



**An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí
Sheachadadh PFN agus Athchóirithe**
Department of Public Expenditure
NDP Delivery and Reform

Seirbhís Chúnaimh
d'Fhostaithe na Státseirbhíse



Guidance on Understanding and Improving Menopause Support in the Workplace

Published by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

[gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie)

Table of Contents

Message from Shirley Comerford, Head of Public Service Workforce Division, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform	3
Introduction	4
Purpose of this Guidance Document	5
Menopause in the Workplace	5
What is Menopause?	6
Symptoms of Menopause	8
Menopause in the Workplace. Getting Help.	9
Supporting a colleague	11
As a Manager	12
How to approach a conversation	13
Lived Experiences of Menopause at Work	15
Workplace Adjustments to be considered	17
The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)	18
Supports and Signposting	18

Message from Shirley Comerford, Head of Public Service Workforce Division, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform



Menopause has long been viewed as a private and personal matter, with limited support available to those experiencing the impact of menopausal symptoms in the workplace.

Despite several awareness campaigns, many women are still reluctant to discuss menopause with their colleagues and their managers. In situations where individuals are impacted by menopause at work, it is important that their needs are understood and access is provided to supports that enable them to reach their full potential.

The Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform is delighted to progress the work of our colleagues on the Women's Health Task force in the Department of Health to assist in bringing about positive change and a more inclusive working environment.

This Guidance document has been developed in support of the Civil Service Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework, both of which have been developed to provide:

- Guidance on developing a Department/Office tailored policy and ensuring employers treat menopause with the critical importance it deserves
- Awareness and increased understanding of the wide range of physical and psychological symptoms associated with menopause that can impact on the performance of peri/menopausal colleagues in the workplace
- A platform to assist in normalising and supporting conversations about menopause and to improve the level of supports available
- Information to ensure that those suffering with menopausal symptoms feel confident to discuss how it is impacting them and feel able to ask for support and any reasonable adjustments/accommodations, if required, so they can continue to be productive and contribute as fully as possible in their roles
- Details on the array of centralised supports available to all staff

We are delighted to be part of this conversation about menopause in the workplace, breaking down barriers and embedding a culture of workplace wellbeing and inclusion for all.

Shirley Comerford

Introduction

The Civil Service is committed to promoting inclusive and supportive working environments for all Civil Service employees¹ where everyone is treated fairly, with dignity, respect and understanding and where their health and wellbeing is fully supported.

Women account for over 50% of the Civil Service workforce currently, and many will experience symptoms associated with menopause during their working life. Women experiencing menopause may need additional consideration, support and adjustments in the workplace. Menopause should be considered an organisational and workplace issue.

In 2020 and 2021, the Women's Health Taskforce conducted a substantial outreach to women, including a Radical Listening exercise wherein over 278 women were invited to share their views and experiences of healthcare in Ireland. Women who engaged in this exercise reported that menopause was a taboo subject, "not spoken about by anyone, they felt dependent on mothers, sisters and close friends to provide information which wasn't available in mainstream media or talked about in the workplace".

Menopause has been cloaked in silence and secrecy for many years and has only become a mainstream topic very recently. Menopause can have an impact on a person's sense of self and self-confidence. A lack of openness and awareness can discourage a person from discussing these challenges and their needs in the workplace. While a manager is not expected to be an expert in this area, having an understanding of menopause and recognising that menopausal symptoms can affect a person's wellbeing and performance at work is part of managements' role in fostering employee wellbeing.

