

Reed
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Menopause:

how to support
your employees

In association with:

balance
by Newson Health

 **The Menopause
Charity**

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Introduction



Menopause. Climacteric. The change. The transition. Change of life. Just a few of the words and phrases to describe a phase in every woman's life. Trans, non-binary and intersex people can also experience the menopause.

Women experiencing the signs and symptoms of menopause may think back to their pubescent years when their bodies began their first dramatic change. It was a scary time for many, yet exciting too as it heralded growing up – a future full of possibilities, along with the less thrilling prospect of learning to cope with periods.

After decades of messy menstruation, the thought of life without periods might be cause for celebration for some: freedom from monthly aches, pain and bloating – not to mention the expense of period products, bar Scotland which in 2020 passed the 'Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act'. In reality, the end of ovulation can be difficult.

Daily life can be impeded by a vast array of symptoms which can be particularly difficult to manage in the workplace, becoming a significant cause of stress for many women.

Menopause survey outcome

In June 2023, Reed conducted a snap survey of 1,000 employed women in the UK, aged 45-54, who are experiencing the menopause. When asked whether they felt their symptoms affect them at work physically, 74% agreed – while a shocking 77% felt their symptoms impact them mentally.

And while 44% state they are comfortable talking to their employer about menopause, an almost equal number – 42% – are not, suggesting more needs to be done to support workers. According to the survey, 46% of people said their employer does not have a menopause policy in place, while 28% didn't know.

These results show the scale of doubt and uncertainty among workers and indicate how much employers need to do to instil confidence.

What is menopause?

For those either in or approaching menopause, this natural life stage signals the closing of their fertility window, with ovulation and periods coming to an end usually between the ages of 45 and 55 years old.

The average age to reach menopause is 51, and while some sail through the experience with barely a hot flush, others are troubled by symptoms that impact their professional lives. Research suggests those with serious symptoms take an average of 32 weeks of leave from work.

Menopause occurs owing to a reduction and loss of ovarian reproductive function, which means less oestrogen, which alongside the hormones progesterone and testosterone, is produced by the ovaries – in essence, eggs are no longer produced, and fertility comes to a natural (or surgical) end. The event happens gradually, like puberty, with hormonal changes that can last years before the body readjusts.

The NHS website states: "It can sometimes happen earlier naturally. Or for reasons such as surgery to remove the ovaries (oophorectomy) or the uterus (hysterectomy), cancer treatments like chemotherapy, or a genetic reason. Sometimes the reason is unknown."

The Menopause Charity, which works towards greater awareness, aided by one of their high-profile ambassadors Davina McCall, refines the term further still: "Although many of us use the word 'menopause' to describe the period of time when we notice our periods begin to change and we experience typical menopause symptoms, it actually refers to a single day: when you haven't had a period for 12 months in a row."





Who is affected by menopause and when?

According to the British Menopause Society, menopause is defined when a woman has had no periods for one year or more. Before then, a woman will experience 'early perimenopause' and 'late perimenopause'.

Early perimenopause is the first sign of change. It marks differences in the usual monthly cycle when periods may become irregular and/or infrequent. The average age this starts is around 47 but sometimes begins as early as the mid-30s.

Late perimenopause sets in a couple of years later as symptoms become more obvious – menstrual cycles may be completely out of kilter, sometimes not resulting in a period for several weeks or months. Additionally, periods might last for fewer days or longer, and be very heavy.

Menopause refers to a single day: when you haven't had a period for 12 months in a row. The average age to reach menopause is 51.

Early menopause is classed as those who reach the stage before they are 45 years old.

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) is the term sometimes applied to women under 40 years old who experience menopausal symptoms such as irregular or infrequent periods.

Surgical menopause is reached when a woman has a hysterectomy to remove her womb, bringing about immediate menopause.

Post-menopause refers to the time after the final period, usually defined as more than 12 months without a period in someone who has their ovaries or immediately following surgery if the ovaries are removed.

What are the symptoms?

“Around 30-60% of women experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause.”



Menopause symptoms vary – the experience is unique to the individual.

Menopause and perimenopause can cause symptoms like anxiety, mood swings, brain fog, hot flushes and irregular periods. These symptoms can start years before your periods stop and carry on afterwards – according to the NHS website.

For years, a lack of information and stigma around the subject, meant women suffered in silence with symptoms they didn't understand or chalked up as general midlife deterioration – barely worth bothering the doctor with. It is only now, as a result of the work of campaigners and charities, that a shift is taking place in attitudes and we're seeing greater understanding and appreciation of this life stage.

