



Menopause in the Workplace: a practical guide

Introduction

The UK workforce is ageing. There are 11 million over 50s at work in the UK today, a third of the workforce, including 4.6 million women aged 50 to 64.1 As the average age for reaching menopause is 51, many of that number will be transitioning through menopause, making this a key issue for today's workplace. The UK is facing both skills shortages and rising economic inactivity – people not in work or looking for work. Older workers represent an often overlooked source of talent, and making sure that women do not leave work due to menopause is more important than ever.

In earlier decades menopause was a taboo subject, experienced after women had retired or left the workforce early to take up caring responsibilities. This is clearly no longer the case and now menopause is very much a workplace issue. All women will transition through menopause and most women experience symptoms. 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 leaving work before they want to. Women who experience at least one severe menopause symptom at the age of 50 are 43% more likely to quit their job by the age of 55, with 23% more likely to have reduced their hours.² Around a million women may already be at risk of quitting work due to a lack of menopause support.³ Other key trends highlighted by Business in the Community (BITC) academic partners:

- Intersectionality is emerging as a key issue highlighting how gender, age and menopause cross with race, neurodiversity and disability to create specific workplace experiences for people with these intersecting characteristics.
- Increased recognition that working conditions may amplify menopause symptoms via factors such as stress, lack of autonomy or fixed, unpredictable or rigid working hours.
- A broader range of occupations and sectors are now included in research. As a result, there is greater focus on how initiatives fit different organisations and variation across a wider range of jobs and experiences.
- Progress is still required even where action has already been taken. Nondisclosure levels remain high,

employees may choose to accept difficulties rather than seek adjustments and risk burnout as a result, and there is evidence that progress on key issues such as career development and disciplinary action has stalled.

 Research emphasises that many initiatives will help all employees, not just those struggling with menopause.

This toolkit includes research findings from academics at the leading edge of inquiry into female reproductive health and its impact in the workplace. It also showcases how employers at the forefront of the agefriendly workplace agenda are supporting older female staff and shares frameworks for action based on best practice. We hope that this toolkit will help to normalise menopause at work and make it as unremarkable as pregnancy or long-term medical conditions.

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What is Menopause?

Menopause is the transitional period during which women move out of the reproductive phase of their lives.⁴ However, its impact extends beyond the biological context, with a range of psychosocial impacts relating to broader experiences of women in later life. Menopause becomes inter-related with women's experiences in the workplace, in their families and as they are looked to in taking up socially traditional female roles such as caring.

Unlike pregnancy and childbirth, menopause is experienced by most women, plus some transgender and non-binary people assigned female at birth whose experiences may differ from other groups due to diverse biopsychosocial understandings and experiences. Cultural factors are also at play, with different groups adopting differing interpretations of menopause as a medical or a more natural process. These compound variation in the physical experience of menopause on a racial and ethnic basis, such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic women entering menopause earlier than White women.

Furthermore, 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. When seeking to raise awareness of the issue, it is important to take into account of the perspectives of younger women and of men too.

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

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 40.7

Symptoms can start before reaching menopause (perimenopause) and can persist for several years afterwards (postmenopause). 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 ovary removal or cancer treatment, can experience a medically induced menopause which may be both sudden and severe.⁸

Symptoms

Menopause symptoms can vary extensively, and different women experience different symptoms with a difference in severity. Evidence shows that more than three quarters of women experience menopause symptoms with a quarter describing symptoms as severe.

Common symptoms, affecting both physical and mental health, include: 10

- hot flushes intermittent short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck and chest, making 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.

A domino effect can mean that one symptom may exacerbate another such as with night sweats and sleeping.¹¹



How menopause impacts women in the workplace

Impact on work

Our research partners at The Open University and University of Bristol found that significant numbers of women find symptoms associated with the menopause transition problematic at work.^{12,13} They found the top five menopause symptoms in terms of impact on women at work are:

fatigue 40 per cent

hot flushes35 per cent

focus/concentration 34 per cent

anxiety and worry 32 per cent

insomnia 30 per cent

Evidence of any negative impact of menopause 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

In a survey of women of menopausal age, more than half said they have been unable to go into work at some point due to their symptoms and, without the right support, the pressure and stress of work is higher.¹⁶

Attitudes to menopause at work

While progress has been made, research shows continuing negative attitudes to menopause at work.¹⁷ Women report a lack of support and unhelpful attitudes from both colleagues and managers. Our research partners found that¹⁸:

- only 37 per cent of women said they could talk about menopause at work, and then only with close colleagues in private conversations.
- over 60 per cent said menopause is not well understood.
- 30 per cent said that their experience of discussion of menopause at work was that it was joked about. This is neither funny or harmless and serves to reinforce the taboo.¹⁹

 nearly 50 per cent agreed or somewhat agreed that menopause is a taboo subject.

Disclosure of menopause at work

Too many women remain reluctant to disclose their menopause status at work. Our research partners found that.²⁰

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

The main reasons for not disclosing were:

- it is a private issue.
- I will be perceived negatively.
- my abilities would be guestioned.²¹



Disclosure should always be a matter of personal choice. However, if those transitioning through menopause 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 by providing and publicising appropriate support for those transitioning through menopause, raising awareness and making space for conversations. Practical actions are considered in detail in the later section, 'What employers can do to help'.

Why menopause is important for employers

Retaining older workers

- One in three workers are now over 50.²² As employers continue to face a skills shortage²³ and high economic inactivity (people not working or looking for work),²⁴ retaining over 50s helps deliver skills and retain knowledge and experience.
- The biggest increase in employment in the last 30 years has been for women over 50, due to increased economic participation and changes to the State Pension Age. The employment rate for women aged 50 to 64 has risen from 48 per cent in the 1990s²⁵ to 72 per cent in 2025.²⁶

There are now 4.6 million women aged 50 to 64 in work.²⁷ 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.

