



The Prince's  
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Business Network



**Toolkit**

# **MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE**

October 2022

**A practical business guide for  
HR, Wellbeing and Occupational  
Health Practitioners**



# TOOLKIT

## **MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE: A PRACTICAL BUSINESS GUIDE FOR HR, WELLBEING AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS**

There are over 10 million over 50s at work in the UK today, a third of the workforce, including 4.4 million women aged 50 to 64. The average age for reaching menopause is 51, so many of those 4.4 million will be women transitioning through menopause, making this a key issue for the modern workplace. As we emerge from the pandemic, businesses are facing critical staff shortages and a cost-of-living crisis. Older workers represent an overlooked source of talent which business can no longer afford to ignore. Making sure that women do not leave work due to menopause is now more important than ever.

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### Introduction

The UK workforce is ageing. People want and need to work for longer and employers need to draw more effectively on an older workforce.

For women this is particularly true – they have been the major drivers of growth in the older

workforce over the last decade. Both social and policy changes have been at work here. Many more women now return to work after childbirth, and the reform of the pension system has extended women's working lives. There are now 4.4 million working women aged 50 to 64,<sup>1</sup> and many will be transitioning through menopause.

In earlier decades menopause was a taboo subject and was perceived to be experienced after women had retired or left the workforce early to take up caring responsibilities. This is no longer the case and now menopause is very much a workplace issue. All women will transition through menopause, and most women experience symptoms which impact on their quality of life in some way. But with the right support, those symptoms can be effectively managed, and women can continue successfully at work.

Despite increasing awareness of menopause, it continues to be a reason for women exiting the



labour market before they want to. New research suggests that women who experience at least one severe menopause symptom at the age of 50 are 43% more likely to have quit their jobs by the age of 55 and 23% more likely to have reduced their hours at work.<sup>2</sup> Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) suggests that almost one million women may have already left work due to menopause.<sup>3</sup> Further evidence suggests that a similar number are still considering quitting,<sup>4</sup> although the current cost-of-living crisis is also pushing older workers to consider staying longer in work.<sup>5</sup>

Leading employers are finding that it makes business sense to support employees during menopause, building retention of a key workplace demographic and retaining valuable knowledge, skills and experience. But everyone's experience of menopause is unique, and employers need to consider a range of actions to provide effective support.

The experience of these leading employers has shown that often quite simple actions, such as education and awareness-raising, can make a real difference. In this way, we can normalise menopause at work so that it becomes as unremarkable a topic as risk assessment during pregnancy or a long-term medical condition.

New research is providing fresh insights into the realities of women's experience of menopause in the workplace. This toolkit includes research findings from academics at the leading edge of inquiry into female reproductive health and its impact on the workplace. It also showcases how employers at the forefront of the age-friendly workplace agenda are rising to the challenge of supporting their older female staff and suggests frameworks for action based on best practice.

Business in the Community (BITC) aims to make the UK the world leader for responsible business. Our work on age provides employers with the tools and insight they need to support a growing older workforce and shares best practice to promote productive, age-inclusive workplaces in which people of all ages can thrive.

## Acknowledgements

BITC would like to thank our academic partners, Professor Jo Brewis at The Open University and Dr Vanessa Beck at The University of Bristol, for their support in the development of this toolkit. We would also like to thank BITC members who have shared their evidence and experience to help us identify the practical business actions that really make a difference.

## What is Menopause?

Menopause is the transitional period during which women move out of the reproductive phase of their lives.<sup>6</sup> However, its impact extends beyond the biological context, with a range of psychological and social impacts relating to the broader experiences of women in later life. Menopause becomes interrelated with women's experiences in the workplace, in their families and as they take up socially traditional female roles such as caring.

Cultural factors are also at play, with different groups adopting differing interpretations of menopause as a medical or a more natural process. There is also some evidence of variation in experience on a racial and ethnic basis, possibly indicating that Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse women may enter menopause earlier than other women. We hope current research will continue to explore these themes further.

Unlike pregnancy and childbirth, menopause is experienced by most women, and some transgender and non-binary people assigned as female at birth.

However, it is important to understand that menopause does not just affect those who go through it. The effects are felt at work, in relationships, in families and in society as a whole. So, when seeking to raise awareness of the issue, it is important to include and take account of the perspectives of younger women and of men too.

## Onset of Menopause

Menopause usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, but around 1 in

100 women will experience menopause before they reach 40.<sup>7</sup>

Symptoms can start before reaching menopause (perimenopause) and can persist for several years afterwards (post-menopause). Although menopause is defined medically as an event, in the workplace it is more appropriately viewed as a transition as symptoms are typically experienced over a number of years.

