

**SMASH THE
STIGMA**



**GMB MODEL
MENOPAUSE IN
THE WORKPLACE
POLICY**

GMB

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GMB MODEL MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY

This policy was put together with thanks for contributions from:

- GMB London Region Sisters Self-Organised Group
- GMB Sandwell Community Branch
- GMB South West Ambulance Branch
- GMB London Fire Brigade Branch
- GMB SECamb branch
- Wales TUC
- South East Coast Ambulance Service
- London Fire Brigade
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Draft Menopause Policy

Review date:

Review through collective bargaining structures including input from GMB

Equality Impact Assessment date:



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1. Policy Statement

[Employer] is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. It is also committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce.

This policy recognises that those experiencing the menopause may need additional consideration, support and adjustments before, during and after the menopause.

[Employer] will take a proactive stance and will promote a greater understanding of the menopause and seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices.

Menopause is a natural stage of life and yet it can remain a taboo subject in the workplace. This policy demonstrates our commitment to changing the way we think and act about the menopause in the workplace and will ensure that employees are supported.

The employer recognises that the menopause is a key health and safety issue.

[Employer] has a positive attitude to the menopause and will work proactively to make adjustments where necessary to support women experiencing the menopause and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse.

[Employer] want to ensure that women experiencing menopause symptoms can feel comfortable to discuss it and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments so they can thrive in a safe workplace, whilst feeling confident their symptoms or experience will not have a negative impact on their working career.

The (Employer) has a responsibility to create a stigma-free environment that encourages open discussion and disclosure; this will encourage women to feel confident, and discuss the practical steps needed to support their needs.

Managers will be trained to understand the impact of the menopause and act accordingly without breaking the confidence of the individual.

[Employer] will educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work. This will in turn enable our staff to feel confident in fulfilling their job role.

Employees will also be educated about who the menopause might affect, what the impact is and why the employer provides this support.

[Employer] want to support women to remain in the workplace wherever possible throughout their menopause.

Statement on Terminology – Although the majority of people who experience the menopause will identify as women, other people – for example trans, non-binary and intersex people – may also experience the menopause. We have used the terms “women” and “people who experience the menopause” throughout the policy but this policy is inclusive of all people who experience the menopause and applies to everyone.

2. Aims and objectives

The aim of this policy is to educate and inform managers of (Employer) about the potential impact and symptoms of menstruation and menopause, and how they can support employees at work.

It also aims to raise wider awareness and understanding among employees and to outline support and reasonable adjustments that are available.

[Employer] aims to create an environment where those experiencing the menopause feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable 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.

This organisation takes a proactive stance and will promote a greater understanding of the menopause and seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices.

This policy is intended to provide clarity and direction on how [Employer] should deal with menopause related issues, for individuals experiencing the menopause.

[Employer] recognises that the menopause is a very individual experience, and that people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

[Employer] will seek to challenge stereotypes that may exist within the organisation about who is likely to be experiencing menopausal symptoms. Whilst the majority of people experiencing the menopause will identify as women, some trans and non-binary people who do not identify as women may also experience the menopause.

Also, a significant number of those under 45 will experience the menopause and medical and chemically induced menopause can occur at any age.

[Employer] will carry out risk assessments which take the specific needs of individuals into consideration (including stress risk assessments).

The employer will work with the GMB to ensure implementation of these objectives.

3. Legislative compliance

The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers.

Under the 1999 Management of Health and Safety at Work Act, employers are required to do risk assessments under the Management Regulations which should include specific risks to those going through the menopause.

The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. It is also important to note that conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

The Public Sector Equality Duty was created by the Equality Act. The duty places a legal obligation on this organisation to consider how it can positively contribute to a fairer society through paying due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

This includes:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

In particular, the use of a risk assessment approach to ensure the working environment will not worsen symptoms, and the application of reasonable adjustments will be considered, alongside the recognition of protected characteristics to ensure that there is no direct or indirect discrimination or harassment as a result of an employee experiencing the menopause.

Whilst the menopause is not in itself a disability, [Employer] recognises that conditions arising from it may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and will therefore consider what reasonable adjustments may necessarily have to be applied on a case-by-case basis.

