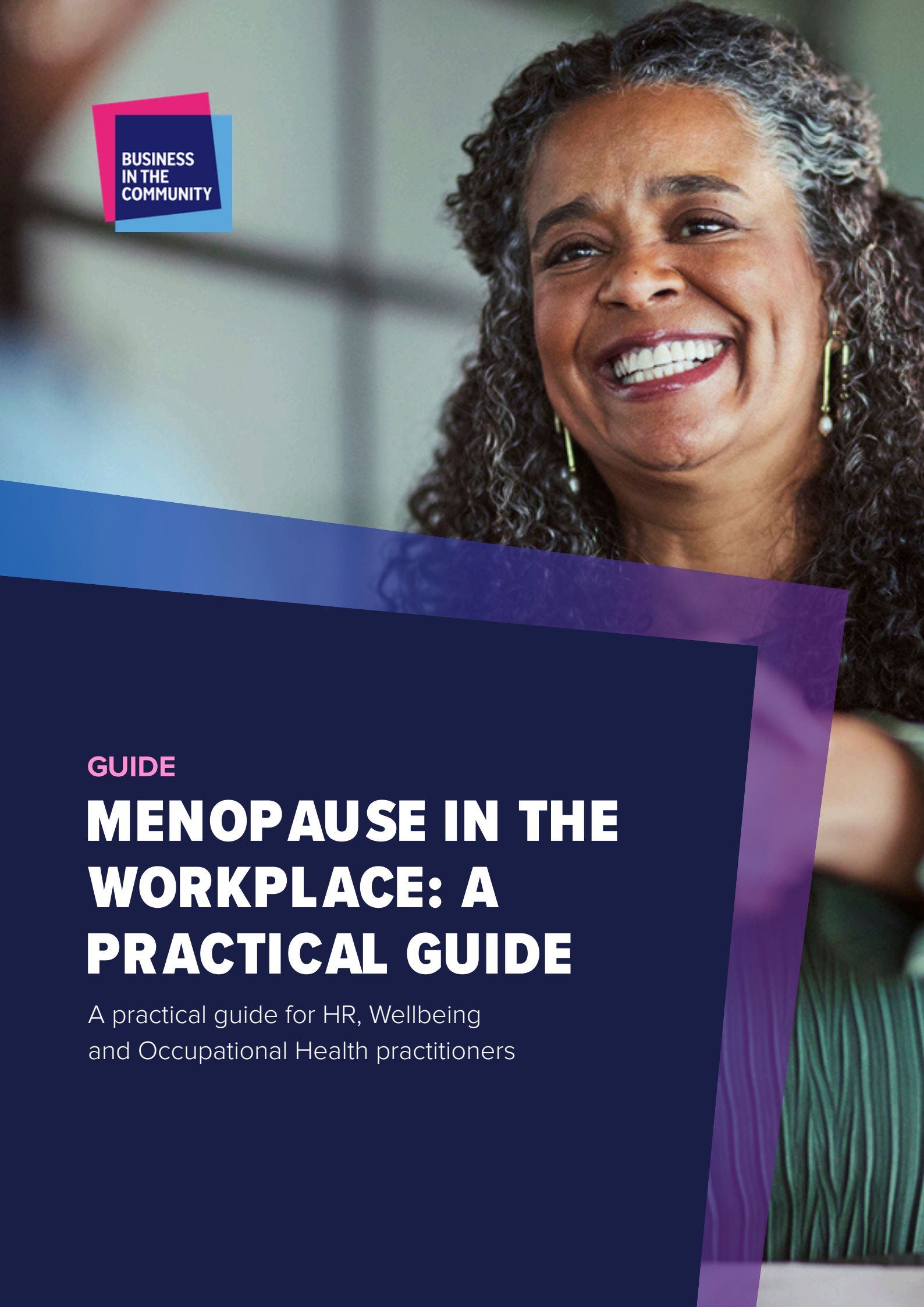


A close-up photograph of a woman with curly hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a green top and gold earrings. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office or indoor setting.

**BUSINESS
IN THE
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GUIDE

MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

A practical guide for HR, Wellbeing
and Occupational Health practitioners

Introduction

The UK workforce is ageing. There are 11.3 million over-50s at work in the UK today, a third of the workforce, including **4.6 million women aged 50 to 64**.ⁱ 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 more 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, sometimes experienced after women had retired or left work 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, plus some transgender and non-binary people assigned female at birth, and most people experience symptoms. But with the right support, those symptoms can be effectively managed, and those transitioning through menopause can continue successfully at work.

