



CREATING A MENOPAUSE-AWARE WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION

This briefing is for employers who want to ensure their organisation can provide their employees who are experiencing menopause with the support they need. It provides the information you need to understand the impact of the menopause in the workplace and what action you can take to create a menopause-aware workplace in your organisation.

Menopause is a normal and natural part of women's lives, but there is still widespread discomfort around talking about the menopause, particularly in the workplace. Many women don't feel comfortable talking about it because of ongoing stigma and stereotypes of 'menopausal women'. When managers and colleagues avoid the subject, and senior leaders don't see it as a workplace issue, it makes it even harder for women to get the support they need.

Menopause is a legitimate reason to need support in the workplace. Adequate support should be available in your organisation. By making small adjustments to workplace policy and practice you can make a real difference to the lives of your employees who are experiencing menopause. The changes you make to your practice will also help advance gender equality in your wider workplace, including helping close your gender pay gap.

Intersectionality

Developing action on menopause and the workplace is a good example of intersectional work.

Intersectional work recognises that women are not a homogenous group and do not experience inequality in the same way. Different groups of women experience multiple, intersecting discriminations that overlap and combine to create different levels of inequality. For example, menopausal women's experiences of inequality and discrimination may be inflected by not only sexism but also ageism, including stigma and barriers associated with menopause.

By considering how these different inequalities interact when developing your action to support women experiencing menopause, you are taking an intersectional approach. You can then carry your learning on this approach into other areas of work on equality, for example addressing Black and racialised women's experiences of inequality in the workplace.

MENOPAUSE & THE WORKPLACE

The symptoms of menopause can have a real and detrimental impact on women and those who experience menopause in the workplace. These include:

- Mood fluctuations and anxiety
- Aches and pains
- Tiredness
- Recurrent UTI symptoms
- Palpitations
- Hot flushes
- Brain fog and memory issues
- Insomnia, sleep disturbance and night sweats
- Lack of energy
- Heavy and/or unpredictable bleeding

The vast majority of women will experience one or more symptoms, but around a third experience severe symptoms that have a significant impact on their wellbeing. This is a workplace issue, with 25% of women likely to experience difficulties associated with menopausal symptoms at work.¹ Menopausal symptoms can impact an employee's ability to concentrate or do their job effectively, and working conditions and environments can exacerbate this, for example:

- High temperatures in the workplace,
- A lack of ventilation,
- Inability to take regular breaks,
- Absence management processes penalising women who have higher absence rates due to menopause symptoms, and
- Excessive work-related pressures, for example high workload or deadlines, causing stress.

Without support, employees experiencing menopause may feel compelled to reduce their hours or responsibilities, or even leave their job altogether. This sees your organisation lose those skills, and results in increased recruitment and training costs to replace them. During menopause, women's productivity or performance may fall or they may have higher levels of sickness absence. Where

¹ Griffiths, A., MacLennan, A.J., & Hassard, J. (2013) *Menopause and work: An electronic survey of employees' attitudes in the UK.*

workplace support isn't available, this sends a message to women that they aren't valued, or that their wellbeing isn't taken seriously. This creates a workplace culture which doesn't feel inclusive to women.

The impact of menopause at work is interwoven with the impact of workplace gender inequality, and the power imbalance between women and men in the workplace. As men age in the workplace, this is associated with perceived increased status and credibility, however it is the opposite for women. This is a result of gender norms and inequality. Older women in the workplace also face an increasing challenge of 'sandwich caring' - providing care for both elderly parents and grandchildren. A lack of status and power in the workplace, combined with caring roles and the impact of menopause symptoms increases workplace inequality. Supporting women to stay in the workforce during menopause will therefore help tackle gender inequality in your workplace.

WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO DO

There are four key areas that you need to focus on to develop a menopause-aware workplace. These are:

1. **Awareness**
2. **Support**
3. **Policy**
4. **Implementation**

1. Awareness

Increasing awareness of menopause and how it impacts women in the workplace is key to ensuring women are able to access the support they need. There are three types of awareness-raising activity that you'll need to carry out:

Communications aimed at all employees

You should share information on menopause and how it impacts on women in the workplace, and a statement that you are committed to providing employees who experience menopause with the support they need.