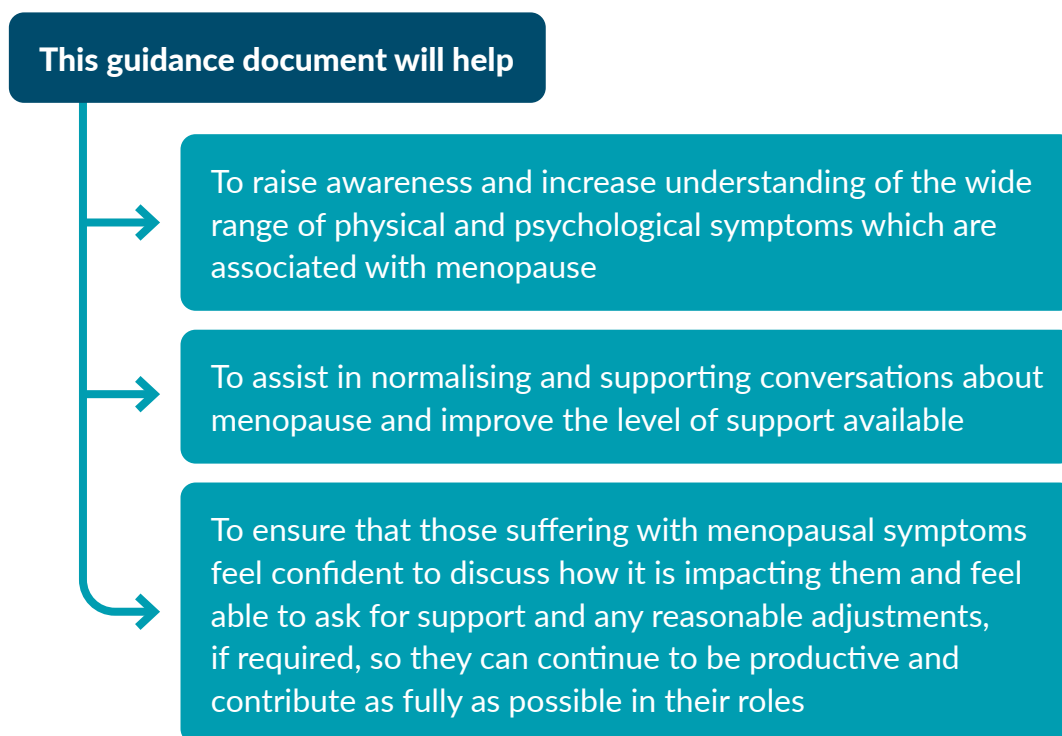
This document is intended to support persons who are experiencing, or who may in the future experience, menopausal symptoms. When this guidance document refers to "women" it is intended in the most inclusive sense of the word. It is used as shorthand to describe all those who identify as women as well as those that do not identify as women but who share women's biological realities and experiences. In using this term, we seek to include not exclude.

1 For ease of reference, civil servants are referred to generally as "employees" in this document

Purpose of this Guidance Document

Supportive practices greatly contribute to an inclusive working environment and can go a long way towards retaining valuable employees, encouraging connectivity, enhancing team morale and motivation, maintaining productivity and reducing sick leave absence.

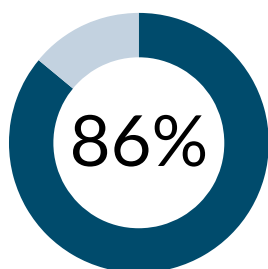
This guidance document has been developed by the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) to assist both managers and employees in fostering an inclusive environment where employees can openly and comfortably engage in discussion about menopause and its impact on them.



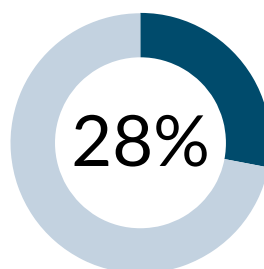
The guidance should be read in conjunction with the Civil Service Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework.

Menopause in the Workplace

Menopause is a normal and healthy life stage. However, for some, it may not be an easy transition. Research² has indicated that:



of women say that menopause can have a big impact on their everyday lives



of women in menopause say they would be happy to talk about it to their manager at work

Specific research³ undertaken in 2023 to understand women's experience of menopause in the workplace found that:



7% of menopausal women have given up work due to their symptoms



34% have considered giving up work due to their symptoms



37% have taken time off work due to menopause



18% have taken 3 or more days off work because of menopause

2 Department of Health. Understanding Menopause Highlights of Department of Health Research Carried out by B&A Oct 2022. Department of Health, Oct. 2022, www.gov.ie/en/publication/f1490-why-we-need-to-talk-about-menopause/

3 Source: The Menopause Hub Workplace Survey 2023

Further research⁴ undertaken found that the top five symptoms of menopause experienced that impacted work included:

Brain fog	Anxiety	Loss of confidence	Insomnia	Aches and pains
77%	65%	60%	47%	46%

The right approach and supports in the workplace can greatly improve the management of challenging symptoms.

