

## Tips for Managers to Support Employees with Menopausal Symptoms



### 1. Educate yourself about menopause & understand the symptoms

#### What is menopause?

The menopause is experienced by most women, usually between the ages of 45-55, although some women can experience it earlier than this, due to 'premature menopause' or surgery.

Menopause is the transition from the reproductive to non-reproductive phase of life and can cause significant hormonal changes, affecting physical, emotional and social aspects of a female's life.

#### The three phases of menopause are:

**Pre-menopause** when menstruation still occurs (regardless of regularity) and females considered to be in their reproductive years. Some hormonal changes may be occurring, but there are no noticeable body changes.

**Peri-menopause** is the actual time of transition, when hormone levels begin to fluctuate and occurs well before menopause is officially hit. Women enter this stage some 8 to 10 years ahead of menopause - the average age being 45. Most women will notice peri-menopause symptoms in their 40's. During this time oestrogen and progesterone levels start to fluctuate and this can result in many troublesome symptoms, particularly flushes and sweats. Oestrogen and progesterone levels can also go up and down more sporadically than a normal 28-day cycle, which can cause irregular periods and other symptoms. During the final stages of peri-menopause, your body will produce less and less oestrogen.

**Post-menopause** officially kicks in when the ovaries produce so little oestrogen that eggs are no longer released. This also causes your period to stop.

#### What are the symptoms of menopause?

It's not just about having hot flushes! There are over 40 symptoms of menopause and 80% of women will have symptoms whether it is hot flushes, brain fog, memory issues, difficulties concentrating, anxiety or moods swings. These feelings can be disconcerting and contribute to a lack of self-confidence. Insomnia, which affects a lot of women results in tiredness at work. Around one in four women have severe symptoms which detrimentally affect their work life, forcing them into considering giving up work, with 10% actually leaving the workplace. Being more honest and understanding about what it feels like to work with these symptoms will make it much easier to bear for your female colleagues. The average age of menopause is 51. The average age of peri-menopause (the phase leading up to the end of the female reproductive years) is 45. Therefore, menopause is a midlife experience.



### 2. Engage with your colleagues

Consider how menopause aware your organisation is. Does your organisation have an open culture in which women can talk about the menopause and the challenges they face? Are the health, safety and wellbeing of menopausal employees effectively managed? How can women be supported to ensure productivity levels are managed for individuals, their colleagues and the organisation?



### 3. Discuss it

It shouldn't feel embarrassing or stressful to talk about the menopause and how it can potentially make work life more challenging, but in reality of course, these feelings can be difficult to raise with a manager or work peers. Do what you can to make women feel more confident and able to talk about it with their colleagues.

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### 4. Don't joke about it!

Sometimes humour is a wonderful ice breaker and a great way to get people to talk about sensitive issues. And while that tactic might work for some women, be aware that joking about their menopausal symptoms may also have a detrimental effect on some women's mental wellbeing. We've all heard the rather sexist comments about 'women's time of the month' or 'pregnancy brain' and further comments about hot flushes won't help.



### 5. Raise awareness

Offer workshops and seminars for HR, managers and employees to help them understand the symptoms better. But whatever the size of your organisation, you can do something to show your employees you care.



### 6. Be adaptable with practical support

There are some simple things which employers can do to make the menopausal symptoms women feel bearable. For example, a simple desk fan can help with hot flushes. A drinks dispenser can help women stay cool. Providing a proper work/life balance rather than encouraging overtime can help alleviate anxiety and tiredness. Flexible working arrangements can also reduce stress. Being adaptable to your employee needs, as well as compassionate about what they're going through, will also help to improve their attendance and efficiency.



### 7. Include men in the conversation too

Changing the culture at work so that both men and women feel able to discuss the menopause, or any other serious health condition, should involve everyone – not just women. Helping male colleagues understand how women can feel during the menopause can make all the difference. You may find male co-workers say it helps them understand what's going on at home with their partners, wives or mums too, which can only make us more understanding and compassionate human beings.



### 8. Support time out for treatment

Women no longer need to suffer in silence as there are treatment options available for women experiencing symptoms, from simple over the counter solutions, to HRT (hormone replacement therapy,) non-hormonal medication, CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) and some alternative therapies. About 10 per cent of women actually stop work because of their severe menopausal symptoms, which may seem drastic but highlights the serious impact the menopause can have. Be supportive of any time-out employees need to seek medical support.



### 9. Encourage a good work/life balance

We spend the majority of our lives at work and balancing our busy work life with our families and health can be really tricky, especially when going through the menopause. Many of us can feel torn between work and home, particularly now technology means we're now more easily contactable than ever before. We expect our employees to be focused and productive while at work but by encouraging them to get the right work/life balance will protect them from potentially burning out, and for women, exacerbating their menopausal symptoms.



### 10. Know what the national guidelines say

In September 2021 EMAS (the European Menopause and Andropause Society) released a position statement. In this they state that Menopause is now considered to be an important gender and age equality issue, and dealing with its consequences should be part of maintaining an inclusive work environment.

For more on information contact: [themenopausehub.ie/menopause-in-the-workplace](https://themenopausehub.ie/menopause-in-the-workplace)