According to the Faculty of Occupational Medicine: “Around 30–60% of women experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause, which can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life. At work, they can cause embarrassment, diminish confidence and can be stressful to deal with. The menopause may be compounded by the development of other health conditions, as well as coinciding with caring responsibilities for ageing parents and relatives.”

While some women may not experience any vast change during this transition, others struggle to maintain a normal life, with crippling symptoms that affect their mental and physical health. At one end

of the scale is the stress of irregular and/or heavy periods – at the other night sweats, irritability and loss of self-esteem.

To the symptoms list, the British Menopause Society adds disturbed sleep and insomnia, low energy levels, low mood, anxiety, low libido and sexual drive, impaired memory and concentration, a sensation of 'brain fog', joint aches, headaches, palpitations, vaginal dryness, and urinary symptoms.

The Menopause Charity notes: “It's common to start noticing these changes around the age of 45, but you might notice them earlier or later. Don't be surprised if it takes you a while to realise what's happening – it's easy to ignore these symptoms and put them down to the everyday stresses of your busy life.”

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Jenny Haskey, CEO of The Menopause Charity, said: "Menopause often occurs at the same time as other significant life changes, such as children leaving the home, elderly relatives requiring care, and all of these can really exacerbate the impact of menopause as well, and often leave women wondering, "Is it just in my mind?", you know, "Is it because I've got all of these other things going on?"

"Women who experience menopause earlier have a higher risk of osteoporosis and cardiac cardiovascular disease, while women who might experience menopause later have an increased risk of breast cancer. So, there's a lot of overlap with lots of other illnesses as well. The menopause can impact on all of these."

Anaemia can be another side-effect of heavy periods (known as flooding) during perimenopause. If left untreated, haemoglobin levels can fall to a dangerous level, leading to the individual's eventual collapse. Signs to look out for include a sallow complexion, dry hair, brittle nails, and reduced energy levels (taking longer to climb the stairs, for example) which can be hard for the individual affected to spot as depletion happens very gradually, over months and years.

Many perimenopausal women commonly suffer from fibroids which can cause additional challenges in an average working day. Depending on their size and placement, they can result in more frequent trips to the toilet if they press on the bladder or lead to heavy periods.

Acknowledging a mourning period

Aside from these typical symptoms, the years leading up to menopause present a decreased likelihood of conceiving naturally. Some women may struggle to accept this if they have not had children or the number of children they wanted. This alone could lead to grief-like symptoms, which could require counselling to overcome. Others may feel a general sadness about reaching this life stage and anxiety about the future. Menopause presents an existential reminder that some women may even be in denial about for years.

Common symptoms at a glance:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Heavy periods
- Disturbed sleep/insomnia
- Low energy levels
- Low mood
- Dizziness
- Joint/muscle pain
- Anxiety
- Migraines
- Palpitations
- Insomnia
- Low libido
- Impaired memory and concentration/brain fog
- Joint aches, headaches, palpitations
- Vaginal dryness and urinary symptoms

What are the current treatments?

Menopausal symptoms should always be taken seriously, and it's a good idea to seek professional advice from a GP.

The NHS website provides an overview of the types of treatments and care available, both hormonal and non-hormonal.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is taken by an increasing number of women to manage their symptoms. According to the British Menopause Society (BMS): "It has been shown to be the most effective intervention for managing menopausal symptoms".

As well as reducing and relieving some of the common symptoms, there is evidence HRT can strengthen other parts of the body that typically suffer at this stage of life, such as bone density – protecting against osteoporosis-related injuries. BMS literature states: "HRT started in women under the age of 60 or within 10 years of the

menopause has also been shown to result in significant reduction in the risk of heart disease and cardiovascular mortality".

The two main hormones used in HRT are oestrogen and progestogen, bringing the body back into balance via tablets, stick-on patches, implants, gels or pessaries. HRT involves taking oestrogen only or both hormones.

While a successful treatment for many women, HRT won't be suitable for all, depending on other health issues and medications they may have.

Always seek advice from a GP and visit the [NHS website](#) for more information.

Complementary, alternative and talking therapies

Some women like to manage their symptoms, if mild, through changing their lifestyle – perhaps cutting out certain foods or alcohol and doing more exercise, which can all contribute to general health improvement. Complementary therapies such as reiki, acupuncture and aromatherapy take a holistic approach to wellbeing – factoring in physical, emotional and spiritual needs – and have been found to offer some relief.