It is also possible that the menopause may worsen the effects of a disability or long-term health condition, or a disability or long-term health condition can worsen the impact of the menopause.

4. Key principles

Menopause is a natural part of most women's lives, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not experience symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their Line Manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments they may need.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. (Employer) would like everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without fear or embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women.

It will be recognised that the menopause is a very individual experience, and that people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

Appropriate information/support will be provided to all workers with regards to the menopause.

[Employer] encourages employees to seek advice, support and representation from their GMB rep.

Risk assessments will be carried out which take the specific needs of menopausal women into consideration.

Adjustments to working conditions will be proactively put in place.

Training and awareness raising will be provided for all managers and staff.

A confidential named point of contact/support will be provided whom women can speak to for support for any issues that arise due to the menopause.

Reference other relevant workplace policies here

5. Definitions

The **menopause** is part of the natural ageing process for women. Commonly known as ‘the change’, it refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months.

Most typically occurring between age 45 and 55, the average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51; however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.

Cancer treatment and hysterectomy can cause women to have menopausal symptoms or cause early menopause.

The **peri-menopause**, which is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause, is when people are most likely to experience symptoms including hot flushes, aches and pains, mood changes and “brain fog”.

Peri-menopause can often last for four to five years, although for some workers it may continue for many more years – or for others last just a few months.

Because they may still be having regular periods at the onset of symptoms, many do not always realise that they are experiencing the peri-menopause and may not understand what is causing their symptoms. This can be a barrier to accessing support.

Post-menopausal – after a woman has not had a period for a year, she can be described as ‘post-menopausal’. These symptoms may vary in degree between different individuals from mild to very significant.

Premature menopause is experienced by around 1 in 100 women, who experience the menopause before the age of 40.

Menstruation, also known as a ‘period’, is the process of discharging blood and other material from the lining of the uterus at monthly intervals from puberty until the menopause, except during pregnancy.

6. Symptoms

Physical symptoms associated with the onset of the perimenopause can include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- hot flushes
- palpitations
- night sweats
- insomnia and sleep disturbances
- fatigue
- headaches
- joint aches
- dry skin and skin irritation
- tiredness and lack of energy
- increased perspiration during the day
- dry eyes
- hair loss
- urinary problems
- vaginal dryness, itching and discomfort
- irregular and/or heavy, painful periods, clots and flooding

There may also be associated psychological symptoms including (this is not an exhaustive list):

- depression
- anxiety
- panic attacks
- poor concentration
- changes to mood (including low mood and anxiety)
- irritability
- problems with memory
- loss of confidence
- 'Brain Fog'

It is important to note that not every individual will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

On average, women continue to experience symptoms for four years after their last period, but around 10 per cent of women continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years after their last period.

Beyond the menopause, due to lower levels of certain hormones, post-menopausal women can be at an increased risk of certain conditions such as developing osteoporosis ('brittle bones') and heart disease.

These risks increase for women who have an early or premature menopause.

7. Who is affected

[Employer] recognises that a large and increasing proportion of its employees will be working through and well beyond the menopause. In the UK it is estimated that around 1 in 3 women are either currently going through or have reached the menopause.

The menopause affects most women, and it can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

In the UK, the average age is 51, but it can happen much earlier. Many women experience the menopause before 45 (early menopause) - therefore their symptoms are not always recognised and this can create additional barriers and stigma.

Some women experience a medical/ surgical menopause which can occur suddenly when the ovaries are damaged or removed by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.

It is important to be aware that many women will experience the menopause at a time when other pressures are also increasing, for example many women at this age may be taking on additional caring responsibilities for elderly parents or grandchildren which may add to the impact of the menopause.

It should be noted that people from the non-binary, transgender and intersex communities may also experience menopausal symptoms. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may be different for those among these communities, especially during some people's transition. Menopause support should consider these additional barriers and needs.

Experiences and perceptions of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status. It is important to recognise that for many reasons, people's individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. It is particularly important that no assumptions are made by managers about who or how the menopause may impact.