At any age, women undergoing certain medical procedures, such as removal of ovaries or cancer treatments, can experience a medically induced menopause, which may be both sudden and severe.<sup>8</sup>

## Symptoms

Most women will experience menopausal symptoms. These can vary extensively, and different women experience both different symptoms and different levels of severity of symptoms. Evidence suggests that around 80% of women experience menopausal symptoms which interfere with their quality of life<sup>9</sup> and 25% of women describe their symptoms as being severe.<sup>10</sup>

Common symptoms include:<sup>11,12</sup>

- hot flushes – intermittent short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, which can make your skin red and sweaty.
- night sweats and difficulty sleeping.
- problems with concentration – sometimes called ‘brain fog’.
- headaches and migraines.
- mood changes, low mood and anxiety.
- palpitations – heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable.
- joint stiffness, aches and pains.
- recurrent urinary tract infections.



Some of these symptoms may be exacerbated through a domino effect, with one symptom causing another, for example night sweats leading to problems sleeping.<sup>13</sup>

Always be aware that menopause is a medical condition. The advice provided in this toolkit relates to practical actions to support women in the workplace. Any individual who is facing issues with symptoms should always be advised to seek medical advice from a GP.

## How menopause impacts women in the workplace

### Impact on work

Our research partners at Bristol and The Open University have found that significant numbers of women find symptoms associated with the menopause transition problematic at work. Their research<sup>14</sup> has found that the top five menopausal symptoms reported as having a significant impact on women at work are:

- fatigue 40% of respondents
- hot flushes 35%
- focus/concentration 34%
- anxiety and worry 32%
- insomnia 30%

Evidence of any negative impact of menopausal symptoms on performance at work is not conclusive. However, poor working environments and high levels of stress make symptoms more difficult to deal with. The most challenging aspects of work to cope with are:

- workplace environment including high temperatures and poor ventilation.
- short or changing deadlines.
- long hours.
- high workload.
- dealing with customers or clients.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence shows that in response, women may:

- hide and/or self-manage their symptoms.
- develop a degree of paranoia about how their performance might be affected.

- work harder to compensate.<sup>16</sup>

The ITV Wellbeing of Women Survey<sup>17</sup> found that 50% of women said that work made menopausal symptoms worse and 25% had considered giving up work as a result.

## Attitudes to menopause at work

Evidence generally suggests a negative attitude to menopause at work. Women report lack of support and unhelpful attitudes from colleagues and managers. Our research partners<sup>18</sup> found that:

- only 37% of women said they could talk about menopause at work, and then only with close colleagues in private conversations.
- over 60% said menopause is not well understood.
- 30% said that their experience of discussion of menopause at work was that it was joked about.
- nearly 50% agreed or somewhat agreed that menopause is a taboo subject.

## Disclosure of menopause at work

Attitudes are very important as evidence shows that women are often reluctant to disclose their menopause status at work. Our research partners<sup>19</sup> found that:

- only 46% of survey respondents had disclosed their menopause status at work.
- only 24% had disclosed to their line manager and less than 3% to an occupational health professional.
- only 16% of disclosures had been made to men.

The primary reasons for not disclosing menopause status at work were:

- it is a private issue.
- I will be perceived negatively.
- my abilities would be questioned.<sup>20</sup>



Disclosure should always be a matter of personal choice. However, if women feel prevented from disclosing their menopause status due to attitudes of colleagues and managers, they will be prevented from accessing the support which is available in the workplace, or seeking more individual solutions.

Businesses need to respond to these challenges by providing and publicising appropriate support for women, raising awareness and making space for conversations about menopause in the workplace. Practical action steps are considered in detail in the later section, 'What employers can do to help' on page 6.

## Why menopause is important for employers

### Retaining older workers

- One in three workers are now over 50.<sup>21</sup> As we emerge from the pandemic, employers are facing significant shortages of talent.<sup>22</sup> Older workers are an untapped reserve of skills and experience, and retaining them helps employers retain crucial knowledge and skills within organisations.
- The biggest increase in employment over the last 30 years has been for women over 50, reflecting both increased female economic participation and the unification and raising of the State Pension Age. The employment rate for women aged 50 to 64 has risen from 47% in 1992 to 67% in 2022.<sup>23</sup>
- There are now 4.4 million women aged 50 to 64 in work.<sup>24</sup> Given that the average age for

entering the menopause is 51, this means that there are potentially some four million menopausal women in the workforce. Look at your employee data to understand how many menopausal women may be in your workforce. BITC's toolkit [Getting started on age: from data to action](#) can help you with this.

