

Understanding Menopause and Improving Menopause Support in the Workplace

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Menopause Support

Menopause is a normal and healthy life stage. However, for some, it may not be an easy transition. With the right approach and supports in the workplace their experiences with difficult symptoms can greatly improve.

The role of managers in supporting those experiencing menopausal symptoms is vital, not only for the person in question, but for the team in its entirety.

On-duty EAO available at 0818 008120
Monday - Thursday: 9am - 5.15pm
Friday: 9am - 5pm
Appointments are available evening
and weekends if required

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Supportive practices greatly contribute to an inclusive working environment and can go a long way to retaining valuable employees, maintaining productivity and reducing sick leave absence.

The 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-efficacy. Lack of openness and awareness can discourage a person from discussing these challenges and their needs in the workplace. A manager is not expected to be an expert in this area. However, having a good understanding of the menopause and recognising that menopausal symptoms can affect a person's performance at work is part of your role in fostering employee wellbeing.

This guide aims to explain more about the menopause and to provide managers with guidance in supporting and managing employees experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Aims

- To support you as a manager by providing guidance on supporting and managing employees experiencing menopausal symptoms
- To raise awareness and increase understanding of the wide range of physical, cognitive and psychological symptoms which are associated with the menopause
- To assist in normalising and supporting conversations about the menopause and improve the level of support available



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

The guide is written using inclusive language.

Key Terms

Menopause: Menopause occurs when a person has their last period and reaches the end of their reproductive life. Menopause occurs over several years. The average age of menopause is 51 years of age but menopause can begin earlier

Perimenopause: This is the phase leading up to menopause where menopausal symptoms begin to present. This happens over several years prior to the menopause.

Post-Menopause is when a person has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

Common symptoms during perimenopause include:

Physical

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Fatigue
- Irregular periods
- Headaches
- Reduced libido
- Changes in taste and smell
- Thinning hair
- Low energy
- Weight gain
- Allergies
- Dry mouth
- Heart palpitations

Mental and Emotional

- Low mood or anxiety
- Loss of motivation
- Reduced self esteem
- Loss of emotional control
- Forgetfulness
- Brain fog
- Panic disorder
- Loss of confidence
- Irritability

Supporting Team Members

Research has indicated that it can be very challenging to approach a manager to discuss how menopause is affecting a person at work. It is important not to assume that because someone is of menopausal age that it is affecting their capacity to work.

As a manager, building connection and trust in a team is vital. Regular and constructive informal communication serves to enhance working relationships and build trust.

Consider arranging seminars on menopause as part of supporting wellbeing at work. This communicates an openness to understand more about this life stage and to hear people's experiences of managing menopausal symptoms.

Normalising and supporting conversations

If a team member would like to talk about their experiences with menopause, arrange an appropriate and

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private space to meet and allow for sufficient time to listen. Assure the person of the confidential nature of the conversation.

As a manager, this may feel uncomfortable at times. 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 the Menopause available on the [CSEAS website](#).

Other suggestions and guidelines include:

- Take the lead from the individual and focus on the person and their experience
- Understand that menopause can often affect people's confidence and self esteem
- Try not to make any assumptions
- Use active listening skills, being present and reflecting back
- Maintain good eye contact
- Approach the conversation with sensitivity
- Keep an open and flexible approach
- Explore the best ways that they can be supported and discuss what might be helpful
- Arrange a follow up meeting to check back in
- Note key meeting points including any adjustments or supports agreed

- If the person is experiencing debilitating symptoms, you could encourage them to make an appointment with their GP
- You could also suggest that they seek support from the CSEAS particularly if they are experiencing psychological symptoms
- If it is apparent that the person is in significant and immediate psychological distress, you may wish to make a referral to the CSEAS with the person's consent. [See the CSEAS Management Support page for information on making a referral of an employee to the CSEAS](#)

Remind yourself that you are not expected to be an expert on menopause.

You are expected to be familiar with and understand what menopause is. Being clear on your understanding of the menopause will be helpful to you in supporting your team members.

You can contact the CSEAS to support you in preparing for a sensitive conversation. See the [CSEAS People Managers' Guide](#) information section on **Having a Difficult Workplace Conversation**.

Some potential accommodations that can be made to support those going through the menopause:

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Hot flushes

- Desk fan
- Access to fresh drinking water
- Access to a quiet area
- Small breaks to step out into the fresh air
- A work station close to a window

Heavy periods

- Work station proximity to bathroom
- Sanitary products made available in the bathrooms

Difficulty sleeping

- Flexible working policy

Low mood/Anxiety

- Suggest talking to their GP
- Suggested referral to the CSEAS to speak to menopause specialist
- Ask what might be helpful in terms of managing work

Feelings of isolation

- Coming in to the office
- Taking coffee breaks with colleagues
- Anchor days
- Dept/Division network
- Buddy system
- Informal check-ins

Loss of confidence

- One to one mentoring
- Pacing of work
- Buddy system
- Feedback

Difficulties concentrating

- Review task allocation
- Pacing of workload
- Schedule challenging tasks when concentration is best
- Short breaks during long meetings

How the CSEAS can help

The CSEAS is a support service which offers a wide range of free and confidential* supports designed to assist civil servants in managing work and/or life difficulties. Employee Assistance Officers (EAOs) are available to speak to and meet with civil servants who are in any way affected by the menopause.

*see website for exceptions to confidentiality

The CSEAS website has many useful and relevant publications on health and wellbeing, minding your mental health, stress management and bereavement. For more information, please contact us as follows:

**Civil Service Employee Assistance Service
(HQ)**

**Department of Public Expenditure and
Reform**

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