



Menopause matters in the workplace



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Introduction

The Menopause is a natural and inevitable phase in a woman's life, marking the end of her reproductive years. While it is a significant physiological milestone, it can also bring about a range of challenges that impact various aspects of a woman's life, including her professional career. The workplace, where women spend a substantial portion of their time, can be particularly affected by the difficulties and complexities associated with menopause.

The Menopause typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and involves a decline in reproductive hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone. As these hormonal shifts take place, women may experience a wide array of physical and psychological symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, fatigue, mood swings, memory lapses, and difficulty concentrating. These symptoms can vary in intensity and duration, affecting women in many diverse ways.

In the context of the workplace, menopause-related challenges can arise due to the often unpredictable and disruptive nature of the symptoms. The physical discomfort caused by hot flashes and night sweats can lead to sleep disturbances, resulting in fatigue and decreased productivity. Cognitive symptoms like memory lapses and difficulty concentrating may impede a woman's ability to stay focused and perform tasks efficiently. Mood swings and emotional changes can also impact professional relationships, leading to misunderstandings or strained interactions with colleagues and clients.

Menopause is often an overlooked topic in workplace conversations, and societal taboos surrounding it may contribute to a lack of understanding and support for women experiencing this transition. Many women feel reluctant to discuss their menopause-related challenges openly, fearing potential stigma or perceptions of decreased competence. This silence can create a barrier to seeking necessary accommodations and support from employers, further exacerbating the difficulties women face during this phase of their lives.

Recognising and addressing the unique challenges of menopause in the workplace is crucial for promoting gender equality and ensuring a supportive and inclusive work environment. By acknowledging the impact of menopause and implementing policies that accommodate the needs of menopausal women, work places can foster an atmosphere of empathy, respect, and inclusivity.

By providing access to resources, flexible working arrangements, peer support and educational programs management can empower women to navigate this transition more effectively while maintaining their professional contributions.



Workshop held at the Catalyst, Newcastle

“The support is mixed within my organisation. They have implemented a basic policy and have agreed to a Menopause Support Group, which I offered to facilitate. Being at the group was an eye-opening experience as it seems that support and flexibility is very different within the organisation and is manager dependent. Overall - the Organisation is flexible; however, they still have more to learn around reasonable adjustment.”

Supporting women in the workplace during menopause is important for several reasons:

1. **Gender Equality:** Menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life, and supporting women during this time helps promote gender equality in the workplace. It ensures that women have the same opportunities and resources as men to succeed in their careers.

2. **Talent Retention:** By providing support for women going through menopause, employers can retain experienced and skilled employees. Losing experienced staff due to menopause-related challenges can be costly, as finding and training replacements can be expensive and time-consuming.

3. **Employee Well-being:** Menopause can bring physical and emotional symptoms, such as hot flashes, mood swings, and sleep disturbances. Addressing these challenges can improve the overall well-being of female employees, leading to increased job satisfaction and productivity.

4. **Diversity and Inclusion:** Fostering an inclusive workplace that supports women during menopause demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion. This can attract a more diverse talent pool and enhance the organization's reputation.

5. **Legal and Ethical Obligations:** In many countries, laws and regulations prohibit discrimination based on gender and related factors, including age. Employers have a legal and ethical obligation to provide a supportive and non-discriminatory environment for their employees during menopause.

6. **Productivity and Performance:** When women are supported during menopause, they are more likely to maintain their performance levels and continue contributing to the success of the organization. This can lead to increased productivity and positive outcomes for the company.

7. **Employee Engagement:** Providing support during menopause can boost employee engagement. Employees who feel supported by their organization are more likely to be motivated, loyal, and committed to their work.

8. **Reduced Absenteeism:** Menopause-related symptoms can lead to increased absenteeism if not managed effectively. By offering support and accommodations, employers can help reduce the number of sick days taken by female employees.

9. **Knowledge and Experience Retention:** Experienced employees bring valuable institutional knowledge and expertise to the workplace. Supporting women through menopause ensures that this knowledge is retained, benefiting the organization.