The role of managers in supporting those experiencing menopausal symptoms is vital, not only for the person in question, but for their colleagues as well. Menopause education and awareness needs to be available to and understood by everyone in the organisation.

4 Source: The Wellness Warrior Workplace Survey 2021

What is Menopause?

Every person is unique and will experience menopause in their own way.

Menopause

The word menopause is an overall term that includes perimenopause, post menopause, early menopause, premature menopause, and induced menopause. Menopause is a natural process and an unavoidable part of life for all those who experience menstrual periods. It is influenced by hormonal changes and hormonal decline. This transition usually happens between 45 and 55 years of age with the average age for menopause in Ireland and Europe being 51 years.

Menopause itself is marked by the end of monthly menstruation (also known as a menstrual period or 'period') due to loss of ovarian follicular function. This means that the ovaries stop releasing eggs.

Natural menopause is deemed to have occurred after 12 consecutive months without menstruation for which there is no other obvious physiological or pathological cause and in the absence of clinical intervention.

Perimenopause

The beginning of menopause happens long before the final menstrual period. The phase leading up to the menopause is called the perimenopause. Perimenopause means "around menopause" or "menopause transition". This phase can last several years. On average this phase begins around age 45 but can begin up to ten years before the actual menopause. This phase is marked by fluctuations in female reproductive hormones. Women start experiencing symptoms of hormonal imbalance. Women still have menstrual periods while they are perimenopausal. They may experience physical and psychological symptoms particularly associated with the fluctuation in oestrogen and other hormones. The perimenopause can be a good time for a woman to review her lifestyle. It is important to know what the signs and symptoms of the perimenopause are. As hormone levels change, symptoms can come and go.

Post Menopause

This is the third phase of the menopause transition, where symptoms may still be present. This typically refers to when a person has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

Early Menopause

Early menopause is when a woman's periods stop before the age of 45. It can occur naturally or as a side effect of some treatment(s).

Premature Menopause

Premature menopause, also known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), occurs when a woman experiences menopause before the age of 40. It is not incredibly common and is estimated to affect around 1% of women under 40.

Induced Menopause

Induced menopause refers to menstrual periods that stop after surgical removal of the ovaries, chemotherapy or radiation damage to the ovaries, or from the use of medications to intentionally induce menopause as part of the treatment for certain diseases. Induced menopause can happen at any age after ovulation begins.

Menopause is a very individual experience and is marked by a spectrum of physical and psychological symptoms. Symptoms vary significantly in duration and severity. This can be a distressing and anxious time for many. Some women may experience greater psychological symptoms than others. The range of physical symptoms experienced is equally varied.

Some experience few symptoms that last for a short while, others none at all and some can experience symptoms that are severe, debilitating and long-lasting.

Symptoms of Menopause

The experience of menopausal symptoms can negatively impact workplace wellbeing. This can result in:

- Poor concentration
- Listlessness and fatigue
- Poor motivation
- Reduced job satisfaction
- Reduced sense of efficacy
- Increased sick leave

By understanding the symptoms and how they interplay in the workplace, and encouraging open conversations, a manager can mitigate some of the negative impacts these symptoms can have on the individual and the working environment.

This is not an exhaustive list of symptoms but includes the most common:

Physical	Cognitive and Psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot flushes • Night sweats • Difficulty sleeping • Fatigue • Lack of energy • Vaginal dryness and pain, itching or discomfort • Reduced sex drive (libido) • Discomfort during sex • Irregular and/or heavy periods • Flooding • Headaches • Heart palpitations (a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart) • Recurring UTIs • Loss of muscle • Weight gain • Dry mouth • Joint aches and pains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain fog • Low mood and irritability • Anxiety • Problems with memory or concentration • Tearfulness • Loss of confidence and self esteem

Menopause in the Workplace. Getting Help.

If the symptoms of menopause are problematic and causing stress and concern it is important to recognise that it is okay to reach out for help.