Reducing gender pay and pension gaps

- The gender pay gap is widest for women aged 50 to 59,28 coinciding with menopause transition. 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 is twice the gender pay gap.²⁹
- Approaches designed to help menopausal women remain in good

quality jobs, with access to training and development, will be important to employer strategies to reduce both their gender pay and pension gaps.

Reducing business costs

- Recruitment, training and turnover are key costs for business. Improving retention is an important way to control these costs.
- Improved health and wellbeing improve productivity and reduce absence costs.
- Women experiencing menopause report that work makes menopause symptoms worse. Some find the stress of work too much and, if not properly supported, may give up work altogether.
- 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 home. These wider pressures can add to the risk of early workforce departure.
- Employee turnover costs are high.
 Replacing staff incurs costs from exit procedures and lost productivity while posts are vacant. Oxford Economics found that it costs an average of

£30,000 to replace an employee and train a replacement to the same level.³⁰

Reducing business risk

- Businesses which fail to support people transitioning through menopause put themselves at legal risk. The number of menopause-related tribunal cases is rising, and these cover a range of issues including disability, sex and age discrimination, plus constructive and unfair dismissal.³¹
- Health and Safety law gives employers a duty of care to ensure the health, welfare and wellbeing of employees.³²
- Under The Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees and to treat employees with respect in terms of age, sex and gender identity. 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.³³
- The Equality Act requires employers not to discriminate against employees on the basis of disability. If an employee experienced serious menopause symptoms that amounted to a mental or physical impairment with a

- substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, this could be classed as a disability under the Act.³⁴
- The Employment Rights Bill introduces menopause action plans. Initially voluntary, these will become compulsory for larger employers from 2027.³⁵ BITC <u>Advisory Services</u> can help to shape these.

What employers can do to help

Awareness-raising and communication

In order to break the taboo of menopause, employers need to raise awareness and normalise menopause at work. Awareness-raising needs to be directed at the whole workforce to include women, and others, 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 where they feel they have empathetic colleagues or managers.³⁶

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. Sharing videos about symptoms and experiences of menopause can be an effective initial step.

Environment and physical adjustments

The physical environment can worsen menopause 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. Where the following are provided, the experience of menopause in the workplace is improved:³⁷

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

Policies and procedures

Make sure policies and procedures include provision to support menopause. While three quarters of respondents to a recent BITC Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality survey said they have introduced a menopause policy, this compares with a nationwide estimate of half of employers taking action on menopause but only a quarter with a policy in place. However, bear in mind that policies are only effective if they are understood and implemented. A menopause policy needs to be supported by the wider actions described in this toolkit to create an inclusive culture.

Absence policies

It is important that your sickness absence policy accommodates those experiencing menopause transition. Record sickness absences related to menopause as an ongoing health issue instead of a series of short-term absences. In this way you will ensure that your sickness absence procedure will not be unnecessarily implemented, providing peace of mind to employees when they raise health needs.

Nearly half of respondents to a CIPD survey of menopausal age women had taken menopause related sick leave but less than 2 in 5 disclosed menopause as the reason.³⁹

Flexible working

Be accommodating to flexible working requests that help those experiencing menopause – all employees have the legal right to request flexible working. 40 Flexible working can lead to reductions in absences, an increase in wellbeing and productivity, and build retention in the older workforce. Remember that menopause is a transition and experiences can change over time. Be prepared to implement flexible working in a responsive manner. Flexible working arrangements may only be required temporarily. 41 Adjustments to working patterns might include:

- The ability to rearrange tasks and meetings on bad days.
- Allowing women to take breaks.
- 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 for medical appointments.

Training for line managers

Provide training for line managers to ensure they understand how menopause

symptoms may affect women, trans and non-binary staff, and your policies and procedures that support menopause.

Training should include listening skills and sensitivity, and guidance on how to have difficult conversations. ⁴² 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.

Support groups

Supportive organisational cultures will allow the provision of informal support 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.⁴³ Cognitive behavioural therapy has also been found to be beneficial in controlling symptoms⁴⁴ and has been effectively offered by employers participating in research programmes.⁴⁵

These forms of support might be offered in-house or by external independent experts, perhaps through an employee assistance programme. Mid-life MOTs also provide helpful spaces for employer-employee conversations which can surface any new adjustments employees need.

Business best practice on menopause

A number of BITC members have become trailblazers on menopause by:

- Developing a definition, policy and/or guidance on menopause, and adding menopause to policies and procedures eg sickness absence.
- Sharing stories of menopause experiences to drive empathy and create an inclusive culture.
- Recognising the business case for menopause support, breaking down stigma and building understanding.
- Agreeing reasonable adjustments to support menopause, such as changes to

- the work environment and job design, including flexible and hybrid working.
- Development of support networks including menopause champions and employee resource groups.
- Collaborating with existing employee networks, such as LGBTQ+ groups, to ensure that menopause understanding and support is intersectional.

Resources

Further details of actions taken by leading BITC members on menopause are in our menopause best practice case studies. Non BITC members can join us to connect with our member network and Advisory Services who can advise on creating inclusive workplace cultures. Other key resources include:

BITC Becoming an age friendly employer and Getting started on age: from data to action

BITC Inclusive Flexible Working toolkit

BITC Gender pages

BITC Wellbeing pages

CMI menopause friendly workplace with insights from Professor Jo Brewis

Menopause in the workplace video from Professor Vanessa Beck

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