

Menopause Policy

The aim of this policy

NWC aims to create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their perimenopause or menopause symptoms and ask for support and adjustments at work. The organisation is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place.

Definition

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods.

Menopause refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months.

Post menopausal is the term used to describe a woman who has not had a period for over a year.

Policy statement

NWC recognises that some of its staff will be working through the menopause. Individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. Some women seek medical advice and treatment for the symptoms of the perimenopause and menopause. A common form of treatment is hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Some women may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

A lack of knowledge about the menopause may mean that someone can be misdiagnosed as constantly having health issues which restrict them from fulfilling their normal role and having time off work. In addition, symptoms may impact on their performance, leading potentially to capability or disciplinary proceedings. They may be afraid to approach anyone for help and therefore suffer in silence, losing confidence and feeling isolated before leaving work altogether. It has been estimated that approximately 10% of women actually leave work because of their severe symptoms and lack of support in the workplace (Source My Doctor)

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women and the Menopause.

Women who do not have English as a first language or with diverse cultural backgrounds may have more difficulty in communicating symptoms or difficulties they are experiencing, as many cultures do not have a term to recognise the menopause. This may make it more difficult for them to access medical advice or ask for help or adjustments at work.

Trans women

Hormone therapy is taking hormones of the gender you identify with. The type, intensity and rate of reaction to hormone therapy varies from person to person and depends on the type of medication taken; because of this, trans women may experience similar symptoms to cis women who are going through the menopause.

Women may have a partner who is going through the menopause at the same time. While this can be positive in terms of increased mutual understanding and support at home, sometimes, if both partners are experiencing symptoms such as sleep disturbance or night sweats, this may increase tiredness and fatigue for both partners. It may also be more difficult if both partners experience symptoms such as depression or mood swings at the same time.

Procedures

Managers will:

- Listen and wherever possible, respond sympathetically to any requests for adjustments at work
- Maintain confidentiality in handling health information about the menopause

- Ensure that any specific needs identified (including reasonable adjustments that are agreed) are recorded and reviewed regularly
- Be aware of the potential impact of menopause on performance. If someone's performance suddenly dips, it is worth considering whether the menopause may be playing a part in this.
- Offer flexibility to attend clinics or hospital appointments
- Provide a private space for staff to rest
- Be considerate of the role – stressful environments, high work demands, and long hours can aggravate menopausal symptoms

Management of symptoms

Hot Flashes and Daytime Sweats

Suitable adjustments may include:

- Temperature and ventilation-controlled areas
- Seating near a door or window
- Access to cold water
- Easy access to toilet facilities and showers/washing facilities
- Making adjustments to duties – hot flashes can be difficult to cope with when undertaking high visibility work such as formal meetings and formal presentations.

Hot Flashes, Night Time Sweats and Sleep Disturbance

These symptoms may result in both the individual experiencing them and their partner being very tired at work. Suitable adjustments may include:

- Revisiting working time arrangements – flexible enough in order to deal with symptoms, including starting later after difficulties in sleeping
- Taking more breaks during the day or needing to leave work suddenly. Many staff have a time of day when they are able to work most productively and adjusting working hours to suit that time is a reasonable adjustment.

Urogenital Problems

This will include an increased frequency and urgency to pass urine with a need to access toilet facilities more frequently and to drink more fluids. Suitable adjustments may include:

- Providing ready access to suitable toilet facilities. Providing ready access to suitable washing facilities
- Allowing more frequent breaks to go to the toilet
- Providing easy access to drinking water

Heavy and/or Irregular Periods

Sometimes there can be heavier or unpredictable periods during the perimenopausal stage. Suitable adjustments may include:

- Providing ready access to suitable toilet facilities
- Providing ready access to suitable washing facilities
- Allowing for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet

Psychological Problems

A lack of confidence, forgetfulness and/or memory loss, difficulty in concentrating and a change of mood is reported by many people going through the menopause. This can mean that it may become more difficult to carry out certain tasks temporarily and that performance is affected. Work related stress can exacerbate these symptoms. Suitable adjustments may include:

- Encouraging employees to discuss concerns openly at one-to-one meetings with their line manager or Health Matters
- Agreeing possible adjustments where possible
- Providing access to counselling services
- Addressing work related stress through risk assessment

Psychosocial and Social Impact

Some people report feelings of isolation. Suitable adjustments may include:

- Promoting physical and mental wellbeing at work
- Providing access to counselling
- Providing an ability to network with colleagues experiencing similar issue

General Itchiness

Suitable adjustments may include:

- Encouraging employees to wear clothes made from natural fibres
- Providing comfortable working conditions

Muscular Aches and Bone and Joint Pain

For individuals experiencing these symptoms, moving and handling or adopting static postures may be more uncomfortable. Suitable adjustments may include:

- Making any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules
- Review work of the work station