## Reducing gender pay and pension gaps

- The gender pay gap is widest for women aged 50 to 59.<sup>25</sup> Action to reduce the gap where it is highest will have a significant impact on reducing the gap overall.
- Women can struggle to balance their experience of menopause with engagement in the workplace. If they end up taking career breaks, reducing their hours or missing out on opportunities for progression, their income will fall and a company's gender pay gap may well be adversely affected. The same factors drive the gender pension gap which currently stands at 38%, twice the gender pay gap.<sup>26</sup>
- Approaches designed to help menopausal women remain in quality jobs, with access to training and development, will be important to strategies aiming to reduce the gender pay and pension gaps in UK businesses.



## Reducing business costs

- Recruitment, training and turnover are key costs for business. Improving retention rates is an important way to control these costs.
- Improved health and wellbeing will also improve productivity and reduce costs from absence.
- Women experiencing menopause transition report that work makes menopausal symptoms worse. Some find the stress of work too much and, if they are not properly supported, may give up work altogether.<sup>27</sup>
- Menopause is also experienced during a broader transitional period for women in later life when they may be taking on additional

caring responsibilities or have teenage or young adult children still at or leaving home. These wider pressures can add to the risk of early departure from the workforce.

- Employee turnover costs are high. Replacing staff incurs costs from exit procedures and lost productivity while posts are vacant. Research consultancy Oxford Economics found it costs an average of £30,000 to replace an employee and train a replacement to the same level.<sup>28</sup>

## Reducing business risk

- Businesses which fail to support women during menopause put themselves at legal risk. There have already been a number of successful employment tribunal claims in relation to the menopause.
- Under Health and Safety legislation, employers have a duty of care to ensure the health, welfare and wellbeing of their employees.<sup>29</sup>
- Under The Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees, and they are required to treat employees with respect in terms of their age, sex and gender identity. The menopause is a female condition (also affecting some trans and non-binary people assigned female at birth), so any detrimental treatment related to the menopause could represent direct or indirect discrimination.<sup>30</sup>
- Under The Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees on the basis of disability. If a woman were to experience such serious symptoms due to menopause that they amount to a mental or physical impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on her ability to carry out day-to-day activities, this could be classed as a disability under the Act.<sup>31</sup>

## What employers can do to help

### Awareness-raising and communication

In order to break the taboo of menopause, employers need to raise awareness of and normalise menopause at work. Understanding of menopause is low across the workforce. Awareness-raising needs to be directed at the

whole workforce, including women in or approaching menopause, younger women and male staff.

Employers need to encourage the development of organisational values within which menopause is treated as a natural process and those transitioning through menopause are confident to request support and adjustments to their working conditions. Women also need to know what support is available. Studies indicate that support from others is important and that women are more likely to speak up about symptoms where they feel they have empathetic colleagues or managers.<sup>32</sup>

Plan a programme of awareness-raising on menopause at work, for example a wellbeing or occupational health campaign, seminars or sign-posting to online resources. It has been found that sharing videos about symptoms and experiences of menopause can be a particularly effective initial step.

## Environmental and physical adjustments

The physical environment can worsen menopausal symptoms and increase stress at work. Problems are often caused by high workplace temperatures, poor ventilation, inadequate rest or toilet facilities and even simple matters such as lack of access to cold drinking water.

Evidence shows<sup>33</sup> that where the following are provided, the experience of menopause in the workplace is improved:

- fans and good ventilation.
- temperature control.
- comfortable toilet facilities including access to women-only showers if possible.
- cold drinking water.
- appropriate clothing – if uniforms are required, options should be available which are light, layered and non-synthetic.
- rest areas.
- natural light.
- reduction in noise exposure.

## Policies and procedures

Make sure your policies and procedures include provision to support those transitioning through menopause. In a survey by our research partners,<sup>34</sup> it was found that:

- 60% of respondents said that their workplace did not provide any information about the menopause.
- only 10% said that their organisation had a menopause policy or guidance.

While data suggests that now nearer 25% of employers have a menopause policy or guidelines,<sup>35</sup> new research indicates that two-thirds of FTSE 100 companies have failed to publish the menopause support they offer. If you develop a menopause policy or guidance, make sure everyone knows about it and can access it.<sup>36</sup>

Policies and procedures might include any of the strategies discussed in this section.

## Absence policies

It is important that your sickness absence policy accommodates those experiencing menopause transition. Record any sickness absences that are related to the menopause as an ongoing health issue instead of a series of short-term absences. This will ensure that your sickness absence procedure will not be unnecessarily implemented and will provide peace of mind to your employees when they discuss their health needs.