Some women seek medical advice and treatment for the symptoms of the peri-menopause and menopause. A common form of treatment is known as hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Many women find these treatments helpful for alleviating symptoms, but HRT is not suitable or appropriate for all women. Some women using HRT may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

8. Workplace factors

This policy recognises that there are many workplace factors which can make working life more difficult for women experiencing the menopause and which may make symptoms worse. These include:

- Lack of suitable gender sensitive risk assessments
- Lack of awareness of the menopause
- Lack of management training on women's health issues
- Poor ventilation and air quality
- Inadequate access to drinking water
- Inadequate or non-existent toilet/washing facilities
- Lack of control of temperature/ light
- Lack of appropriate uniforms or personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Inflexible working time rules/ break times
- Inflexible policies which penalise women because of their symptoms
- Negative attitudes
- Excessive workloads
- Workplace stress
- Unsympathetic line management/colleagues
- Bullying and harassment

This organisation is committed to ensuring that the above factors are eliminated from this workplace and to taking proactive steps to ensure conditions in the workplace do not make women's symptoms worse.

9. Responsibilities

9.1 Chief Executive Officer (or equivalent)

The Chief Executive Officer has a responsibility to ensure that the general principles of this policy are followed by all and to support mechanisms to aid the promotion of health and wellbeing.

9.2 Line Manager responsibilities:

- Be ready and willing to have open and honest discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally
- Maintain absolute confidentiality at all times regarding these discussions. If it is necessary to seek additional advice and/or support from other departments or bodies agree this with the individual
- Ensure that menopause related sickness is recorded accurately under the procedure
- Use this policy and guidance in appendices to inform any reasonable adjustments or actions to be agreed with the member of staff, and record using template
- Ensure agreed adjustments are adhered to and ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates
- Where adjustments are unsuccessful, the Line Manager may speak with the Wellbeing Hub with the consent of the individual who may advise a referral to Occupational health. Direct referrals to Occupational Health may also be appropriate.

9.3 Responsibilities of the Occupational Health/Wellbeing hub (may need different terminology for what is applicable to [Employer]):

- Engage with others to explore support mechanisms and help to implement agreed support structures.

- Provide support and advice to individuals and Line Managers regarding menopause, including signposting to external service/support wherever appropriate and necessary.
- Facilitate referrals to Occupational Health where appropriate.

The role of Occupational Health is to:

- During an assessment discussion of symptoms and wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with up-to-date research and best practice to assist individuals to determine whether menstruation or menopause may be a contributing factor
- Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice
- Provide support and advice to HR and Line Managers in determining and agreeing reasonable adjustments, if required
- Highlight any increases in referrals due to menstruation and menopausal symptoms
- Deliver Menopause Awareness sessions to managers and staff as requested

9.4 Human Resources (HR) responsibilities:

- Offer guidance to Line Managers on the interpretation of this Policy
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in respect of related absence levels and performance
- Audit and Review (evaluating effectiveness)
- Work with relevant training departments to roll out training for managers and staff

Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly in line with the employer's procedures, alongside GMB, to ensure that it is kept up to date and is working effectively.

10. Awareness raising and education

It is vital that all managers receive training on the menopause and the use of this policy. The training should include covering how the menopause can impact on workers, the importance of breaking down stigma and taboos around the menopause, what support is available/should be given by line managers, how to carry out risk assessments and access occupational health support, sickness management, confidentiality and other supportive measures managers should put in place.

[Employer] to carry out regular training and awareness raising in the workplace for all staff, including who may experience the menopause, how it can impact on people and the workplace and what support the employer can put in place.

11. Access to workplace support

It is recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and different adjustments and levels of support may be needed for different individuals.

This organisation is committed to ensuring that line managers are sympathetic and provide appropriate support and adjustments when needed to help deal with issues arising from the menopause.

Alternative point of contact/support

Although all managers are expected to take a positive and supportive approach towards discussions about the menopause, this organisation understands that some individual staff members who are affected may feel uncomfortable talking directly to their line manager if they are experiencing problems, especially if the line manager is a man or much younger.

Therefore the organisation has made other options available including x person in x department (e.g. a trained person from HR, OH, Employee Assistance Service).

The organisation also understands that women may wish to approach another manager whom they trust or may wish to approach their union rep for support.

Trade Unions

Trade unions play a vital role in supporting their members through challenging periods, such as when experiencing the menopause.

