

---

# Menopause in the Workplace Guidance

---

## Introduction

1. Our organisation is committed to the wellbeing of its staff and aims to facilitate an open, inclusive and supportive culture where all employees are treated with dignity and respect. We aim to create a safe and healthy working environment for all staff and where individuals feel comfortable to speak about their menopausal symptoms and ask for support if needed so that they can thrive and achieve their full potential at work.
2. SFC recognises that employees may need additional consideration, support and adjustments before (perimenopause), during and after the menopause (post menopause). We recognise that menopausal symptoms can impact some transgender, intersex and non-binary people who will require support and flexibility relevant to their needs.
3. The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness and understanding of menopause and to provide clarity and support for managers and staff dealing with menopause related issues, either as individuals dealing with menopause, or those affected indirectly, such as colleagues, friends and family.

## Legal implications

4. Under the Equality Act 2010, employees are protected from discrimination (direct and indirect), harassment and victimisation on the basis of protected characteristics including disability, age and sex. While menopause is not of itself a protected characteristic, employees experiencing menopause may be protected by discrimination laws relating to age, sex, disability and gender reassignment.
5. Depending on its effects, the menopause could meet the statutory definition of disability if menopause symptoms have a long-term and substantial impact on an employee's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. In that case, SFC as an employer has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its staff.
6. People experiencing menopause are generally aged between 45 and 55 so any unfavourable treatment or discrimination (whether direct or indirect) towards an employee experiencing menopause could amount to sex and/or age discrimination. Gender reassignment discrimination may also be relevant if the employee experiencing menopause is transgender.
7. Issues that may arise between colleagues, such as unwanted conduct in the workplace involving an employee's menopause or menopausal symptoms, may amount to harassment or sexual harassment. This could include what might be perceived as 'banter' between employees about another colleague's perceived menopausal symptoms. Similarly, victimisation or bullying may occur if an employee who has asserted their rights under discrimination laws is treated less favourably because of their

complaint(s) regarding unwanted conduct.

8. Employers have a duty of care and an obligation under The Health & Safety Act at Work Act 1974 to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all employees at work. In the context of the menopause, these duties place employers under an obligation to help employees to manage their menopause in the workplace and to ensure that their working conditions do not exacerbate any symptoms. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require an employer to undertake risk assessments and take action to prevent exposure to risks.

## What is the menopause?

9. The menopause is a natural and temporary phase in an individual's life during which they stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. There is usually a gradual transition, with menstrual irregularity and the development of symptoms. This period is referred to as the perimenopause. Perimenopause begins several years before menopause. Individuals may start to experience menopausal symptoms during the final two years of their perimenopause.
10. This guidance applies to all employees experiencing menopause, including those going through early menopause (perimenopause). Perimenopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause but can also occur for various medical reasons including:
  - Cancer treatment (chemotherapy, radiotherapy).
  - Surgical removal of ovaries.
  - Hormone-related conditions.
  - Autoimmune disorders.
  - Endometriosis treatment.
  - Genetic factors.
  - Primary ovarian insufficiency.
11. Employees experiencing early menopause may face additional challenges that require sensitive consideration:
  - Multiple health conditions: Early menopause often occurs alongside other chronic health conditions that may qualify as disabilities under equality legislation.
  - Age-related assumptions: Younger employees may face disbelief or minimisation of their symptoms, as menopause is often incorrectly assumed to only affect older workers.
  - Fertility concerns: Early menopause may involve grief around fertility loss, requiring additional emotional support.
  - Treatment complexity: Some employees may be managing menopause symptoms while undergoing treatment for underlying conditions.

- Compounded stigma: The intersection of age, health status, and menopause symptoms may create multiple layers of potential discrimination.
12. Menopausal symptoms can occasionally begin before the age of 40 but it usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years. However, each individual's experience will differ and for some the experience can be very challenging and impact on their general health and wellbeing.
  13. The average age for an individual to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. There is evidence to suggest that this is different for Asian and black people, i.e. Asians may start their menopause later and people of colour slightly earlier.

## Why should we talk about the menopause in the workplace?

14. Perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms already affect a substantial number of workers. That number is expected to grow considerably, with an ageing population forecast to stay in or go back to work. Individuals over the age of 50 are the fastest growing segment of the workforce and most will go through the menopause transition during their working lives.
15. Some people go through the menopause with little or no impact on their daily life while others experience symptoms that can last for several years and have a negative impact on their performance and attendance at work. A bad night's sleep can affect concentration, for example, while heavy periods or hot flushes can be physically distressing and embarrassing. The psychological effects can also decrease confidence and impact relationships at work. For some, the symptoms are so severe that employees feel compelled to leave their jobs.