Accessing support from your personal health provider

There are a number of GPs and consultants in Ireland who specialise in menopause and are members of the British Menopause Society. To prepare for the visit:

- Keep a record of symptoms in as much detail as possible
- Make a note of how long symptoms have been experienced
- Keep a note of the date of the last menstrual period
- Be informed about the different treatment options
- Menopause Hormone Therapy (MHT), also known as HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy), is a form of therapy which replaces declining hormones during this period and may provide relief of menopausal symptoms. Write down any questions you may have about the benefits and any possible risks
- Ask what additional treatment options are available

The CSEAS specialist page on their [website](#), contains additional information on preparing for your appointment including access to the Green Climatic Scale (GCS) which is a simple tool to help assess your menopause symptoms across various health areas such as physical, psychological, sexual and vasomotor.

Lifestyle Changes

Women may not be prepared for the many changes that their bodies and minds go through in this natural transition. Having knowledge gives power and informs good choices. It can be a time to reflect and implement changes in lifestyle which may improve overall wellbeing and assist in managing problematic symptoms.

Some lifestyle changes to consider include:

- Regular exercise which benefits both physical and psychological wellbeing
- Building in some resistance exercises in addition to cardiovascular exercise. This supports muscle mass which is lost in menopause
- Relaxation and mindful breathing which can reduce the stress response and increase toleration of hot flushes
- Eating a healthy diet which supports bone health and cardiovascular health
- Being aware of intake of spicy food/alcohol, as both can exacerbate hot flushes
- Keeping the bedroom cool and using light layers rather than heavy bed clothes
- Talking to others, talking to a specialist, talking to your GP, talking to the CSEAS
- Accessing credible source research and learning about the accurate facts. Staying informed will enhance overall management of challenging symptoms. The CSEAS provides some useful links on their dedicated Menopause page: <https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/the-menopause/>

Managing symptoms at work

If menopausal symptoms are impacting your workplace wellbeing, consider talking to your manager. While this is a personal choice, it could be an important step in securing the support you need at work. It can be difficult to disclose sensitive and personal information. You might consider talking to your Employee Assistance Officer in preparation. They can provide you with a safe space to discuss your concerns and identify how this might be best approached with your manager.

- You can start with listing the symptoms which impact you most. Then review these to see which are impacting you most at work.
- Try to identify what adjustments might support you at this time and consider how any of the existing flexible working arrangements, available to you, might work to your advantage to support you at this time.
- Consider your desk or office space. Would a fan or being near a window help?
- If you are experiencing brain fog or short term memory difficulties, consider making a note of items you may need to recall and what reminders you could set to support your memory.
- Reflect on when you are at your best and, if feasible, plan your most demanding tasks around this time.

It is also vital you take regular breaks throughout the day e.g. getting outside for some fresh air or employ breathing or mindfulness techniques. Your Employee Assistance Officer can support you in building your personal self-care plan.

If feasible, consider bringing a “caught-out kit” to store in your desk or locker at work. This kit could include sanitary products, wet wipes, a towel and spare clothes.

Do consider talking to supportive work colleagues. Some may be at a similar life stage and could provide invaluable peer support.

Supporting a colleague



It is important to understand that every colleague's experience is unique and symptoms will differ from person to person. Chances are, given the demographic makeup of the Civil Service, there are people in many divisions experiencing perimenopause and menopause. A good first step would be to learn about what menopause is, how it affects people both directly and indirectly and what supports are available to support those going through perimenopause, menopause and post menopause. It is important that those going through this transition and experiencing problematic symptoms feel supported to continue to work to the best of their capabilities.

Not everyone will want to talk about their experience of menopause. It is still a personal, private and sensitive issue. But if they do wish to discuss this, listen to them and ask how they are feeling about what they are going through. Be present and focus on listening to their experience. Remember everyone's experience is different. This supports the building of trust and enhancing inclusivity.

Many women, especially those experiencing problematic symptoms, may feel discouraged in the workplace and struggle to do things they have normally done or be reticent and/or anxious about progressing or taking on new challenges. Try and gently encourage them to seek help. Encourage those who disclose they are suffering to speak with their manager or consider accessing support. Words of encouragement can go a long way to bolster their self-esteem and validate their experience.