Despite increasing awareness of menopause, it continues to be a reason for those affected 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.ⁱⁱ Around a million women may already be at risk of quitting work due to a lack of menopause support.ⁱⁱⁱ Beyond the impact on women's abilities to

remain in work, research by Business in the Community's (BITC) academic partners highlights several wider trends in the experience of menopause in the workplace:

- Intersectionality is emerging as a key issue, highlighting how gender, age, and menopause intersect with race, neurodiversity, and disability to create specific workplace experiences for people with these intersecting characteristics.
- There is an 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. Non-disclosure levels remain high and employees may accept difficulties rather than seek adjustments, risking burnout as a result. There is also evidence of menopause-related disciplinary action as well as stalled career development.
- 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 age-friendly workplace agenda are supporting menopausal employees 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.

Acknowledgements

BITC would like to thank our academic partners, Professor Jo Brewis at The Open University and Professor 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 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.^{iv} However, its impact extends beyond the biological context, with a range of psychosocial impacts relating to women's broader experiences in later life. Menopause is interrelated with women's experiences in the workplace, within their families and 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.^v Cultural factors are also at play, with different groups adopting differing interpretations of menopause as a medical or a more natural process. There are also racial and ethnic variations in the physical experience of menopause, with evidence suggesting that Black, Asian, and ethnic minority women enter menopause earlier than White women.^{vi}

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 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 one in 100 women will experience menopause before they reach 40.**^{vii}

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 and elsewhere 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.^{viii}

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.^{ix} Common symptoms, affecting both physical and mental health, include:^x

- 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 night sweats disrupting sleep.^{xi}

Impact on 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.^{xii, xiii} They found the top five menopause symptoms in terms of impact on women at work are:

- fatigue
- hot flushes
- focus/concentration
- anxiety and worry
- insomnia

Poor working environments and high levels of stress make menopause symptoms more difficult. The most challenging aspects of work to cope with are:

- high temperatures and poor ventilation
- short or changing deadlines
- long hours and high workload
- dealing with customers or clients.^{xiv}

In response, women may:

- hide and/or self-manage their symptoms
- develop a degree of paranoia about the impact on their performance
- work harder to compensate^{xv}

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.^{xvi}

Attitudes to menopause at work

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

- Only **37%** of women said they could talk about menopause at work, and only with close colleagues in private conversations.
- Over **60%** said menopause is not well understood.
- Of those surveyed, **30%** said that, in their experience, menopause was joked about at work. This is neither funny nor harmless and serves to reinforce the taboo.^{xix}
- Nearly **50%** 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:^{xx}

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

The main reasons cited for not disclosing were:^{xxi}

- it was considered a private issue;
- concerns about being perceived negatively; and
- concerns that their abilities would be questioned.

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.



Why menopause is an important issue for employers

Retaining older workers

- One in three workers are now over 50.^{xxiv} As employers continue to face a skills shortage^{xxv} and high economic inactivity (people not working or looking for work),^{xxvi} retaining over-50s helps deliver skills and retain knowledge and experience.
- The biggest increase in employment in the last 30 years has been in women over 50 due to **increased economic participation and changes to State Pension Age**. Employment for 50 to 64-year-old women rose from 48% in the 1990s^{xxvii} to 69% in 2026.^{xxviii}
- There are now 4.6 million women aged 50 to 64 in work.^{xxix} Review your 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 do this.

Reducing gender pay and pension gaps

- **The gender pay gap is widest for women aged 50 to 59,**^{xxx} 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 leaving, taking career breaks, reducing their hours or missing out on opportunities for progression, their income will fall, and a

company's gender pay gap can be adversely affected. The same factors drive the gender pension gap, which is twice the gender pay gap.^{xxxi}