**Nearly one in three respondents to a survey by the TUC reported management criticism of menopause-related sick leave.<sup>37</sup>**

## Flexible working

Women may suffer from fatigue, anxiety and depression because of menopausal symptoms. Be accommodating to flexible working requests that will help those transitioning through menopause to manage their health issues. Flexible working can lead to a reduction in absenteeism and an increase in wellbeing and productivity and build retention in your older workforce.

Remember that menopause is a transition and that experiences can change over time. Be prepared to implement flexible working in a responsive manner. Evidence shows that flexible working arrangements may only be required temporarily.<sup>38</sup>

Flexibility and other adjustments to working patterns might include:

- the ability to rearrange tasks and meetings on bad days.
- allowing women to take breaks where needed.
- access to flexible working hours and/or working from home, especially on bad days or when someone has slept poorly.
- allowing time off if required or leaving work early, perhaps to resume working later in the day or evening at home.
- ensuring time is made available during the working day to attend medical appointments.

## Training for line managers

Provide training for line managers to ensure they understand how menopausal symptoms may affect women, trans and non-binary staff, and the policies and procedures you have in place to support those transitioning through menopause. Training should include development of listening skills and sensitivity, and guidance on how to have difficult conversations.<sup>39</sup> Videos can be very helpful, and these can be readily found online.

Encourage line managers to seek support from specialists in HR and occupational health units if they are uncertain on how to approach a menopause issue in their team.

**45% of respondents to a TUC survey said their managers did not recognise problems associated with the menopause.<sup>40</sup>**

## Support groups

Supportive organisational cultures will allow the provision of informal support for mid-life women (and others) during menopause transition. This can be an easy way to make a start, drawing on a peer support approach to set up a women's network or a menopause café, an informal group where

women in menopause can meet and share in a safe space. Other options include online discussion forums and helplines. Once formed, groups can act as focus groups, providing information and feedback on policies, plus champion the issue in your business.

## Specialist support for those transitioning through menopause

Specialist support has been found to be effective in making the experience of work better for menopausal women. Educational programmes can help with managing symptoms and provide advice on diet and exercise, and also support women as they prepare for the possible consequences of menopause transition at work.<sup>41</sup>

Cognitive behavioural therapy has also been found to be beneficial in controlling symptoms and has been effectively offered by employers participating in research programmes.<sup>42, 43</sup>

These forms of support might be offered in-house or by external independent experts, perhaps through an employee assistance programme.

Mid-life MOTs are also very helpful to provide space for conversations between employers and employees in mid-life, and allow people to consider how their work might need to adjust to their circumstances. Advice on implementing a mid-life MOT can be found in BITC's Toolkit [The Mid-Life MOT: helping employees navigate mid-life](#).

## Business best practice on menopause

A number of BITC members have become trailblazer companies on menopause, making significant progress in what has for so long been a taboo subject. Actions taken include:

- developing a definition, policy and/or guidance on menopause, and adding menopause to policies and procedures eg sickness absence.
- recognising the business case for menopause support and taking action to break down stigma and build understanding.
- introduction of reasonable adjustments to support those experiencing menopause, such as changes to the work environment and job design, including flexible and hybrid working.



- development of support networks including menopause ambassadors, champions and employee groups.

BITC members can access a [case study resource](#) providing detailed information on actions taken by leading members via their member pages. If you are not a member, [join us](#) to connect with our network of responsible business members and access our member resources.

### Resources

BITC has produced a range of toolkits and factsheets designed to help you retain, train and recruit older workers which you can find on our [Age page](#) or on [our website](#) where you can filter for age resources. BITC resources you may find helpful when developing support for employees transitioning through menopause include:

[Becoming an age friendly employer](#)

[Getting started on age: from data to action](#)

[The Mid-Life MOT: getting started - a guide for individuals and smaller businesses](#)

[The Mid-Life MOT: Helping employees navigate mid-life - a toolkit for Senior & HR Managers to drive the benefits of retaining older workers](#)

You can also find helpful guidance online from official sources, BITC members and partners, and other menopause organisations:

[Government Equalities Office report on menopause and women's economic participation](#)

[Phoenix Group/DWP 50+ Choices Employer Taskforce Report 'Menopause and Employment: how to enable fuller working lives'](#)

[NHS website menopause pages](#)

[Lecture given by Professor Jo Brewis at The Open University on menopause in the workplace](#)

[The British Menopause Society](#)

[Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace](#)

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Talk to one of our expert team [today](#) to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further, and drive lasting global change.

## ENDNOTES

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