

Menopause Guidance Advice and Support for Employees and Managers

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Purpose

Charnwood Borough Council is committed to providing a supportive working environment for all staff and, as an inclusive employer, feels that the subject of menopause should not be viewed as 'taboo' or 'hidden'. It is important for everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, men should be aware too.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75-80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that most of these women are reluctant to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.

Through this Menopause Guidance document, the Council aims to:

- a) Create an environment where staff can openly and conformably engage in discussions about menopause.
- b) Ensure everyone understands what menopause is and can confidently discuss the subject, as appropriate.

- c) Inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work.
- d) Ensure that women experiencing menopause symptoms feel confident to ask for support and any reasonable adjustments they require, so that they can continue to succeed in the workplace.
- e) Assure women that Charnwood Borough Council is a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life. It isn't always an easy transition, but with the right support it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not experience symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

- **Menopause** is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons. Around 10 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40 years of age.
- **Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, e.g. irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.
- **Postmenopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

Symptoms of Menopause

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms and 25% could be classed as severe.

Most women will experience menopausal symptoms. Some of these can be quite severe and have a significant impact on your everyday activities. Menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before your periods stop and last around four years after your last period, although some women experience them for much longer.

In some cases, Menopause can also increase a woman's risk of developing long term health risks, such as weak bones (osteoporosis), raised cholesterol and heart disease. In severe cases, the symptoms may have such an adverse impact that they may meet the legal definition of a disability.

Common symptoms can include:

- Hot flushes
- Heavy/ light periods
- Headaches
- Poor concentration
- Panic attacks
- Difficulty sleeping/ night sweats
- Low mood/ mood swings
- Loss of confidence
- Anxiety

The above is not an exhaustive list and women may experience other symptoms to those shown.

Guidance for Managers

It is recognised that every woman is different, and it is therefore not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines for managers to follow.

It is important that all managers are ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversations and treat any discussion sensitively and professionally. Managers may find it helpful to use the Confidential Discussion Template (see *Appendix A*) when having a one-to-one discussion with a member of the team, if it helps.

As a manager, when having a one-to-one discussion with a member of the team about these issues, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation.
- Find an appropriate room that is confidential.
- Consider how the symptoms listed in this guidance may be impacting on the employee.
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (i.e. reasonable adjustments).
- Agree actions and how to implement them. Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Ensure all agreed adjustments are implemented without delay.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed and by whom.
- Signpost to other sources of support e.g. GP, Employee Wellbeing Service, support groups, etc. (*see Page 7 for more information*).
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor, toilet areas or breakout areas etc.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic it may be necessary to:

- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice.
- Refer the employee to Occupational Health.
- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical.
- Update the action plan and continue to review.

Guidance for Employees

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically and support for women could be considered as detailed below (please note, this is not an exhaustive list). The type of support required will depend on you as an individual and will need a discussion between yourself and your manager. Some options for support could include the following:

Hot flushes

- Request temperature control for the work area, such as a fan on your desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window or away from a heat source.
- Easy access to drinking water.
- Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform e.g. by removing a jacket.
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if your work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if severe hot flushes need managing.

Heavy/light periods

- Have permanent access to toilet facilities
- Request an extra uniform
- Ensure storage space available for a change of clothing i.e. pedestal under desk

Headaches

- Have access to fresh drinking water
- Have a quiet space to work (where reasonable to the job role)
- Have noise reducing headphones to wear in open offices
- Have time out to take medication if needed

Difficulty sleeping

- Ask to be considered for flexible working via the Flexible Working Policy, particularly if you are suffering from lack of sleep. You can find the policy [here](#).

Low mood/ mood swings

- Agree time out from others when required without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a Buddy to talk to
- Identify a time out space to be able to go and 'clear your head'
- Contact AMICA (Confidential Employee Support) on: 0116 254 4538 or contact via the [online form](#)

Loss of confidence

- Have regular quarterly reviews and one-to-ones
- Have regular protected time with your manager to discuss any issues
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work

Poor concentration

- Discuss if there are times of the day when your concentration is better or worse and adjust working pattern accordingly (where reasonable/ appropriate to the job role)
- Review task allocation and workload
- Be provided with books for lists, note board or other memory- assisting equipment
- Reduce interruptions
- Have agreement in place in an open office so that you are not disturbed
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work

Anxiety

- Request counselling services provided by AMICA or through Occupational Health
- Identify a Buddy to talk to
- Be able to have time away from work to undertake relaxation techniques
- Undertake mindfulness exercises such as breathing exercises, gentle exercise (go for a walk)

Panic attacks

- Agree time out from others when required without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a Buddy
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques
- Undertake mindfulness exercises such as breathing exercises, gentle exercise (go for a walk)

Visiting the GP

Employees may find it helpful to keep a record of symptoms including the relevant dates, frequency and the impact they are having. If the symptoms are troubling or are being experienced under the age of 45 then advice should be sought from a GP.

It would be good to discuss with your manager if you have visited your GP, and the next step suggested, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

If you have visited your GP and are being supported by them, it may be useful at this point to undertake an Occupational Health appointment as they can give specific advice regarding the workplace. A GP can offer treatments and suggest lifestyle changes if there are severe menopausal symptoms that interfere with day-to-day life. This can cover a range of options such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), or simply eating a balanced diet and exercise regularly. [Health tools- NHS Choices](#).

menopause Workplace Pledge

Menopause Workplace Pledge

The Council has signed up to the Menopause Workplace Pledge to demonstrate the positive action and commitment it has to anyone affected by the menopause. In signing the pledge the Council agrees to:

- Recognise that the menopause can be an issue in the workplace and women need support
- Talk openly, positively and respectfully about the menopause
- Actively support and inform our employees affected by the menopause.