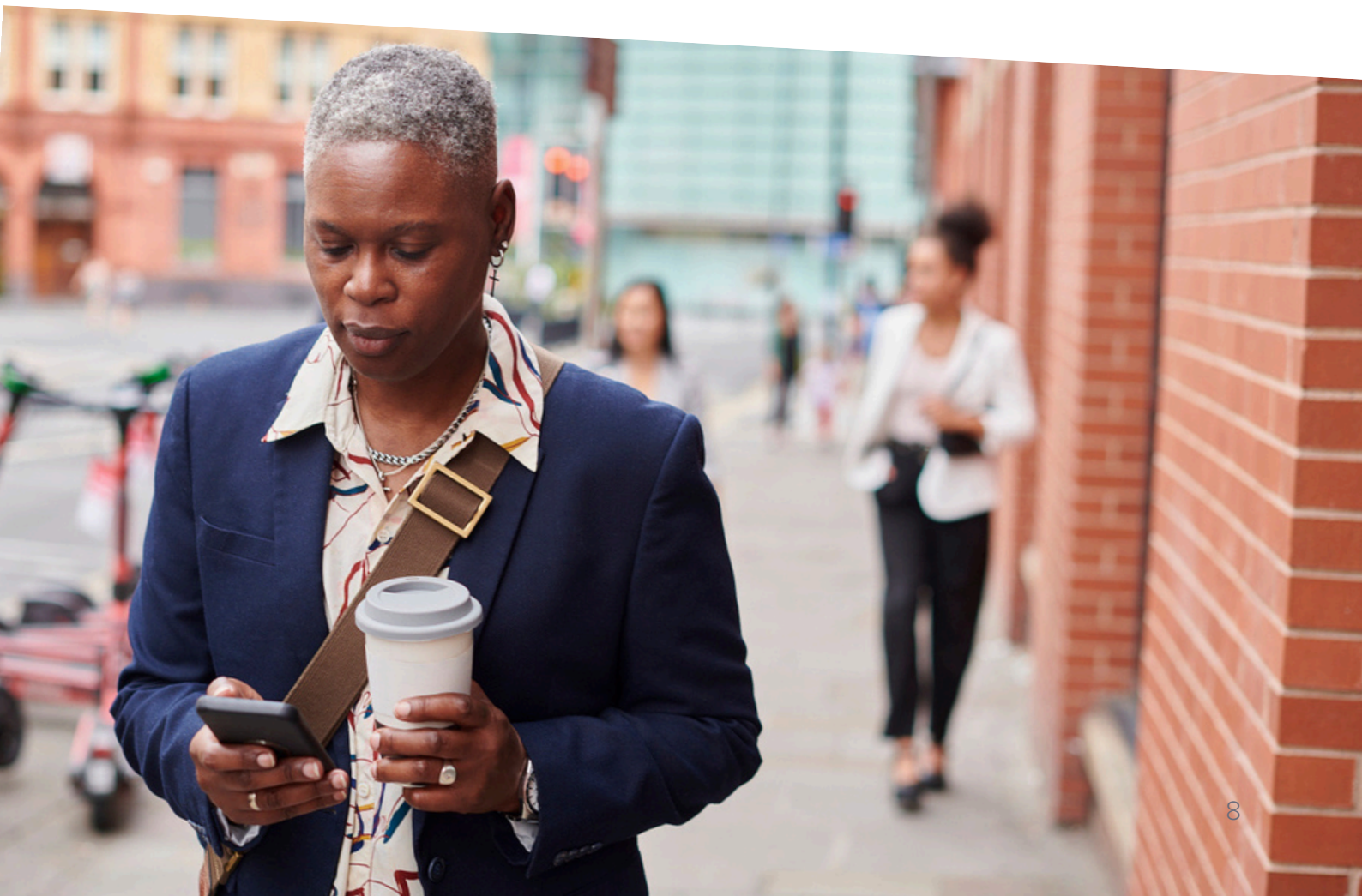
- Approaches designed to help menopausal women remain in good quality jobs, with access to training and development, will be important to employer strategies to reduce both their gender pay and pension gaps.

Reducing business costs

- Recruitment, training, and turnover are key costs for business, and improving retention can reduce these costs. Research has found that it can cost £30,000 to replace an employee and train a replacement to the same level.^{xxxii}
- Improved health and wellbeing improve productivity and reduce absence costs.^{xxxiii}
- Women experiencing menopause report that work can make menopause symptoms worse. Some find the stress of work too much and, if not supported, may give up work altogether.^{xxxiv}
- Menopause is 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.