Herbal help

Herbal remedies, vitamins and supplements that claim to ease symptoms can be found in many health food shops. What works for some, won't work for others, and it's important to know exactly what you are ingesting in case it has a detrimental effect on other medication you are taking. According to the British Menopause Society: "It is relevant to note that many herbal or natural remedies may contain hormonal ingredients that have oestrogen-like properties so would not be suitable for women who have a contraindication to taking HRT."

Mental health

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), one of the [talking therapies](#), is also an effective option in managing mood swings and anxiety experienced during menopause. [CBT can be requested through the NHS](#), and doesn't require a GP's referral.

Tech savers

Technology is playing an ever-greater role in healthcare, with apps available to track and monitor symptoms. Some even recommend particular exercises, which might be physical as well as mental, such as quizzes and memory training apps. Others tailor a fitness regime according to your needs and time – it might be yoga moves, weights or cardio.

A quick search of your device's app store will reveal a number of available menopause apps, with both free and paid-for features. The [free balance menopause support app](#), available on Google Play or the App Store, was devised by renowned menopause specialist, Dr Louise Newson. It allows you to track your symptoms, access personalised expert content, share stories in the community, and more. It also provides a health report that you can show to a healthcare professional, illustrating how your hormones are impacting you. This has been shown to speed up getting a diagnosis and treatment plan, with 87% of balance users being able to self-diagnose and 69% gaining access to HRT treatment to alleviate their menopause symptoms.

Future gazing

A new drug, fezolinetant, that quickly combats hot flushes was licensed in the US in May 2023 and is heralded as 'game-changing' for those unable to take HRT. It could be approved for use in the UK by the end of 2023.



How should we discuss menopause in the workplace?

Unlike menopause, puberty has little stigma attached to it. Most women will remember sharing their experience of periods with friends and their mothers, even reading about it in magazines. There is a sense of a shared experience and camaraderie, which menopause, at the other end of the scale, has severely lacked.

Breaking taboos and stigma

Women have been empowered to share their stories in recent times, beginning arguably with the #MeToo movement. The campaign was started in 2006 by the American civil rights activist Tarana Burke to promote “empowerment through empathy” among women of colour who had been sexually abused, and later swept across the social media sphere to highlight all experiences of sexual abuse and harassment – with women uniting to voice their concerns and experiences.

Described as the last great taboo, menopause is finally being openly discussed, a conversation that is having a ripple effect in wider society.

Employers eager to attract and retain talent are reviewing their culture and practices to entice this highly experienced segment of the workforce by understanding the impact of menopause on employees. Open conversations are beginning to happen in workplaces to help normalise the topic – according to our survey, almost a third (32%) of women feel comfortable talking to their employer about menopause and how it affects their work – but there is still a long way to go. Discussion can help prevent discrimination, which can arise when women feel compromised by their symptoms and at times unable to perform in their roles as a result.

Building trust

On its website, the CIPD states: “The level of trust you build with employees will determine the extent to which colleagues are able to discuss menopausal symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work. Simple changes to your management style can make a world of difference:

- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your team can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone’s health situation, including the menopause.
- Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture, and encourage someone to raise any concerns.
- Don’t make assumptions – everyone is different, so take your lead from the individual.”

Informal conversations

The Faculty of Occupational Medicine advises: “Regular, informal conversations between manager and employee may enable discussion of changes in health, including issues relating to the menopause. It may be valuable simply to acknowledge this is a normal stage of life and that adjustments can easily be made.

“However, employers need to recognise that some women may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience of the menopause with their manager and an occupational health professional can be very useful.”

This can be particularly true for those who don’t have a great relationship with their boss or would find it difficult discussing personal issues with a male manager.

Cultural and religious factors

Cultural and religious differences may also impact how willing someone is to discuss their health. There may also be a level of shame, fear or guilt around the subject, which is when signposting to professional services might be considered if a manager suspects a link between work performance and menopausal symptoms. Learn more about [finding occupational therapists through the NHS](#).

Alternatively, consider adding employee assistance programmes that include services such as occupational health and counselling to your staff benefits packages.

Encouraging employees to set up their own informal support groups, online or in-person, within the working day may help unite staff who may be unwilling to share their experiences with line managers or HR. If permission is granted by attendees, such groups could be very useful in gathering information to help shape policy, and should be seen as an opportunity for anyone to contribute as a way of normalising menopause conversations.



Impact of menopause in the workplace

Since women first entered the workplace, they have had to navigate menopausal tides in the face of sexism and plain ignorance.

