**Croydon Council**

**Menopause Guidance to Support the Workforce**

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1. **Introduction**

This guidance is aimed to assist line managers and employees who:

* Need information or guidance around the menopause
* Need suggestions regarding resources or support that may assist women
1. **What is the menopause?**
* The menopause is a natural part of aging for women and denotes a biological stage of life in which a women stops menstruating. Usually menopause is defined as having occurred when a women has not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for women reaching the menopause naturally).
* Some women may experience a ‘surgical menopause’ much earlier if they have a hysterectomy, or treatment for some cancers.
* The average age for women to experience the menopause naturally in the UK is 51, however it usually occurs anytime between 45 and 55 years of age.
* In some cases the menopause can occur before the age of 40 and symptoms of the menopause can occur up to five years before the menopause and beyond (post menopause), so from a women’s early 40 ‘s up to her mid 60’s.
* Around **30 – 60%** of women experience intermittent **physical and/or psychological symptoms.** These are associated with the decrease in the body’s production of the hormone oestrogen.
* **25% of women currently going through the menopause have considered leaving work due to their symptoms. (**survey by ‘Tonight’ and Wellbeing of Women 2016)
* Without treatment, most menopause symptoms gradually stop naturally.
* This usually happens two to five years after the symptoms start, although some women experience symptoms for many more years.
* A premature menopause can occur with periods stopping before the age of 40 either naturally or as a result of a medical condition or treatment.

**3. What are the symptoms of the menopause?**

* **Every woman’s experience of the menopause will be different** but some of the most common symptoms that women may experience are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Physical Symptoms** | **Description/Impact in the workplace** |
| * Hot Flushes
 | * Can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downwards.
* Most flushes only last a few minutes and the woman may sweat and the face, neck and chest become flushed.
* Severe flushes can cause sweat to soak through clothing and cause embarrassment
 |
| * Sleep Disruption
 | * Can be caused by night sweats, although can also be caused by anxiety women feel during the menopause.
* Sleep loss can cause irritability or lack of concentration at work.
 |
| * Tiredness
 | * + Can be caused by sleep disruption
	+ Can lead to headaches
 |
| * Difficulty Concentrating/Reduced Cognitive function
 | * Can be caused by sleep disruption
* Can cause problems with memory and confidence.
* For example, doing presentations may become more difficult.
* May cause also problems meeting deadlines.
 |
| * Irregular/Heavy/Painful Periods
 | * Some periods may last longer.
* Most women will also experience irregular periods, which are harder to prepare for.
* Can cause embarrassment if women start periods unexpectedly or experience heavy bleeding.
* Periods may become more painful and other gynaecological issues could develop.
 |
| * Urinary Problems
 | * It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.
* This may be difficult for women who are part of long meetings or working shifts.
 |
| **Psychological Symptoms** |
| * Mood Swings/Emotional Disturbance
* Anxiety/Panic Attacks
* Depression
* Lack of confidence
 |

1. **What can managers do to assist women who may be experiencing symptoms of the menopause?**

**Talk about it**

* **In response to a TUC survey** over a third of women cited embarrassment or difficulties in discussing the menopause with their employers, and one in five spoke of criticism, ridicule and even harassment from their managers when the subject was broached.
* **Be aware that** not every woman will be willing to discuss the issue with their manager!
* However the issue may come up in other ways (via sickness absence; requests for flexible working; managing performance etc.).
* The conversation needs to remain **practical** at all times, rather than any discussion of the employee’s symptoms.  This would alleviate any embarrassment on both sides.  The employee is probably more likely to initiate the conversation than the manager.

**How might the conversation start?**

***For example: Employee***

*I’ve been feeling really tired lately I think that it might be the menopause.*

***Manager***

*Thank you for sharing this with me. What practical support can I or the council offer to make work more comfortable for you? Is the temperature comfortable for you at your desk? We could talk about changing your start time?*

* **Regular informal conversations** between managers and employees may be a valuable way to:
	+ - * **Acknowledge that** this is a normal stage of life
			* **Discuss what adjustments** can be made to assist
			* **Identify support at work** to help women remain productive
			* **Encourage** them to discuss health concerns with their GP
1. **Practical support that can be offered**
* **Workplace temperature and ventilation**

Find a way of providing a temperature that suits your colleague. If office temperature cannot be adapted, consider if the employee is able to purchase a USB fan or re-locate their workstation in another part of the office or building that may be more comfortable.

* **Flexible/agile working patterns may be of assistance**

The council is by default working in an ‘agile’ way. It should therefore not be difficult for employees to be able start later or work from other locations (home or other buildings) if there are issues with sleep patterns and tiredness.

* **Access to cold drinking water**

This should be provided in all work locationsincluding off site venues.

* **Where uniforms are compulsory flexibility is helpful**

This might include the use of thermally comfortable fabrics, optional layers and being allowed to remove neckties or jackets. There should also be changing facilities.

* **Where work requires constant standing or prolonged sitting**

Having access to a rest room or break area would be helpful as well as space for women to move around in sedentary roles.

* **In customer/public facing roles**

It may help to have access to a quiet room/rest room for a short break so to manage a severe hot flush.

* **Medical Advice**

If there are severe issues impacting the employee, consulting [Occupational Health](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/your-health-and-wellbeing/occupational-health-referrals) may be appropriate (contact [HR consultancy](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/hr/contacting-hr) for advice)

**And, finally….**

It is important to be aware that the menopause is a natural and temporary stage in women’s lives and that not all women experience significant symptoms.

1. **Resources/ Further Information**
2. NHS website www.nhs.uk/Livewell/menopause/Pages/
* [NHS Choices – menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* <http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
* The Daisy Network – <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>
* Healthtalk.org – <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/later-life/menopause/topics>
* Women’s Health Concerns – <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/focus-series/menopause/>
* The Menopause Exchange – <http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/>
* [Wellbeing of Women – the menopause](http://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/the-menopause/)
* NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management – <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
* [Supporting Working Women Through the Menopause – Guidance for Union Reps (TUC)](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_menopause_0.pdf)
* [Guidance on Menopause and the Workplace – Faculty of Occupational Medicine (Royal College of Physicians)](http://www.fom.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Guidance-on-menopause-and-the-workplace-v6.pdf)
* Davies, S.C. “Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, 2014, The Health of the 51%: Women” London: Department of Health (2015) Chapter 9: Psychosocial factors and the menopause: the impact of the menopause on personal and working life. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officer-annual-report-pausehome.aspx NHS website www.nhs.uk/Livewell/menopause/Pages/

nopausehome.aspx

***This guidance was developed by members of the Women’s Staff Network Group, and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Network Group in conjunction with Human Resources using resources from the TUC and the Faculty of Occupational Health Medicine.***