## Common symptoms

16. According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approximately 80% of people in the UK will experience some menopausal symptoms that affect them differently. For many of them, experiencing the menopause can result in physical, psychological and emotional changes to which it can be difficult to adjust.
17. While symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees, they commonly include:
  - hot flushes and night sweats;
  - changes in mood, such as feeling tired, irritable, depressed or anxious;
  - poor memory and reduced concentration;
  - panic attacks, loss of confidence;
  - weight gain;
  - skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness);
  - reduced sex drive;
  - dizziness; headaches;
  - recurrent urinary tract infections and loss of bladder control;

- joint stiffness, aches and pains;
  - sleep disturbance;
  - palpitations; and
  - irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy.
18. This is not an exhaustive list. The particular changes involved can affect different people in different ways. Individuals may experience only some or all of these symptoms.
19. Each of these symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work. SFC has a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees and therefore commits to ensuring that reasonable adjustments and support are available to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.
20. It is important to recognise that many employees may not initially identify their symptoms as menopause-related, particularly:
- Those experiencing early menopause may not consider menopause as a possibility due to their age.
  - Symptoms can develop gradually and may initially be attributed to stress, other health conditions, or life circumstances.
  - Perimenopause symptoms can begin years before periods stop, making the connection less obvious.
  - Symptom variability means experiences don't always match commonly known signs.

### Behavioural changes may include:

- Increased irritability, anxiety, or emotional responses.
  - Difficulty concentrating or memory issues ('brain fog').
  - Fatigue affecting usual performance levels.
  - Changes in communication style or workplace relationships.
  - Increased absences that may seem unexplained.
  - Reduced participation in meetings or social workplace activities.
  - Apparent disengagement or loss of confidence.
21. Before making assumptions about performance or behavioural changes:
- Consider that symptoms may have an underlying medical cause.
  - Avoid labelling behaviour as 'unprofessional,' 'erratic,' or 'difficult'.
  - Approach conversations with curiosity rather than judgment.
  - Focus on offering support rather than criticism.
  - Remember that employees themselves may not understand what's happening.

## Available support and adjustments

22. Employees are encouraged to inform their line manager that they are experiencing menopausal symptoms to determine the most appropriate support to suit their needs. However, it should be recognised that an employee experiencing menopausal symptoms may find broaching the issue with their line manager uncomfortable, in which case they may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with:
  - a colleague or another manager;
  - a member of the Human Resources team;
  - a Trade Union representative;
  - a counsellor from Employee Assistance Programme (EAP); or
  - a Mental Health First Aider (where appointed).
23. Any health-related information disclosed during such discussions will be treated sensitively and confidentially. However, it is important to recognise that some employees may not wish to discuss the menopause at all.

### Some possible support or adjustments may include:

- Flexible working arrangements (i.e. a reduction in working hours, altered work pattern, working from home or hybrid working).
  - Flexibility in starting work late or go home/finish early.
  - Flexibility around the breaks, or increased breaks during the working day.
  - Making temporary changes to work allocation, in consultation with the employee, to ensure that the type and volume of work is appropriate.
  - Paid time off to attend relevant medical appointments.
  - Changing/washing facilities with access to free sanitary products.
  - Access to chilled water.
  - Desk fans can be provided upon request.
24. In addition, help and support is available through our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Occupational Health services and Mental Health First Aider (contact Human Resources in first instance).
  25. Advice on support and adjustments should be discussed with your line manager in the first instance, notwithstanding the additional guidance provided in the Available Support and Adjustments section above.
  26. Menopause symptoms can be highly unpredictable and may occur without warning – it isn't something that can be scheduled around. Employees may experience:
    - Sudden onset symptoms that develop rapidly during the workday.
    - Symptom flare-ups that can happen without identifiable triggers.

- Day-to-day variability where someone feels well in the morning but unwell by afternoon.
  - Immediate physical responses such as severe hot flashes, sudden fatigue, or anxiety attacks.
27. Due to this unpredictability, employees may need to make same-day/last minute requests for:
- Working from home instead of coming into the office.
  - Changing meeting schedules or locations.
  - Taking additional breaks or leaving early.
  - Adjusting workload or deadlines.
  - Moving to a cooler/quieter workspace.
28. Managers should be prepared to accommodate last-minute changes wherever operationally possible:
- Avoid requiring advance notice for all flexibility requests.
  - Allow for same-day working arrangement changes.
  - Be understanding when employees need to step away from meetings suddenly.
  - Have contingency plans for when key employees need sudden accommodation.
29. They should also build flexibility into:
- Meeting structures (hybrid options available).
  - Project deadlines where possible.
  - Daily work scheduling.
  - Communication expectations (understanding delayed responses during symptom flare-ups).

