a wealth of mental health support information can also be found on their own [website](#).

8. This guidance will be implemented as follows:

- Publication on the source;
- Team Brief;
- Access for employees via arcadia.

9. Review

9.1 This procedure will be reviewed from September 2024