

## **Menopause policy**

### **Introduction**

Highways England is committed to providing an inclusive and connected working environment, in which individuals' differences are understood, valued and respected.

The aim of this policy is to ensure everyone understands what menopause is and to create an environment in which colleagues feel they can openly and comfortably start conversations about menopause and any support they may need.

### **What is Menopause**

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women. It refers to the time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. It is triggered by lower levels of oestrogen, which decrease naturally as one gets older.

Some employees will experience menopause at a (sometimes significantly) younger age either naturally or because of surgical/medical intervention, eg, as a result of cancer treatment. The resulting impact on fertility can further complicate their experience of menopause transition. In some cases, the menopause will be temporary.

Because the physical changes in the body are hormonally based, menopausal symptoms can also be experienced by non-binary, intersex or transgender people.

The average age for the menopause is 45 to 55 but for some women it can start in their 30s, or even younger.

The menopause usually happens gradually. For a few years before the menopause, women can experience changes, such as periods becoming irregular, more or less often than usual, and perhaps heavier. This stage is called the perimenopause (or menopausal transition) and can last for about four years, sometimes longer.

Women may experience only some or all of these symptoms (and others not listed below). Most women will experience some symptoms, with 25% experiencing very severe symptoms and some women will not experience any noticeable symptoms at all. On average, women continue to experience symptoms for four to eight years after their last period.

Every woman's experience is different, however, there are common symptoms.

### **Symptoms**

The physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause may be interrelated and can create a 'domino' effect whereby one symptom can cause or exacerbate

another – such as hot flushes at night-time can disrupt sleep, leading to tiredness, irritability and loss of focus during the working day.

**Physical symptoms** can include:

- Hot flushes – sudden feelings of heat that build up and mostly affect the face, neck and chest causing redness and perspiration;
- Night sweats – hot flushes that happen through the night;
- Insomnia and sleep disturbances;
- Headaches;
- Joint aches/stiffness;
- Tiredness – night sweats can disrupt sleep causing tiredness at work
- Fatigue - when tiredness is overwhelming and is not relieved by sleep or rest;
- Urinary problems, such as infections or increased frequency/urgency of urination;
- Irregular and/or debilitating periods (usually in the perimenopause stage);
- Other symptoms (which are less likely to impact in the workplace).

**Psychological symptoms** can include:

- Poor concentration;
- Problems with memory;
- Irritability and/or mood swings;
- Low mood or depression;
- Anxiety, loss of self-esteem and/or confidence;
- Decreased ability to cope with stress.

A list of other symptoms an individual may experience due to menopause can be found at Appendix A.

## **What can I do**

Here are some suggestions for you to consider that may help you with a diagnosis and to manage your perimenopause/menopause symptoms:

- Seek medical advice, reassurance and treatment from your GP or talk to your practice nurse;
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle – eating a balanced diet and taking regular exercise can help alleviate symptoms and keep bones healthy. For recipes and other useful information to support your physical and mental health wellbeing, including mindfulness and sleep podcasts, sign up to our 24/7 wellbeing programme platform, PAM Life, to assess and monitor your wellness. You will have access to wellness assessments and wellness coaches for individual advice. We recommend you register using your personal email address, enter organisation code 'highwaysengland' when prompted when using the site for the first time;
- Drink plenty of water – you may find sipping chilled water during hot flushes particularly helpful, also dabbing cold water on your wrists;
- Request a desk fan from facilities to keep you cool during hot flushes.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot/spicy food, caffeine), especially before meetings or presentations;

- Seek support/allow for frequent toilet breaks, especially at busy times, during long meetings or workshop days;
- Where possible, wear layers of clothing which can be easily removed or added – you may find wearing natural fibres helps maintain a more even body temperature;
- Arrange meetings at optimal times in line with your energy levels;
- Take regular comfort breaks to move and stretch throughout the day and go for a walk in official breaks when safe to do so;
- Use ‘to do’ lists/diaries or mobile phone reminders to support your memory;
- Do relaxation or mindfulness meditation sessions in work, at home or both;
- Consider changing working hours, adjusting shifts, or working from home, if possible;
- Consider the use of a day car;
- Consider being single crewed;
- Consider reducing travel and dialling into meetings;
- If you would like to talk to someone outside of the company, call our 24-hour confidential employee assistance service Health Assured on 0800 783 2808 or visit the Health Assured website <https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/> using the following details to sign in: username: highwaysengland password: highways1  
This service could offer support, including counselling, to help you manage this life change or other issues affecting your wellbeing at this time – such as advice and guidance on debt, relationships, stress, health, change work issues, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, family care or bereavement. The team at Health Assured BCAP accredited and follow the BACP code of ethics.
- Discuss any difficulties you are experiencing with your Line Manager and what support and any reasonable adjustments you may need. If you are worried/embarassed about this, contact Health Assured to get support to rehearse what you want to say.
- Ask your Line Manager for an occupational health referral if further advice is needed on reasonable adjustments;
- Talk to a Mental Health First Aider – if you are feeling stressed, anxious or depressed;
- Join the Menopause and Hormone Treatment [Yammer Group](#);
- Speak to HR Advice or your Regional HR Manager;
- Speak to your Trade Union representative.

### **What can I do as a line manager**

To help people in your team manage their menopause symptoms you can:

- Encourage open communication and create an environment where a colleague feels they can share personal information and seek support if they want to;
- Have an open and honest conversation and do not make assumptions;
- Listen to the individual and explore with them the impact the menopause is having on them in their role and what support they need to manage it;
- Show patience, understanding and empathy;

- If your team member has more complex symptoms that are impacting on them, discuss with them making a referral to our [occupational health provider Optima Health](#) to explore reasonable adjustments we can make in the workplace;
- Suggest contacting our Employee Assistance Programme, Health Assured (details above);
- Suggest they join the Menopause and Hormone Treatment [Yammer Group](#).
- Use the term menopause and avoid using outdated terms such as 'the change' or 'woman/women of a certain age' to help destigmatise menopause.

#### Further Information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

## Appendix A

A list of other symptoms an individual may experience due to menopause.

Hair Loss  
Dizziness  
Weight Gain  
Incontinence  
Bloating  
Allergies  
Brittle Nails  
Cholesterol can rise  
Osteoporosis  
Changes in Odor  
Irregular Heartbeat  
Depression  
Irritability  
Panic Disorder  
Breast Pain  
Headaches  
Joint Pain  
Burning Tongue  
Electric Shocks  
Digestive Problems  
Gum Problems  
Muscle Tension  
Itchy Skin  
Tingling Extremities