But what our mothers and grandmothers endured, today's generation needn't – not to suggest employers are as advanced as they should be on the topic. And while ridicule or diminishing people's lived experiences is no longer tolerated, many women are still afraid to be open about such personal circumstances.

So, what might this hormonal tidal wave look like in real terms? Women experiencing menopausal symptoms might struggle to complete tasks to their usual ability, be more forgetful, irritable or anxious about routine tasks.

Common difficulties at work:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Lowered confidence
- Fatigue
- Mood swings – bursts of anger
- Poor memory
- Anxiety around routine tasks
- Hot flushes – requiring a change of clothes
- Heavy periods – requiring frequent trips to the toilet

As The Menopause Charity website states: "One third [of women] hide symptoms at work, fearing for their jobs", and "one-in-four say they don't feel supported by their manager".

No wonder then that these troublesome symptoms contribute to the estimated 14 million working days lost to menopause each year.



Dr Louise Newson, GP and menopause specialist and founder of the Balance app and website, The Menopause Charity, and the Newson Health Menopause Society, states:

"In the same way that awareness and support for mental health has increased over recent years, the peri/menopause needs to become a part of everyday conversations in the workplace, peer to peer, between line managers and individuals, and through organisational change, culture, processes and support services."

IN FOCUS:

The Menopause Workplace Pledge

Women's health charity, Wellbeing of Women, is dedicated to funding research, education and advocacy across all of women's reproductive and gynaecological health. Through their [Menopause Workplace Pledge](#), the charity is rallying employers and employees to push for better support for menopausal workers.



Janet Lindsay, CEO of Wellbeing of Women, explains the Menopause Workplace Pledge campaign and their strategy for workplace change in relation to women's health issues.

Q: How and when did the Menopause Workplace Pledge come about?

A: Wellbeing of Women launched the Menopause Workplace Pledge in October 2021, in partnership with HELLO! Magazine and supported by Bupa. It has been transforming conversations around menopause support in the workplace and encouraging employers to take positive action.

From talking to women from all walks of life and our research studies, we know the workplace is where many menopausal and perimenopausal women find their symptoms difficult to manage. Three-in-four women will experience menopause symptoms and for some, these will be severe.

Research shows that women don't disclose their menopause – or the difficulty they have working

because of it – due to embarrassment, stigma, and the fear that they might be discriminated against or stigmatised by their colleagues or customers. And without support, women can experience a loss of confidence, decreased productivity, time off work and less satisfaction in roles. They may seek to reduce their work hours, pass up promotions or leave their jobs altogether, which means organisations lose out on talented and experienced individuals.

By signing up to the Menopause Workplace Pledge, employers will be more likely to make changes to their culture, processes and policies, which will make a material improvement to the working conditions of women going through the menopause. So far, almost 2,500 organisations have signed the pledge and are taking positive action, which is already benefitting millions of workers in the UK.

Q: On your website, you highlight three key points employers should commit to in signing the pledge. Do you give employers a timeframe in which to implement these points?

A: The Menopause Workplace Pledge does not impose timeframes or deadlines by which employers need to demonstrate positive action. This is because we recognise that every workplace is different and there is no 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to menopause workplace support.

It is ultimately the responsibility of each individual employer to make changes internally to ensure their colleagues are supported when going through the menopause. We support employers by sharing resources, such as information and best practice case studies. We also survey those organisations who sign up to the pledge to assess what actions they have taken. More than 94% of organisations that responded say our campaign has been driving positive improvements in their workplaces.

Q: Is there a danger menopause issues could be overlooked by some employers in the sense they believe hybrid working makes it easier for women to manage their symptoms?

A: Good menopause support in the workplace is just as much about raising awareness and normalising conversations about menopause among all staff as it is about helping women manage their symptoms. Every employer who signs up to the pledge should consider how they can promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture as well as providing women with the support they may need. The measures they implement will depend on the workplace – an office environment will differ to a factory or store setting, for example. If fully remote or hybrid working has become an established part of some organisations, they will need to consider how best to cultivate an inclusive workplace environment and provide support to colleagues with this type of working in mind.

Q: What has been the overall employer reaction since launching the pledge?

A: Thousands of organisations have welcomed the Menopause Workplace Pledge since its launch, and we continue to see a steady stream of organisations signing up. To date, around 2,500 employers have signed up to the pledge, from major organisations like Reed, NHS England, the Civil Service, Tesco, Royal Mail, Santander and AstraZeneca to smaller businesses, universities and schools.