Physical symptoms

- Hair loss
- Weight gain
- Brittle nails
- Vaginal dryness
- Sleep disorders
- Dizziness
- Incontinence
- Allergies
- Breast pain
- Headaches
- Joint pain
- Itchy skin
- Irregular periods
- Irregular heartbeat
- Osteoporosis

Psychological symptoms

- Mood swings
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory lapses
- Loss of libido

“I feel that having a female manager helps who has experience of the symptoms of the menopause has helped however lack of workplace discussion has not enabled a policy to be put in place, but this is now changing thanks to the workshop today”.

With thanks to the 30 women who attended the workshop or filled in individual questionnaires, the results of which are detailed below;

Please tick the column that most applies	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
My employer makes reasonable adjustments to accommodate me	2	4	16	8
My workplace have/would be willing to implement a Menopause Policy		5	15	10
I have been offered support by my workplace HR department	2	4	24	
It has been necessary for me to take time off from work due to the menopause	2		7	21
I have considered, or have left, a previous position due to lack of understanding	4		16	10
I would have no problem in approaching my employer if I felt that I was struggling	2	5	16	7

“In our organisation it very much depends on the department that you work for as to the support that you receive. I am actually lucky, (why does it always come down to luck?) that my manager supports my menopause and has undergone training to understand how to support me further

In summary

Supporting women in the workplace during menopause is essential for promoting gender equality, retaining talent, enhancing employee well-being, and ensuring legal compliance. It also aligns with the principles of diversity and inclusion and can have positive impacts on productivity and employee engagement. Overall, it's in the best interest of both the employees and the organization to provide support during this life transition.

Recommended Changes going forward, according to the women consulted;

Education and Awareness:

Raise awareness about menopause and its effects by providing information and resources to all employees. Conduct workshops or seminars on menopause to help coworkers understand the challenges women may be facing.

Open Communication:

Encourage open communication between female employees and their supervisors. Make it clear that discussing menopause-related issues is acceptable. Allow women to request accommodations or adjustments to their work environment or schedule if needed.

Flexible Work Arrangements:

Offer flexible work hours, remote work options, or compressed workweeks to help women manage symptoms like fatigue or hot flashes. Consider job-sharing or part-time arrangements for employees who need them.

Temperature and Comfort:

Ensure that the workplace temperature is adjustable and comfortable, as hot flashes can be a common symptom of menopause. Provide access to fans, air conditioning, or heating options to help employees regulate their workspace temperature.

Wellness Programs:

Implement wellness programs that address menopause-specific health concerns, such as stress management, nutrition, and exercise. Offer access to counseling or support groups for emotional and mental well-being.

Access to Breaks:

Allow women to take short, unscheduled breaks if they need to manage symptoms like hot flashes or fatigue. Create a designated, private space for women to relax and cool down if necessary.

Accommodations:

Provide reasonable accommodations, such as ergonomic office chairs or equipment, to alleviate physical discomfort. Make adjustments to workload or expectations if needed to reduce stress.

Supportive Policies:

Develop policies that explicitly address menopause and related accommodations within the workplace. Include menopause as a protected category in anti-discrimination and accommodation policies.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):

Offer access to EAPs that provide counseling and support for mental health issues related to menopause.

Manager Training:

Train managers and supervisors to be understanding and supportive of employees experiencing menopause. Equip them with knowledge about menopause and guidance on how to handle related discussions.

Employee Feedback:

Encourage employees to provide feedback and suggestions on how the workplace can better support women during menopause.

Further reading and resources;

The Menopause Charity

<https://www.themenopausecharity.org/>

NHS help and Support

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/help-and-support/>

Unison Guidance

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/10/25831.pdf>

Gov.uk information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-and-the-workplace-how-to-enable-fulfilling-working-lives-government-response/menopause-and-the-workplace-how-to-enable-fulfilling-working-lives-government-response>

The Daisy Network

<https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>

Menopause Matters

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

Healthtalk.org

<http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/later-life/menopause/topics>

House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee Menopause and the workplace

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/report.html>

ACAS – Managing the Menopause at Work

<https://www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work>

Royal College of Nursing

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/Womens-health/Menopause/Menopause-at-work>