Male Allyship

Everyone has a role to play as menopause is not solely a woman's issue. Men have a very important role in creating and maintaining equitable workplaces. At the moment the conversation around menopause and the workplace is often focussed on actions and techniques women should employ to adapt. However, research has indicated that when male colleagues express support for female issues and gender and equality issues, women feel more supported and are likely to be more open in the workplace. Male allyship can be a strong catalyst for culture change and bringing about greater quality and access to supports.

As a Manager

Education about health issues, good communication skills and sensitivity are vital in order for you to support your staff. Managers are often the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health and wellbeing at work. Regular and constructive informal communication serves to enhance working relationships and build trust.

However, research has indicated that it can be very challenging to approach a manager to discuss how menopause is affecting a person at work.

Managers are not expected to be experts when discussing menopause. However, they should have an understanding of menopause, the supports available to meet the needs of their employees and be open to having conversations with their staff.

Managers should not consider menopause in an overly negative light either or consider it an affliction and it is important not to assume that because someone is of menopausal age that it is affecting their capacity to work.

The onus regarding disclosure rests with the employee. If an employee is affected adversely by menopause but is reluctant to discuss this with a manager, the option of speaking to someone else should be offered e.g. a member of the HR team, an Employee Assistance Officer, another colleague etc.

In providing support and guidance to employees, managers have the responsibility to:

- Ensure they have a good understanding of menopause, the symptoms and how they impact the individual, the team and the workplace. Understand that it is a normal process and one that is highly variable between women.
- Ensure that they have undertaken relevant training on menopause and menopause support. This will raise their awareness of the necessary workplace adjustments and supports that may be required to support the employee.
- Encourage all employees to have a strong awareness, through available training and centralised supports, on menopause and wellbeing at work. This communicates an openness to understand more about this life stage and to hear people's experiences of managing menopausal symptoms.
- Normalise and support conversations about menopause among employees.

- Support an employee should they wish to talk about their experiences with menopause. Arrange an appropriate and private space to meet and allow for sufficient time to listen. Prepare for this meeting. Listen carefully to what the employee is saying: it can be a very emotional discussion for them and should be treated with sensitivity and professionalism.
- Reassure the employee that the conversation is confidential and that no information will be disclosed to anyone else without their explicit consent.
- Respect an employee's right to discuss personal issues appropriate to a workplace setting with an appropriate person of choice. They may be more comfortable talking to a colleague, another manager, HR or a member of the CSEAS.
- Assure the person of the confidential nature of the conversation. As a manager, this may feel uncomfortable at times. Be prepared for some silences. It is important to allow for this and identify how you can support yourself. Speak to your Employee Assistance Officer and consult the specialist page on menopause available on the CSEAS website.
- Try not to make any assumptions. Understand that the menopause experience is individual to each person going through it. Use active listening skills, being present and reflecting back what they are saying. Maintain good eye contact and remain sensitive to the content of the conversation. Avoid assumptions, judgements and downplaying the situation.
- Keep an open and flexible approach and explore the best ways that they can be supported.
- Discuss and be supportive of any upcoming healthcare appointments or leave requirements.
- Agree on any actions or adjustments and how to implement them.
- Arrange a follow up meeting to check on how well arrangements are working for the staff member.

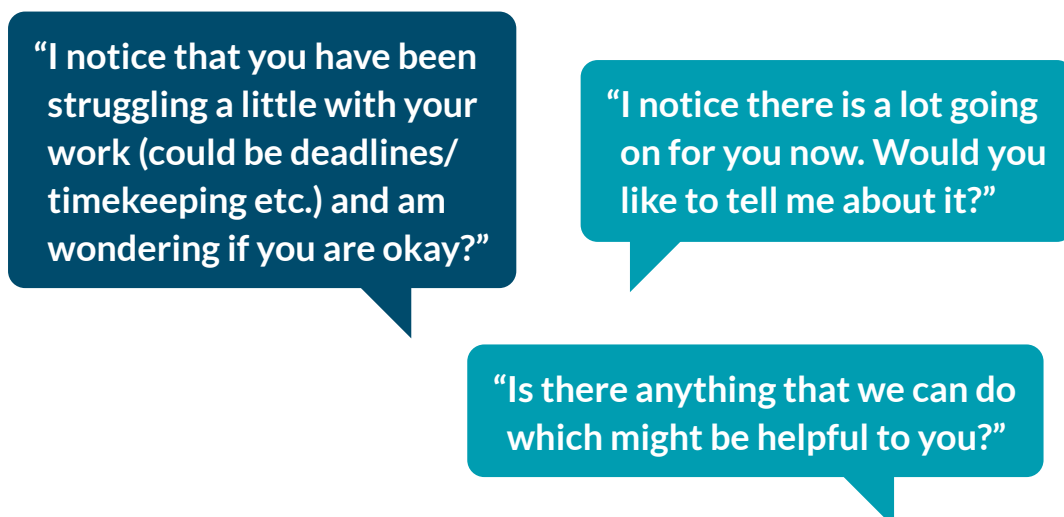
How to approach a conversation:

Discussing an intimate health condition can be very daunting and managing a sensitive conversation around health can be difficult. A good start is to approach with empathy and understanding.

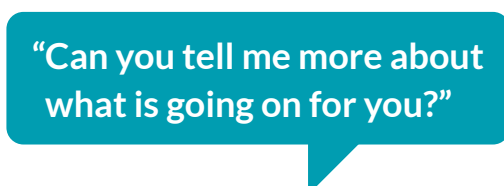
- Speak calmly using supportive language:



- If there is something in particular that you have noticed in relation to the person's demeanour in, or performance at, work, communicate this respectfully and with empathy.



- Ask general, open ended questions rather than direct questions.



- If the person discloses they are experiencing menopause symptoms, recognise that it is a very personal and sensitive topic.

“I am really glad you have shared this with me. I know this may not be easy”

“I’ve been reading up on menopause/completed the training and I know it’s different for everyone so I’d like to hear about what you are experiencing and how I can help”

“It sounds like it has been a very difficult time for you”

“Could you tell me more about this if you are comfortable doing so”

- Take your time and be patient with the person.
- Assure them that the conversation is confidential unless they wish that it go further e.g. HR.
- You can provide supportive suggestions such as:

“Would you consider having a chat with your GP? It could be very helpful. We can also look at how we can support you in work”.

“The CSEAS can offer you confidential support and discuss an action plan to enhance your wellbeing”

- Do invite the person for a follow-on conversation to review any accommodations that have been agreed upon. Do enquire about their wellbeing as symptoms of menopause change over time.

Lived Experiences of Menopause at Work



Case study 1

Marian is in her early 40's, has had a long career in the CS and feels that she has demonstrated competence and commitment in relation to the various roles that she has undertaken. She is a manager and has considerable responsibility in her role. She presented to the CSEAS with symptoms of anxiety and brain fog. She recognises that she has been experiencing a number of symptoms related to perimenopause over the last 18 months. Marian wished to explore how she might cope with this and was considering approaching her manager as her symptoms have been really affecting her short term memory and her confidence at work.

In her sessions with the CSEAS, she explored strategies to help with her feelings of anxiety and overwhelm. We also explored what might be helpful to her in the context of work and general self-care. Marian indicated that she was concerned her manager would think the quality of her work was deteriorating. This was a frightening time and Marian was very worried that she would not be able to cope.

In collaboration with the EAO, Marian put together a plan which involved booking a menopause consultation with her GP to discuss her symptoms and treatment options.

Marian also gave some thought to approaching her Line Manager (LM) and prepared for this with the EAO. Coincidentally, there was an online presentation in work on menopause which her team and her LM attended.

Marian sent an email to her LM indicating that she was having some challenging menopausal symptoms which she felt were affecting her work. She asked for a meeting to discuss this. In preparation she thought of some useful accommodations which could assist her.

The meeting was a positive experience. The LM was sympathetic and listened to Marian's concerns. The LM reassured her that what could be done would be done to support her in her role during this transition. These included an opportunity to take a break during long meetings, a weekly check in with her LM in relation to certain projects and some flexibility to work remotely on the days that she felt overwhelmed. Marian felt that her LM really listened to her and reassured her that their conversation was confidential. When Marian was asked what was most helpful to her in the conversation with her LM, she spoke about being listened to and feeling acknowledged.



Case Study 2

Rose is in her early 50s and is experiencing mainly physical symptoms of menopause over the last year or so. Symptoms include very heavy periods which were unpredictable, hot flushes which often come on during the day when she is in work, dry eyes and itchy skin. She is also feeling exhausted as she is caring for an elderly parent with dementia.