It is a free public pledge with the aim of encouraging all employers to take the necessary action to support employees going through the menopause and to inform all staff about the menopause. Currently, we know that most organisations who sign up believe it has contributed to positive improvements being made in their workplaces.

We are continuing to promote the Menopause Workplace Pledge and hope even more organisations will sign up. A list of all [those who have signed the pledge](#) is available on our website.

Q: Do you provide any menopause resources for employers?

A: We do not currently offer any form of accreditation or menopause-specific training, but we have developed a [resource page](#) where we signpost to advice, guidance, events and training that organisations may wish to look into, available on our website. We also have best practice examples from [organisations who are leading the way in workplace menopause support](#).

We are always open to collaborating and working with like-minded organisations and we will continue

to develop the Menopause Workplace Pledge so that it continues to be helpful to organisations and their workforce.

Q: Is there a deadline for employers to sign up by?

A: The Menopause Workplace Pledge is an ongoing campaign. There is no deadline by when employers need to sign up, but there is an expectation that organisations who do will proactively develop and implement policies and other measures to raise awareness of menopause and support women at work.

Q: What does the ideal workplace/work culture look like for menopausal women?

A: An ideal work environment for menopausal women is one where they feel able to disclose their symptoms to their colleagues without fear of judgement or penalty. Where menopause is openly discussed and included in training, and women receive the support they may need to help them manage their symptoms so that they can continue to thrive and succeed at work.

WATCH

In our video, Janet Lindsay, CEO of Wellbeing of Women, spoke to Reed about the charity's work and the practical steps they are taking to improve menopause support in the workplace.



How to support menopausal employees

A culture change is at the heart of supporting employees through menopause, which will not happen overnight. However, some things can be improved more quickly.



Jenny Haskey, CEO of The Menopause Charity, said:

“The best thing that managers and organisations can do, is to ensure that you’ve got a workplace environment where women feel empowered to access support, seek more individual solutions, and be empowered to talk about it. It’s ensuring your company is visibly making space for conversations about menopause in the workplace. I think that’s key.”

First, focus on creating a working environment that openly normalises menopause, encourages open conversation and is proactive in the creation and use of a dedicated menopause policy. Clear signposting to information and services is vital.

- Normalise menopause through encouragement of open conversation
- Provide menopause training for leaders
- Provide employee resources and signpost to information /services.

Ideas for creating menopause-inclusive workplaces

Not every workplace will have the resources to provide workers with an ideal setup – needs vary – and in any case, what matters is that employers demonstrate a commitment to change and inclusivity.

Find out what your employees would value most, such as:

- Access to cool areas/desk fans
- Change of uniform, if applicable – consider providing uniforms in breathable fabrics
- Prioritise hotdesking areas with proximity to toilets for those who need it
- Provide access to a wellbeing room/private recovery area, separate from the toilets
- Access to showers/washrooms
- Free/subsidised period products
- Allow flexible working
- Introduce a menopause policy – [download our free menopause policy template.](#)

Provide training for leadership teams

Training managers on the signs to look out for in their employees can be a good start, ensuring they are prepared to advise them on the support options available should they find themselves struggling with their usual workload. This is where a manager's skill of emotional intelligence comes to the fore, to judge if and when to start a conversation, particularly if it's the first time the employee has mentioned menopause.

Jenny Haskey added: "An employee just might not want that support from their organisation. And actually, according to research by The Fawcett Society, one third hide their symptoms at work because they fear for their jobs. So that's why it's so important that companies seek to embed that education and signposting for all, so that women, all their loved ones, colleagues, and friends, equally know how best to support them, and ensure that they can reach adequate treatment and support if they're not open to engaging with their manager in that way.

"It's kind of similar to other practices that organisations embed in other areas, to make sure that there are resources, and that employees can access that support, even if they don't feel comfortable going to their line manager. But I would encourage that with inclusive training and that knowledge base, hopefully, everybody will have an open culture."

Raising standards

With women over 50 the fastest growing demographic in the workplace, it's vital employers do all they can to retain this key part of the workforce.

In May 2023, the British Standards Institute published guidance to help employers retain employees experiencing menopause.

The 'Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace standard (BS 30416)' identifies practical recommendations, along with steps to take to ensure workers' needs are met. [Find out more about the BSI Standard and download it free here.](#)



CASE STUDY

PwC Watford's workplace menopause support plan

For PwC Watford, menopause support is an evolving process that thrives on the contributions of its people rather than relying on a fixed policy. Through encouraging open discussion amongst employees and easy access to medical support and information, the accounting firm is working to ensure no one is isolated by their experiences.