Menopause 'Buddies' and Support Group

Menopause Buddies

These are members of staff who currently come along to the Menopause Support Group. They are happy to provide one-one-support, confidentially if needed, to any member of staff- man or woman.

Menopause Support Group (Hot Stuff)

Some employees may find talking about their symptoms or just talking about how they are feeling, may help. The Council's Menopause Support Group (Hot Stuff) could be helpful or alternatively, talking to a Menopause Buddy (*see page 6 for further information*) could provide one-to-one support. These options are also available for male employees who wish to speak about a member of their family, a friend or a colleague.

If you would like to speak to someone, please contact equality@charnwood.gov.uk.

How to talk to the GP about Menopause

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point and it is getting in the way of enjoying your life, it's time to talk to the doctor.

Below are some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment:

1. **Don't wait** - It's all too common for women to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as part of life, but if they are affecting you then there are things that you can do, and support is available.
2. **Prepare for your appointment** - it's easier for your doctor to understand what is going on if you provide them with all the information. It may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition are not always available or accurate, plus your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. Your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you based on your symptoms. You may find it useful to visit the [NICE Guidelines](#) to support your preparation.
3. **Keep a list of your symptoms** - your menstrual cycle, hot flushes how you are feeling, and any changes you have noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it and it's more likely that together you will find the right solution faster. Also, if you have any preference

about how you manage your symptoms tell them that too e.g. if you would like to try Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or not.

4. **Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about the menopause** - they are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery and can help you find the best person to speak to- it might not be your usual GP, as a different GP may have had special training in the subject.
5. **Ask for a longer appointment** - If you do not think the standard appointment will be long enough then see if you can book a double appointment, quite a lot of surgeries will allow this.
6. **Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion** - if you do not feel that you have received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Do not be put off, you know how you are feeling and how it's affecting you.
7. **Ask if there is a Menopause clinic in your area** - Occasionally, there are regional clinics specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area and you think this will be helpful, ask for a referral.
8. **Take a friend or partner with you** - Your friend or partner will know how the symptoms are affecting you, they could support you at the appointment and find out how they can support you.

What to expect from your doctor:

They should	They should not
<p>✓ Talk about your lifestyle, how to manage symptoms and long-term health</p>	<p>✗ Put it down to 'that time of life'. Yes, menopause is a natural stage but please do not feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help.</p>
<p>✓ Provide advice on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) and other non-medical options</p>	<p>✗ Say that they don't prescribe HRT. It is up to you what you want to try and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history.</p>
<p>✓ Talk to you about safety and effectiveness of any treatment</p>	<p>✗ Impose unnecessary time restrictions e.g. they will only prescribe this once or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation and if your symptoms persist, you will need help to manage them.</p>

How can menopause symptoms be managed?

Not all women will require assistance to help alleviate their symptoms however where this is not the case, there are a number of treatment options available including:

- Medical options such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) - tablets, skin patches, gels and implants that relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing oestrogen. If HRT isn't suitable, other medications may be prescribed.
- Lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy, balanced diet, exercising regularly, stopping smoking, reducing alcohol and caffeine consumption, managing stress and having sufficient calcium and vitamin D. Employees should consider how their actions may be impacting on their symptoms (e.g. drinking alcohol may increase the likelihood of hot sweats and disturbed sleep, etc.);
- Complementary and herbal remedies such as St John's Wort, Milk Thistle, Sage and Red Clover. Advice should be sought from a [medical herbalist](#) before trying any of these remedies;
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - a talking therapy that can help with low mood and anxiety;
- Self-help measures such as getting plenty of rest, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, talking to others about what they are experiencing, and practising relaxation techniques such as yoga, tai chi or mindfulness.

GP's can refer individuals to a menopause specialist if their symptoms don't improve after trying treatment or if the individual is unable to take HRT.

Further support, advice & links

AMICA Employee Support (confidential telephone helpline): 0116 254 4538 (open 365 days a year from 8.30am to 8.30pm) or contact via the [online form](#)

CBC Wellbeing Site: Workplace support to improve your wellbeing.
<http://intranet.charnwood.local/Wellbeing@Work/SitePages/Home.aspx>

Charnwood Walking Maps: To support your physical and mental wellbeing.
<https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/walkingforhealth>

Charnwood Adult Sport Activities: To support your physical and mental wellbeing.
https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/adult_sports

Government Report: researched by the University of Leicester School of Business.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-onwomens-economic-participation>

Henpicked: This provides an overview of menopause. You can find out more at <https://henpicked.net/>

Information on hysterectomy: This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. You can find out more at <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk>

Menopause Matters: An independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause. <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>

Menopause Information: This provides an overview of menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>

National Institute of Medical Herbalists: This provides advice on herbal remedies <http://www.nimh.org.uk/>

NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/video/Pages/early-menopause.aspx>

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

<https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/menopause/Pages/Menopausehome.aspx>

NICE guidelines: Impartial menopause information from National Institute for health and care excellence <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/Menopause>

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI): POI Information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>

Confidential Discussion Template

Employee:
Manager:
Date of meeting:

Summary of Discussion
Agreed Actions/ Adjustments

Date of review meeting (if needed):
Signed (Employee):
Signed (Manager):