Reducing business risk

- Businesses that fail to support people transitioning through menopause put themselves at legal risk. The number of menopause-related tribunal cases is rising, and these cases cover a range of issues across disability, sex, and age discrimination, plus constructive and unfair dismissal.^{xxxv}
- Health and Safety law gives employers a duty of care to ensure the health, welfare and wellbeing of employees.^{xxxvi}
- The Equality Act 2010 creates a duty not to discriminate against employees in terms of age, sex, and gender identity. As menopause is a female condition (also affecting some transgender and non-binary people assigned female at birth), detrimental treatment due to menopause could represent direct or indirect discrimination.^{xxxvii}
- The Equality Act also requires employers not to discriminate against employees on the basis of disability. If an employee experienced menopause symptoms amounting to a mental or physical impairment with a substantial, long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, this could be legally classed as a disability.^{xxxviii}
- The Employment Rights Act introduces menopause action plans. Initially voluntary, these become compulsory for employers of 250 or more employees from 2027 (detail in next section).^{xxxix}



How employers can help: implementing Menopause Action Plans

The new government guidelines for menopause action planning detail how employers can create inclusion action plans to cover a minimum of two actions, one to address the gender pay gap and one to support menopause. There are six areas identified for action planning on menopause, and for each action plan, your action(s) should be 'new' or 'in progress'.

The areas identified for menopause action planning are:

1. Train managers to support employees experiencing menopause.
2. Offer occupational health advice for employees experiencing menopause.
3. Set up menopause support groups and networks.
4. Offer workplace adjustments for employees experiencing menopause.
5. Conduct a menopause risk assessment for your workplace.
6. Review policies and procedures to meet the needs of employees experiencing menopause.

Drawing on BITC's advice, alongside the insights^{xi} and best practice of our members, as seen in our case studies, we recommend action in the following ways.

Training for line managers

Ensure line managers understand how menopause symptoms may affect women, transgender 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.^{xii} Encourage line managers to signpost team members to, or seek support from, specialists in HR and occupational health units if they are uncertain about how to approach a menopause issue.

Occupational health, environment and physical adjustments

The physical workplace environment can worsen menopause symptoms and increase stress.^{xiii} High temperatures, poor ventilation, inadequate rest or toilet facilities, and access to cold drinking water can be problematic. The experience of menopause at work can be improved by providing:

- fans, good ventilation, and temperature control
- rest areas, comfortable toilet facilities and access to women-only showers
- access to cold drinking water
- uniform options that include light, layered and non-synthetic clothing
- natural light
- reduction in noise exposure

Support groups and networks

Supportive organisational cultures will allow informal menopause support. This can be an easy way to make a start, such as drawing on a peer support approach to set up a women's network or menopause café as an informal safe space to meet and share. Other options include online forums and helplines. These can all act as focus groups, feeding back and championing the issue in your business. Collaborating with other groups, such as race or LGBTQ+ networks, will help to ensure that menopause understanding and support are intersectional.

Specialist support can also be effective. Educational programmes can help with managing symptoms, provide advice on diet and exercise, and help prepare for the possible consequences of the menopause transition at work.^{xliii} Cognitive behavioural therapy can be beneficial in controlling symptoms^{xliiv} and has been effectively trialled by employers.^{xliv} Specialist support can be offered in-house or externally, for example via an employee assistance programme.

Workplace adjustments

BITC members highlight the importance of agreeing reasonable adjustments to support menopause, such as changes to the work environment and job design. Flexible working, which all employees have the right to request,^{xlvi} is probably the most important workplace adjustment for those transitioning through menopause and, for the employer, can lead to reductions in absences, an increase in wellbeing and productivity, and enhanced retention in the older workforce.

Remember that menopause is a transition and experiences can change over time. Adjustments may only be required temporarily, so be prepared to implement them responsively.^{xlvii} 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 at home.
- ensuring time is available during the working day for medical appointments.

Risk assessment

Conducting a risk assessment can help to understand how the workplace affects menopause symptoms and identify adjustments and other forms of support.^{xlviii} While menopause itself is not a risk, formal risk assessments provide a structure to highlight the range of impacts and help ensure that your workplace does not exacerbate menopausal symptoms.

Policies and procedures

Make sure your policies and procedures include specific provisions to support menopause and that all employees know about them.^{xlix} Moreover, to create an inclusive culture, menopause policies need to be supported by actions, such as those described in this toolkit and included in the government's menopause action planning guidance.

Remember to specifically accommodate menopause in your sickness absence policy. Record sickness absences related to 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, 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 two in five disclosed menopause as the reason.**¹



Resources and Support

Details of actions taken by leading BITC members on menopause can be found in our [menopause best practice case studies](#). Non-BITC members can [join us](#) and members can connect with our [network](#) to find out how to create inclusive workplace cultures. Other key resources include:

- [BITC Becoming an age friendly employer](#)
- [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](#)
- [DWP Menopause in the Workplace Literature Review 2025](#)

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