Louise Hymers, South East Events Marketing Manager, PwC Watford

Q: How did PwC go about implementing menopause support?

A: It started off through my own journey when I was perimenopausal and thinking I needed some support – that led into researching what was available within the firm. At the time, employees were supported in terms of signposting to line managers or career coaches as a first port of call, but I wanted something quite specific, to speak to people who could relate to what I was going through.

That led to the creation of our internal menopause support group, which now has nearly 1,000 members. It's a safe space where everyone can compare notes, hints and tips. It's a one-stop-shop on everything menopause related and everybody's welcome to join. It's not just for females going

through menopause; we have younger people in the group and males who want to learn more. On the back of that, a second, more informal 'menopause cuppas' group was set up, which is another safe place for people to chat to others in similar circumstances.

We then started looking at our private healthcare package and listening to staff and their experiences. As a result, we set up access to a menopause specialist, available to everybody.

It's important to mention that I felt very comfortable in challenging people in senior positions to highlight the type of support I felt PwC was lacking – the culture of the business will play a big role in this.

Q: What types of menopause support have worked well?

A: The support process evolved over a couple of years as we realised what our employees most valued. Small things like introducing menopause as a work absence reason felt really empowering. It was born from my personal experience of feeling I had to lie when debilitating symptoms meant I had to take some time off. I said I had a stomach bug or a cold, when what I wanted to be was honest.

We provided guidance to managers to recognise menopause signs and symptoms, signs to look for if people in their teams are struggling, or just in case

they want to learn more about the life stage. That has gone down very well.

We also devoted time to raising awareness to get people's stories across because the difficult thing with menopause is that everybody's going to be impacted differently, and some won't have any symptoms at all. So, we launched a series of videos that featured staff in our office who had very different stories about how menopause had affected them. That was hugely impactful.

Q: What kind of staff feedback have you had?

A: We've had wonderful feedback generally from staff saying we've really helped them when sometimes life has been quite difficult.

One lady had recently joined the support group and said she was so pleased to learn that the company now offered access to a private menopause specialist, having tried unsuccessfully to get HRT through her doctor. She said without workplace support, she would probably still be struggling.

People have appreciated the opportunity to share things they're going through and the impact it has on their ability to do their work, such as mood swings, brain fog, a lack of motivation, and sleep deprivation. I think just having loads of support mechanisms in place has been really appreciated.

PwC holds an annual awards event, and I was lucky enough to win the Empowerment Award, which was fabulous and totally unexpected. I shared the news on social media and it went viral! The result of it was other businesses contacting us for advice about providing menopause support. This is ongoing – I'm going to our Belgium office soon to speak to their teams about it. Ultimately, if you really want to raise awareness, use all your platforms to get your message out.

Q: Are menopause policies always the best option?

A: When I first spoke with our people team about whether PwC should have a dedicated menopause policy, we decided against it as we have lots of support packs in place and guidance.

Instead, we have a dedicated internal Google site loaded with information and apps, a one-stop-shop for anything menopause. It's very much a wellbeing page, with guidance for managers and staff.

In my view, a policy is not necessarily the right answer because it's not one-size-fits-all. What works for one company might not work as well for another. And I think support always needs to evolve, so I'm now working on how we can keep the momentum going.

One of the next things I want to do is ensure we have support in place for everyone impacted by menopause – not just those going through it, but their partners and families. I'm probably having conversations about it with as many men in the firm as I am with women, and I'm super proud of that. It's almost like we've taken the taboo away from it.

Q: What advice would you give to employers wanting to offer better menopause support?

A: I don't think businesses need to overcomplicate it at all. There is greater awareness out there now, thanks to high-profile people like Davina McCall and Dr Louise Newson, and a lot more positive talk about menopause generally.

Within the workplace, it's great to encourage volunteers to set up a group or some sort of internal platform where staff can feel comfortable in getting together and sharing thoughts and experiences. There should be a safe space for everyone, whether they're managers or career coaches wanting to learn how to provide support or employees seeking it.

And if a business has the means to offer private healthcare, particularly a menopause specialist, as part of a benefits package, that's a great bonus.



What should workplace menopause policies include?

Since its fruition in 2010, the Equality Act serves to protect employees – and to date, the government sees no cause to amend it to encompass menopause legislation. However, anyone put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of their menopause symptoms, could make a case for discrimination if it is related to a protected characteristic.

