

Menopause:

# Guiding principles for Employees and their Managers

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## Foreword

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As the Gender Diversity Champion for the Civil Service, one of my top priorities is to build a more inclusive culture and improve the lived experience for women.

Menopause is not a new issue, but it is one that has always silently affected women in the workplace. Despite much progress on gender equality in recent years, a stigma has remained around the topic of menopause. Individuals can be reluctant to talk about it - let alone with their managers in the workplace. Starting the conversation, and adopting a more supportive approach, will bring about positive change for individuals, and for the Civil Service as a whole. This is important because workplaces can often lack the empathy and support needed, as well as the practical support for both colleagues and managers to help make a difference.

The Cross-  
commitment to inclusion in the workplace. The guiding principles set out in the document aim to raise awaren



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## Introduction

The Civil Service and NHS England/Improvement have a commitment to be the most inclusive employers in the UK, and we have made real progress in gender diversity, most notably on the representation of women in senior grades and roles. However, there is a growing commitment for us to do better with policies to support and understand the lived experience of women. Whilst pregnancy, motherhood and family friendly policies are becoming woven into the language and culture of our working environment, there is little mentioned about menopause. It is important for line managers to recognise the particular needs of women at this life stage.

The menopause is not an issue widely discussed in workplaces as there are often connotations of this being a taboo subject for women, with associations of discomfort and stigma. The time has come for change and we should normalise menopause as a workplace conversation and encourage discussion about the broad range of symptoms; in addition to educating managers and colleagues on what menopause means in practice. We know that some women can feel

## What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Every experience will be different, and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40 years. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

**Menopause:** A biological stage in a woman's life when you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

**Perimenopause:** The time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen.

**Premature menopause:** Can happen naturally, or because of illness or surgery.

**Andropause - The Male Menopause.** (*Note the Andropause is not covered in this guidance*)

Although for many women this is a natural life change, for some women the menopause may be medically induced. Surgery such as a hysterectomy and/or chemotherapy can affect women at younger age groups, creating severe symptoms.

## What are the symptoms?

A GP can usually confirm whether a person is menopausal based on the symptoms, and a blood test to measure hormone levels may be carried out.

The physical and psychological symptoms of menopause may be interrelated and can create a night-time can disrupt sleep, leading to tiredness, irritability and loss of focus during the working day.

While symptoms vary greatly, they commonly include:

- fatigue
- insomnia;
- hot flushes and/or night sweats;
- clumsiness;
- irritability;
- reduced concentration;
- loss of confidence;
- mood swings;
- palpitations;
- anxiety and worry;
- dizziness;
- memory loss, problems with recall and/or brain fog;
- depression;
- headaches;
- recurrent urinary tract infections; and
- joint stiffness, aches and pains

On average, the symptoms can continue for up to four years after their last period, but around 10 per cent of individuals continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years.

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Each of these symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work. Organisations have a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees and therefore commits to ensuring that adjustments and additional support are available where appropriate to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.



## Managing confidentiality

Managers should remember that the effects of the menopause may result in the need to treat a colleague differently from other staff for a period. It is good practice to discuss with the employee how they wish any questions from their peers/colleagues to be managed. Confidentiality must be respected unless the employee indicates that they do not mind their team being informed in a tactful and respectful way.

## The working environment

The working environment may inadvertently exacerbate menopausal symptoms and increase discomfort at work. It is also important to consider the culture which includes the values and behaviours of the workplace as well as the physical space. Working in a team which demonstrates respect and consideration can mitigate the potential for negative experiences during the menopause such as physical or emotional issues.

The main types of workplace related issues are due to:

- High workplace temperatures, humidity
- Poor ventilation
- Perceived overcrowding and noise; no access to a quiet or restful space
- Problems with accessing rest or toilet facilities
- Lack of access to drinking water
- Dryness and lack of natural light

It is important for organisations to consider the working environment and to explore what simple, practical steps could be taken to ensure the workplace is comfortable and promotes an inclusive and supportive culture.



## Workplace adjustments

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