She discussed her symptoms with her GP as they were a significant disruptor in her life. She identified that she tended to manage when she was working remotely as she was near the bathroom or could change her clothes, if needed, and she could turn the camera off on team calls if she was experiencing a hot flush. Since returning to the office, she is finding it increasingly difficult to manage. Her job is fast paced. Her doctor suggested she request that she cut her hours or change her role but she loves her job and cannot financially afford to reduce her hours.

She is fearful of speaking with her LM as she explained that he is not approachable on wellbeing issues. He has already refused her request to sit closer to bathroom facilities citing that he cannot approve everyone's requests. Rose became increasingly distressed which hasn't been helped by poor sleep and fatigue. She returned to her GP who has signed her off work. She is currently on certified sick leave.

Workplace Adjustments to be considered

Please see the Menopause in the Workplace Framework for further options and consult your own organisation's Menopause Policy to ascertain what workplace adjustments may be feasible.

Brain Fog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic goal setting • Allow for flexible breaks • Provision of quiet workspaces • Give clear communication • Conduct regular and informal check ins
Low mood/anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest talking to their GP • Suggest speaking to CSEAS • Ask what might be helpful in terms of managing work
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking tea breaks with colleagues • Encourage anchor days - bringing team together • Provide details on Departmental/Division network • Establish a buddy system • Conduct regular and Informal check-ins
Low Self Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and encourage one to one mentoring • Examine the pace of work • Establish a buddy system • Conduct regular and informal check ins • Provide considered and constructive feedback
Insomnia/Difficulty sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of flexible working patterns • Provision of temporary Shift/Rota adjustments

Heavy Periods

- Ensure easy access to toilet facilities
- Allow for enough breaks to use the bathroom
- Provision of sanitary products made available in bathroom or “caught-out kits” containing sanitary products, wet wipes, disposable underwear and a towel
- Ensure cover is available so colleagues can leave their post, if needed
- Make it easy to request an extra uniform if needed

Hot Flushes

- Provision of desk fan
- Provide access to fresh drinking water
- Provide access to a quiet area
- Allow for short breaks to step out into the fresh air
- Review the ergonomics of the office e.g. situation of the person’s desk, proximity to the facilities
- Ensure uniforms consist of breathable fabric, are dark coloured with comfortable waistbands and have easy access fastenings

The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

- The CSEAS is a nationwide Employee Assistance Service available to all civil servants. The CSEAS provides a non-judgmental, [confidential*](#) and free service where every individual will be met with empathy and understanding. The CSEAS provides a safe space to discuss the menopausal experience and to develop a client focused self-care plan.
- Employee Assistance Officers have the training and expertise to work collaboratively with employees, offering emotional, solution focused and informational support to those who are experiencing emotional and mental health symptoms associated with the menopause.
- The service has a dedicated resource person specifically trained in menopause mental health support and can provide defined support for those experiencing adverse effects of this transition.
- The service hosts a dedicated webpage providing up to date information, additional external and community based support details, the Greene Climatic Scale and psychoeducational resources.
- The CSEAS is available to support managers in enhancing a culture of wellbeing in their division and in supporting their colleagues who are going through menopause.

Supports and Signposting

- Further practical information and support can be found in *the CSEAS Guidelines on Understanding Menopause and Improving Menopause Support in the Workplace*
- The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service: [CSEAS \(per.gov.ie\)](https://per.gov.ie)
- The Civil Service Occupational Health Department: [Chief Medical Office \(cmo.gov.ie\)](https://cmo.gov.ie)
- Department of Health Menopause awareness: [gov.ie - Menopause \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)
- HSE Menopause Overview: [Menopause - Overview - HSE.ie](https://www.hse.ie)
- CIPD Menopause at Work: [The menopause at work: A guide for people professionals | CIPD www.cipd.org/uk/topics/menopause/](https://www.cipd.org/uk/topics/menopause/)

per.gov.ie

Published by the Department of Public
Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

gov.ie



An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí
Sheachadadh PFN agus Athchóirithe
Department of Public Expenditure
NDP Delivery and Reform