Workplace culture has a strong influence on the availability of and attitude towards support in the workplace, including menopause-related support. The tone of a workplace is set from the very top. The way senior leaders behave, and the behaviours they tolerate, is the strongest indicator of workplace culture. Supportive communications from senior leaders can help foster a more inclusive environment by challenging stigma.

Communications aimed at employees experiencing menopause

You should issue an all-staff communication advising what support is available to employees experiencing menopause, and how they can access it.

This shouldn't just be a one-off. Workplace cultures that don't feel inclusive can mean women feel unable to ask for support, regardless of whether they've been advised of what is available.

You should regularly raise awareness about your positive approach to menopause in the workplace as a way to show that you take it seriously, and to encourage employees to access support. You can do this through regular communications, and/or by displaying information, for example posters, in prominent areas.

Sharing information with key people

You should ensure your key people have the information they need to play their part in fostering a menopause-aware workplace.

- HR staff should have a good understanding of the menopause and its impact on women in the workplace in order to be able to develop good policy and give advice and support where needed.
- Line managers should be aware of your menopause policy and what support is available. They also need to build an understanding of the impact of menopause so they're able to support their staff.
- Senior leaders need to have enough information to ensure their communications are cogent and sensitive.

There is a wide range of information on the menopause, its symptoms and their impacts at [NHSinform.scot](https://www.nhs.uk/health-a-z/menopause). You may find it useful to share this with your employees as part of your awareness-raising work.

2. Support

You should build a package of support measures that women experiencing menopause are able to access in your workplace. Collating this in one place will help you to share information on what support is available, making it easier for women to access and for line managers to provide.

Your support package should provide to employees:

- The ability to use flexible working to help them manage their symptoms.
- Regular one-to-ones with their line manager to discuss wellbeing and workload, and any adjustments they need.
- Menopause-sensitive absence management – this should include excluding menopause-related absences from trigger-based absence policies.
- Appropriate return to work support after any long-term absences related to menopause.
- Access to free period products, including specific products for heavy flow.
- Ready access to washroom facilities.
- Regular breaks.
- Adapting uniforms, where possible.

- The ability to adjust the temperature in their workspace, for example providing a desk fan, or moving their working location away from a heat source or closer to a window.

Line managers have a key role to play in providing support, and it's important for them to be aware that some women may be reluctant to discuss their symptoms and conversations should be handled sensitively. You can find useful information on how to approach conversations about employee wellbeing and the menopause at [NHSInform.scot](https://www.nhs.uk/inform/scot).

If you have an employee assistance programme you should ensure employees experiencing menopause are aware of the support available through this. You may also wish to provide access to counselling services separate from this.

3. Policy

Having a specific policy on menopause will help encourage women to ask for support and make a visible statement on your commitment to provide that support. It will also ensure you're able to provide line managers and other key people with the support they need to do this well, and help foster an inclusive and safe work environment.

Your policy should include information on:

- What support is available – including examples, which you can draw from the section on 'Support' on page 4.
- How to request support, including reasonable adjustments.
- Your policy on flexible working and how this can support employees experiencing menopause.
- How menopause-related absences should be dealt with (or include this in your sickness absence policy and signpost there).
- Who your organisation's key contact on the menopause is (for example a menopause champion or HR manager).
- A statement that information shared by employees will be handled in line with your organisation's data protection policy.
- A commitment to review the policy regularly and ensure it stays in line with best practice, new evidence and any legal or regulatory changes.

You should also include a statement on the Equality Act 2010 and the requirements regarding reasonable adjustments. Menopause is not in itself a disability, however symptoms may meet the definition of disability. In such cases you have a legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments to your employee. If you don't, it may amount to discrimination. It's critical that key people who receive requests for support understand this and take a positive approach to providing support.

Having a menopause policy is only one element of best practice. You should also review your other policies to identify if they might have an unintentional detrimental impact on employees experiencing menopause. One example of this could be a trigger-based absence management policy that doesn't

exempt or adjust for menopause-related absence. Another could be if recruitment or promotion decisions have a discretion-based component. Where such processes don't take a structured, score-based approach this can allow bias to creep in to decision-making, and stereotypes about 'menopausal women' could affect their chances of success.