## Your role as an employee

30. If you find that your menopausal symptoms are affecting your wellbeing and capacity to work:
- 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.
  - Ask what support and/or adjustments could be offered to help you manage your symptoms when doing your job.

- If you feel comfortable, share your experiences with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing menopausal symptoms and work out your preferred coping strategies.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as improving your diet, smoking cessation and exercise.

## Your role as a manager

31. The role of line managers in supporting employees experiencing menopause transition is crucial. Effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms that are impacting on their work will help you to improve your team's morale, retain valuable skills and talent, and reduce sickness absence. Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee health and well-being, spotting early signs of ill health or distress, and initiating early intervention.

- As a line manager you are most likely to be the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs a change or adjustment to their work or working hours.
- Be ready and willing to have an open and honest dialogue with the individual concerned, to identify the specific issues that person is experiencing.
- Due to the personal nature of the conversation, treat the discussion sensitively, professionally and confidentially. If the individual wants or agrees to information about their condition to be shared, clarity about what specifically and with whom it may be shared is important and their consent must be explicit.
- The level of trust you build with employees will determine the extent to which colleagues are able to discuss menopausal symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work.
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with your team members can provide an opportunity for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause. It will help to create an open and inclusive culture and encourage individuals to raise any concerns, which help make a team member feel more comfortable about approaching you to discuss their experience of menopause.
- While any health condition can be a sensitive and personal issue for many, some of the symptoms associated with the menopause can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate, even invisible, way. It's therefore understandable why many could feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss the impact of their symptoms. However, most people would prefer a concerned and genuine discussion about how they are as opposed to silence. Don't make assumptions about someone's health condition or ask them a direct question as to whether they have menopause

symptoms. If you have concerns about someone's well-being or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' or 'I've noticed you've been arriving late recently, and I wondered if you're okay?' It's up to the individual to disclose any particular symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.

- Approach conversations with empathy and respect – it will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- The discussion should take place in a safe, private, confidential setting where both manager and employee feel at ease and where they will not be disturbed.
- The more supportive and knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms, the less likely that individual will feel embarrassed to approach you and discuss how the menopause is affecting their health and their work.
- Awareness about the symptoms and range of support available in the organisation will also increase your own confidence in discussing the issue. So will attending training sessions about the menopause, how to be supportive, including with regard to reasonable adjustments, as well as familiarising yourself with the organisation's statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- Consider involving relevant experts where appropriate, such as an occupational health practitioner, to help identify appropriate adjustments that could be put in place to help ease the impact of their symptoms on their work.
- Record any specific needs (and agreed adjustments) and review these at least annually. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so make sure you have regular discussions with the person concerned to ensure that the support still meets their needs.
- Ensure that the employee is treated fairly and can work in a supportive and safe environment. Assure them that they will not be penalised or suffer any detriment in relation to the menopause and/or if they request reasonable adjustments.

32. Managers should be particularly aware that:

- Menopause symptoms can affect employees of any age.
- Employees may be managing multiple health conditions simultaneously.
- Some employees may need accommodations for both menopause and disability-related needs.
- Younger employees experiencing menopause may feel isolated or different from peers.
- Medical appointments may be frequent and urgent for those with complex health needs.

Managers can contact HR for additional guidance and information where necessary.

**All members of staff are responsible for:**

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their own health.
- Helping in fostering a workplace culture that allows for open and honest conversations about menopause.
- Ensuring fairness and inclusivity in the workplace and setting up safe spaces where colleagues can talk confidently about how they are feeling.
- Treating each other with dignity and respect with zero tolerance for bullying and harassment.
- Engaging in training and education about the menopause in order to raise awareness and be able to help and support colleagues appropriately.

---

---

## Annex A Useful resources

---

For a clear definition of the menopause (including early menopause) and good, practical advice about managing its effects, visit [NHS website](#).

The [Daisy Network](#) specialises in support for women, along with their families and partners, who have been diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency.

The [Menopause Café](#) provides information about events where strangers gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss the menopause.

The [menopause exchange](#) offers membership of an online community that provides access to experts and a quarterly newsletter.

### Other Sites

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>

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

<https://thebms.org.uk/> <https://menopausesupport.co.uk/>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>

[Search results for "menopause" | Workplace Wellbeing \(Employee Assistance Programme\)](#)

<https://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk>

## Table of amendments

Date	Amendment	Owner	Ratified
17 December 2019	This guidance was produced with the aim to provide policy guidance for SFC staff and line managers.	Human Resources	PPWG/JNCF
September 2024	Guidance updated in line with the evolving legislation and best practice.	Human Resources	PPWG/JNCF
September 2025	Guidance updated from EDI lens and following JNCF comments and suggestions	Human Resources	JNCF 15 January 2026

**Review cycle:** where there is a change in elements of the policy or periodically every two years.