

North East, North Cumbria Menopause resources: Supporting colleagues through the menopause

The NHS workforce is recorded as almost 80% female. This includes our experienced staff, coaches and mentors. ALL women will experience a menopause and it is important to note that menopause can affect all people born with ovaries – whatever their gender recognition. Although the average age of menopause in the UK is 51 years, around 1% (1 in 100) experience menopause before 40. It is therefore part of our duty of care as an employer that we maximise the wellbeing and retention of our valued, experienced colleagues.

Approximately 80% of those affected have menopausal symptoms that affect them at work. As many as 25% report severe symptoms, 69% experience anxiety or depression and 84% experience trouble sleeping. Symptoms of the menopause can result in as many as 10% leaving the workforce according to the [Fawcett Society](#). Studies such as [What do working menopausal women want?](#) indicate that better recognition and communication can prevent feelings of discrimination as also outlined by the [CIPD](#).

What can managers do?

1. Be aware of the menopause and of the needs of your colleagues; attend training and be familiar with organisational support eg. Menopause Café, Network etc
2. Be aware that your role is not to offer expertise and/or knowledge about the menopause; it is to signpost, support and work within local policy/guidelines.
3. Be sensitive; many of those affected report they are uncomfortable discussing symptoms of the menopause with managers and associate this with assumptions about capability and performance, especially during periods of organisational change and/or consideration for promotion
4. Avoid assumptions about needs, gender, age and culture. For example, don't assume provision of a desk fan is sufficient unless specifically asked for. For some colleagues with a Gender Recognition Certificate it might be a criminal offence to disclose information.
5. Do not make comparisons between individuals; menopause is very subjective
6. Be aware that some staff may prefer to approach others to discuss this topic. This underlines the sensitivities and should not be taken personally
7. Offer a confidential, sensitive space and opportunity for discussion, share the resources and signposting resources available and underline the potential to revisit the discussion. Bear in mind that any workplace changes/flexibilities etc may need review. Menopause is a dynamic transition and symptoms can (and do) change
8. Do not accept, promote or tolerate what some may describe as workplace 'banter'
9. Do not confuse the symptoms of menopause with performance issues without first exploring supportive measures such as Occupational Health
10. Ensure the individual can take breaks and work flexibly to maximise their wellbeing and also to ensure they feel they are most productive. Record flexibilities agreed.

Seeking or signposting to informal groups or setting up a small workplace network can make a real difference and help to normalise the feelings many experience when going through the menopause. This can have an impact beyond that individual and help to change workplace culture and language toward acceptance and openness.

For more resources about the workplace, see the [Balance booklet, the workplace](#) and the [Talking with staff](#) guidance produced by ACAS.