4. Implementation

The steps outlined in the sections on awareness, support and policy are core to a menopause-aware workplace, but without effective implementation they won't create the change you need.

You need to ensure your key people receive adequate training, so they understand their role and what is expected of them.

Line managers

Line managers should be a priority group for training. The 'supervisor effect' is a key factor in effective implementation because line managers are gatekeepers in the workplace. Your employee's experience of work, how comfortable they feel asking for support, and what support they get are all heavily dependent on their line manager.

Regardless of how good your workplace policies are, if line managers aren't aware of or don't feel confident implementing them, or if there is discretion involved in decision-making, they won't be fully effective.

You should ensure line managers are trained in how to support staff experiencing menopause. This includes making them aware of your menopause policy, but also of your organisation's expectations on how this should be applied.

Approach is key: it can be the case that some line managers are resistant to, for example, enabling flexible working in their team. It is important line managers understand that menopause symptoms are a legitimate reason for needing support at work, and that they should take a positive and open approach to providing this in their teams. This is key to fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture, and a consistent approach across your organisation.

It's also important to remember that line managers might be uncomfortable discussing menopause, especially if they're men. Awareness-raising and good policy can provide them with the information they need, but they also need to build their confidence in talking about menopause with employees and managing those conversations sensitively. You should provide them with the support they need to do that.

HR

Your HR staff should also be trained in how your menopause policy should be implemented in order that they can provide advice to line managers, and to employees experiencing menopause. HR staff

provide essential support in the workplace and have a positive role to play in ensuring women get the support they need.

HR staff should also monitor the effectiveness of your menopause policy and take steps to improve implementation where required.

The **Menopause Information Pack for Organisations** has a range of detailed resources that can help your organisation ensure action is implemented effectively.

Developing your action plan

The best way to create a menopause-aware workplace is to develop an action plan. Alternatively, you can build actions on menopause into an existing equality action plan, if you have one.

Action plans are crucial to ensuring your work in this area is strategic, clearly mapped and measurable. Your plan should set out:

- What you want to achieve
- Which actions you will prioritise
- Who is responsible for delivering each action
- When actions will be delivered by
- How you will track progress

Progress tracking and accountability measures are key to ensuring focus is maintained on your actions and the plan doesn't lose momentum as other priorities arise.

Wider work

Gender inequality in the workplace is a significant contributor to the difficulties women face when experiencing menopause in the workplace. Many of the issues described here – how bias creeps into decision-making on recruitment and access to flexible working, or how norms and stereotypes create workplace cultures that don't feel inclusive – aren't just relevant to creating a menopause-aware workplace. They're the result of women's workplace inequality.

The actions in this resource can have a positive impact on gender equality in your workplace, but taking wider action is important. You can easily widen some of the actions here to consider not just the impact on women experiencing menopause, but all women in your workplace.

For example:

- Including information on women's greater responsibility for unpaid care in training for line managers on flexible working, and ensuring line managers take a positive approach to all flexible working requests.
- Undertaking a review of your policies to identify where they might have a differential impact on women and men, and making changes to address this.

- Carrying out an objective review of the culture in your workplace. Be willing to be challenged and to honestly confront any issues you identify.

Close the Gap has a range of resources for employers who want to improve gender equality in their workplace.

Our **Close Your Pay Gap** tool is for large private and third sector employees who have to publish their gender pay gap. The tool uses your pay gap information, along with a short self-assessment test, to generate a personalised action plan to help you close your pay gap. It also has a wide range of resources to support your progress on gender equality at work, including **topic-focused guidance** and short briefings for **senior leaders** and **line managers**.

Our **Think Business, Think Equality** tool is for small and medium businesses who want to benefit from gender equality in the workplace. The tool assesses your current employment practice, gives tailored feedback, and provides a tailored action plan for your business. You can choose your own topics to focus on, such as **workplace culture**, **pregnancy and maternity** or **pay and reward**. The tool also includes a brand new suite of resources on **preventing sexual harassment in the workplace**.

We also have **guidance for public sector employers** that sets out what you need to do to meet your duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty, with a specific focus on women's employment inequality. This includes information on how to: analyse employee data, use your gender pay gap information, set equality outcomes, and mainstream gender into your policy and practice.

Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and unions to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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Close the Gap

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