

Line Manager Guidance.

Please find some advice and guidance for managing staff with perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms.

Perimenopause and/or menopausal symptoms can have an impact on women with a subsequent effect on:

- workforce health
- wellbeing
- productivity
- retention of people affected.

For those women going through menopause, we want to maintain their contribution within the workplace, increase inclusivity and enhance the retention of our valued colleagues. Let's consider how the symptoms of perimenopause or menopause can affect women in the workplace.

Premature ovarian insufficiency (40 years and under)

When menopause occurs under the age of 40 years it is termed [premature ovarian insufficiency](#) (POI). POI is estimated to affect around 1 in 100 women.

The menopause is a normal event in a woman's life, but women who have chemotherapy, radiotherapy to the pelvic area, surgery for endometriosis, a hysterectomy or their ovaries removed, may have POI.

Early menopause (40 and up to 45 years)

Menopause can sometimes happen at an earlier age and menopause between the ages of 40 and up to 45 years is referred to as 'early menopause'.

Perimenopause (mid 40s)

Perimenopause is the phase leading up to the menopause, when a woman's hormone balance starts to change.

During this stage, the amount of oestrogen made by the ovaries begins to decline and most people start to experience symptoms. It can then be months or years before periods stop.

Perimenopause usually begins during the mid-40s, although it can start earlier, and extends until 12 months after the final period. By the time of the menopause, 3 quarters of women will have experienced symptoms.

Menopause (up to 55 years)

The word 'menopause' comes from 'meno', meaning your menstrual cycle, and 'pause', meaning to stop.

The menopause is a natural stage in every woman's life. It refers to that time when a woman's periods stop and her ovaries lose their reproductive function.

This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years but for some women it can be earlier or later. For most women, the definition of menopause is when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

This definition assumes they have reached the perimenopause, that they were having normal periods and are not on medication that might affect menstruation.

Surgical menopause (any age)

Surgical menopause occurs following an operation to remove your ovaries. A hysterectomy (surgical removal of the womb) may or may not be performed at the same time, but it is the removal of the ovaries that make you instantly menopausal.

The procedure might be performed for a number of reasons:

- as part of cancer or endometriosis treatment
- in order to reduce the risk of developing cancer (in those who carry the BRCA gene mutations, for example)
- as a last resort in women who suffer with premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), a severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS)

Surgical menopause differs from natural menopause as oestrogen production (oestrogen being previously produced by the ovaries) is suddenly withdrawn. This means that symptoms of surgical menopause are sudden and can be more extreme than in natural menopause, especially in younger women.

Urinary urgency or heavy bleeding

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- Are you ready to provide support at short notice for example if dealing with a Class?
- Can people step out of meetings at short notice?
- Don't push for details, if someone has a heavy bleed or urinary urgency, they may not wish to stop and explain.
- Are there practical solutions such as offering emergency packs to include a change of underwear and pads as necessary.
- Can a referral be made to the medical centre for support?
- Is there easy access to appropriate facilities?

Insomnia and fatigue

Many women experience difficulty sleeping, sometimes this is due to hot flushes or night sweats. Fatigue can lead to difficulty concentrating at work.

In a clinical environment, it is important that there are open conversations if it is felt that tiredness is impacting wellbeing, judgement or concentration. Someone's ability to stay alert may put patient safety at risk.

Fatigue can also impact confidence, leave people feeling emotional and affect their ability to focus.

- How the working day can be adjusted such as shorter days, later start times, longer break times. You may wish to have a discussion with the line manager about the flexible working policy.
- Is there an option to provide a suitable quiet working space to enable someone to concentrate without distractions?
- Is there somewhere people can rest during a break?
- Is there an opportunity for some time out (even if it's just 5 minutes)?

A wellbeing conversation around supportive measures and reasonable adjustments to the workplace.

Problems with recall and or brain fog

Even highly experienced professionals can struggle with what is known as brain fog, which can mean they falter in the moment with recall and may need patience or prompting.

It is really important not to make a judgement here and offer support.

- Using technology where it can help, for example, setting helpful reminders.
- Colleagues may gently prompt or just be patient to allow the person time to recall.
- Be understanding.

As stated before, every woman is different, and the menopause is an individual experience. Consider how women with:

- pre-existing medical conditions
- learning difficulties

may be affected in menopause?

Pre-existing conditions

Many women report that the menopause seems to make existing health conditions worse, triggering or coinciding with a flare up of symptoms.

For example, for a woman with diabetes, hormone changes associated with menopause may make it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels stable.

It may also be difficult to tell whether symptoms such as sudden changes in body temperature or mood swings are related to fluctuations in blood sugar caused by diabetes, or hormonal changes due to menopause.

Learning difficulties

Women with conditions that cause differences in communication or sensing and perceiving (for example, autism) or women with certain mental health conditions, may perceive menopausal symptoms differently.

They may find it more difficult to access medical help for symptoms or to get the right support.

- Keep conversations private and confidential, including disclosure of their information.
- This could also impact partners of those affected by the menopause.
 - Sometimes, if both partners are experiencing symptoms such as sleep disturbance or night sweats, this may increase tiredness and fatigue for both partners.
 - It may also be more difficult if both partners experience symptoms such as depression or mood swings at the same time.

Normalise it.

- Menopause is normal and it is okay to go through the menopause at work.
- Remember 1 in 4 women considered handing in their notice during menopause.
- Break the silence.
- Open up the conversation with work colleagues and encourage people to feel more confident speaking about the menopause.
- Make it visible.
- Speak to your line manager or Human Resources to get the support you need.
- Ask for training to get informed.
- Share your knowledge.
- Be part of the solution, help SVS become menopause aware, break the silence and don't be afraid to say the M-word!
- Awareness and understanding
- Make yourself menopause aware, get familiar with the facts around menopause.

- Increase your own knowledge about the menopause, get yourself and others informed; have conversations.
- Approach conversations with empathy and try not to be embarrassed by the issue and how that individual is feeling.
- Be respectful and try not to make judgements; everyone will experience the menopause differently.
- Be supportive and understanding; listen and talk about the menopause.

Menopause in the workplace at a glance

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Joint aches
- Tiredness and fatigue
- Low mood and irritability
- Lower confidence
- Poor memory
- Poor concentration