The [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website states: “Menopause is not a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010 (the Act), but sex, age and disability are all characteristics which provide protection against unfair treatment of employees going through the menopause. As such, the government does not believe further changes to the Equality Act are needed.”

Creating a workplace menopause policy

This puts the onus on employers to outline their own menopause policies and create a culture that instils confidence in employees – and not just those currently going through this life stage. As evidenced in our survey, over a third (34%) of respondents said their employer didn’t understand how their needs have changed as a result of menopause. This is perhaps indicative of fear around broaching the subject, which is vital to address if we are to see a rise in the number of employers creating policies – just 26% of respondents said their employer has policies in place to support the effects of menopause.

The CIPD states: “Not every organisation will decide that having a standalone menopause policy is appropriate for its culture or people management framework. Some may prefer to incorporate provision related to the menopause across its existing policies, such as flexible working and equality and diversity, and develop dedicated line manager guidance and training to bring this policy provision to life.”

The benefits of a standalone menopause policy are a laser focus on the subject – forcing leaders to take the issue seriously; greater clarity for all parties; and a framework that can be easily evaluated and built on.





While HR professionals are responsible for shaping policy with the employer, menopause is still a new area to strategise. Consider setting up an employee focus group with your HR team, led by a group of volunteers willing to share their own menopause experiences, to gauge the topics that should be covered.

Some topics might include:

- Organisational objectives, including the actions planned to implement the policy, and the key outcomes it wants to see
- Signposting to those responsible for implementing specific aspects of the policy, such as HR and line managers, so employees know who to approach
- Pointing to useful resources for employees, such as information about common symptoms
- Offering those experiencing symptoms more regular breaks
- A choice of uniform
- Creating cooler spaces in offices
- Free period products
- Flexible working adjustments

Dr Louise Newson added: "Addressing the menopause should be an integral part of looking after your workforce and be included in your diversity and inclusion agenda.

"Don't make assumptions about what is needed for someone as individual experiences vary greatly. Have open conversations and make a plan on a case-by-case basis. The onus is on you as the employer to consider what reasonable adjustments can be made to support the individual."



FREE DOWNLOAD

Menopause policy template

We have created a menopause policy template to help guide conversations about menopause in your organisation.

[Download now](#)



Showing you care: organisational commitment

How can employers reassure their workforce and future employees of their commitment to menopause support?

Look for a sign

Good intentions are one thing, action another. That's why the charity Wellbeing of Women is setting out to establish an improved workplace culture around menopause. Through their Let's #ChatMenopause campaign in which people are encouraged to share their experiences on social media, to their [Menopause Workplace Pledge](#) which invites employers and employees to sign to show their support, the once deafening silence around menopause is finding its voice.

Likewise, The Menopause Charity has just launched a [Workplace Quality Mark](#), symbolising high standards of support for menopausal people.

The charity's Jenny Haskey explained: "We recognise that just as every menopause journey is different, so are workplaces. The Quality Mark has been developed to help organisations embed practical education and support at the heart of its activity, to ensure their employees thrive. We provide you with the fact-based information, tools, signposting and support required to ensure the needs of your workforce can be met, in a manner that is relevant to your organisation.

"Through simple steps your organisation can prevent women, and individuals experiencing menopause, unnecessarily leaving their roles. Demonstrating an empathic approach to help them understand the treatment options and lifestyle changes that best suit their needs, and reassurance so they know they are not alone."

The Quality Mark enables organisations to develop a culture of empathy, learning and equality. It creates a dialogue for a menopause-confident workforce and empowers organisations to improve support and learn from others. This is not a one-off checklist, nor an overly complex process, but an ongoing practice to embed excellent standards in the workplace, that helps employees thrive.

Commit to the cause

The Menopause Charity believes any organisation, regardless of size, can demonstrate a commitment to ensuring menopause is on the agenda in their workplace by:

- Ensuring menopause education is embedded at the heart of their activity
- Aiding the conversation with clear ownership by those with lived experience of menopause
- Having leadership dedicated to tackling social stigma of menopause and women's health

The Workplace Quality Mark equips organisations with the resources, guidance and updates to work towards this. When you sign up, you will receive access to the Workplace Quality Mark portal providing access to:

- Framework and self-assessment tools
- Resources for employers
- Resources for employees
- News updates
- Use of The Menopause Charity Quality Mark

Jenny added: "Our Quality Mark is an opportunity to help you understand elements you can adopt to improve your organisation's approach to supporting your workforce during menopause, providing you with the framework and resources to embed practice that is relevant and appropriate to your workplace."

WATCH

In our video, Jenny Haskey, CEO of The Menopause Charity, spoke to Reed about the symptoms and impact of menopause in the workplace, and what leaders can do to help menopausal employees.



How else can employers support their staff?

While the government is encouraging the 50+ population back into the workforce, many of whom took early retirement during the pandemic, employers need to ensure they can cater for those with health issues.

Menopause has been shown to play a significant role in women leaving their jobs prematurely – 10% according to [a survey carried out in 2022](#). An imbalance of support and understanding for older people is an ongoing issue across UK society as a whole and must not be allowed to pervade workplaces.

Informal conversations

Where possible, informal conversations between manager and employee are a good foundation for any personal circumstances likely to have an impact on the working day. Trust, empathy and discretion are paramount in any such conversation – as is judging if and when to raise the issue at all.

Dr Louise Newson said: “As a line manager, it is not your role to become an expert on the menopause or seek to solve all the issues at play. Your role is to provide a place for open and supportive conversations that can inform someone where to get the help they need and to know what internal resources are in place within your organisation to encourage and facilitate the employee to use.”

While it may be unaffordable for some employers to provide additional days off – an option desired by 38% of respondents in our survey but a reality for just 10% – it costs nothing to talk. Thirty-six per cent of respondents stated they would value open conversations, but only 27% of employers provide the opportunity.





Flexible working

With remote working and flexi-working far more common than pre-pandemic, menopausal workers have more opportunity to manage their symptoms in the comfort of their own home.

In our survey, 60% of respondents stated they would value flexible working to manage their symptoms – but only 27% of employers offer it. Almost half (48%) of respondents said their employers offered no practical menopause support or weren't sure if they did.

Forward planning

Employers could also help themselves by forward planning and monitoring the projected age distribution of the workforce to avoid a sticking-plaster approach to age-related health issues. With women over the age of 50 the fastest growing group in the workforce according to CIPD, action cannot start soon enough. Advice from occupational health professionals can also support human resource policy.

Other measures such as desk fans and a change of uniform can help with hot flushes – offered by just 19% and six per cent of employers, respectively, according to our survey. In contrast, 28% and nine per cent of respondents desired these items.

Support groups

Menopause Café is a registered charity set up in 2017, based on encouraging open discussion for all at volunteer-led meetings about menopause over tea and cake, raising awareness of the life stage. The USP is there are no experts giving lectures but instead the format relies on a participant-led

discussion. The charity allows people to use its branding to set up their own Menopause Café under their terms, and this includes workplaces too. To find out how to set one up for your employees, [visit the Menopause Café website](#).

Alternatively, employers could look to set up other employee-led support groups, such as lunch & learns, or bring in professional speakers.

Occupational health policy

Consider introducing an occupational health policy as part of an employee benefits package. Alternatively, independent occupational therapists can be found through the [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy](#).

Internal and external resources

Refresh your company intranet with easily-accessible resources dedicated to menopause, including your menopause policy.

There are great people doing great work in women's health. Some key charities and independent companies that provide advice and guidance include [CIPD](#), [The Menopause Charity](#), [Menopause Support](#), [Talking Menopause](#), and [Wellbeing of Women](#). [Balance](#), a menopause website and app created by Dr Louise Newson of Newson Health Menopause Society, has a host of resources including podcasts and articles.

The British Book Awards named 'Menopausal', written by Davina McCall and Dr Naomi Potter, as Book of the Year 2023. This evidence-based guide covering every aspect of the menopause is published by HarperCollins.

In conclusion

Menopause is a hot topic – no pun intended – which means the spotlight will eventually illuminate another equally important subject. This means it's imperative that employees and employers keep pushing for change and having conversations that lead to a better working environment for current and future generations.

As jobseekers prioritise businesses that look after their people both in and out of the workplace, leaders need to commit to refining their employee value proposition and culture to attract and retain talent – being open and supportive of employees on menopause is one way of ensuring this is achieved.



Thank you

Many thanks to the thought leaders for their help with this eBook and for their ongoing contribution in tackling the menopause stigma and fighting for more awareness and inclusion:



Janet Lindsay, CEO,
Wellbeing of Women



Louise Hymers, Marketing Manager,
PwC Watford



Jenny Haskey, CEO,
The Menopause Charity



Dr Louise Newson, GP and menopause specialist and founder of the Balance website and app, The Menopause Charity, and Newson Health Menopause Society

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