Many members may wish for their trade union rep to accompany them to meetings with their manager or HR about the menopause. The employer fully supports this.

Outside Organisations (see signposting below)

12. Key actions and adjustments to be made:

Risk assessments

Managers should ensure risk assessments consider the specific needs of people going through the menopause and ensure that the working environment is suitable and will not make women's symptoms worse.

The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments which may be required.

Common issues that need consideration are workplace temperature and ventilation, access to adequate toilet and washing facilities and sources of workplace stress such as workload.

It is reasonable for managers to review reasonable adjustments to ensure they are still effective. However, it is important to remember that some adjustments may need to be in place for the medium to long term as menopausal symptoms can go on for some time.

There can also be long term effects of the menopause - for example, if as a result of the menopause a person might develop lower bone density or osteoporosis, then reasonable adjustments may be permanent. [This policy may then refer to disability policy if such a policy exists]

Implementation of existing policies

The effects of the menopause and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) should be taken into account in the implementation of sickness absence, capability, disciplinary and performance policies to ensure that menopausal women are not unfairly penalised and do not experience detrimental treatment as a result of their symptoms.

Sickness absence procedures

Menopause related sickness should not be included in any sickness management calculation for formal processes.

The menopause is a natural part of many workers' lives and therefore no individual should be sanctioned or disadvantaged for sickness relating to the menopause (in the same way as pregnancy and maternity related sickness should be excluded from these processes).

If an employer uses the Bradford factor or similar sickness management triggers, menopause-related sickness should be explicitly excluded.

It is important that any menopause-related sickness absence should be correctly and separately recorded. Accurate records for monitoring purposes should be kept.

Flexible working arrangements

Changes to working time arrangements should be made available where needed including adjustments to start/finish times, reduced hours, options for home working. Additional breaks and leave should be granted at short notice where necessary.

[Examples of specific adjustments for different symptoms such as the table of examples provided in the Wales TUC toolkit could be added here or put into a separate guidance document.]

Impact on others

We recognise that when someone is experiencing the menopause it can have an impact on their partner, carer or close family member at work, particularly in terms of affecting sleep.

In these circumstances [employer] will support the employee with reasonable changes to shift patterns and starting times to ensure that they are not disadvantaged as a result of their close association with a person experiencing the menopause.

Other adjustment

The nature of the individual needs people will have mean it is important for line managers to discuss with the employee what actions they need. This could include uniform or work wear changes, access to water, access to regular and flexible toilet breaks, working from home and other supportive actions.

The employer recognises their duty when providing protective equipment and uniforms to take into account the health of those who wear these and not provide unsuitable or tight-fitting clothing or uniforms which may aggravate hot flushes and sweating. They also recognise that employees may need more items of PPE or uniform during the menopause.

13. Signposting, support and further information

Contact details [alternative contact – HR/OH/Welfare/ Employee Assistance Service]

- NHS Menopause Guidance - www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause - provides an overview, together with information about menopausal symptoms and treatment options.
- Menopause Matters - www.menopausematters.co.uk - An independent website which gives up-to-date information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.

- The Menopause Matters Forum - www.menopausematters.co.uk/forum - Provides the opportunity to chat to other women experiencing the same problems and concerns.
- Wales TUC The Menopause in the Workplace Toolkit The menopause in the workplace - A toolkit for trade unionists Wales TUC Cymru | TUC
- British Menopause Society - thebms.org.uk - The BMS provides education, information and guidance to healthcare professionals specialising in all aspects of reproductive health.
- Women's Health Concern (WHC) - www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause - WHC is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society and provides factsheets about the menopause, linked articles (e.g. about experiencing a healthy menopause), FAQs and recommended further reading.
- Manage My Menopause - www.managemymenopause.co.uk - A not for profit organisation providing tailored menopausal advice about post reproductive health.
- The Daisy Network Charity - www.daisynetwork.org - A registered charity providing free information and support to women with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) also known as Premature Menopause.
- Simply Hormones - simplyhormones.com/women - Provides blogs and articles about the menopause and opportunity to sign up to receive free Menopause Survival Kit, newsletters and updates. It also has available a Menopause: A Guide for Men information booklet that has been designed to help men understand more about the menopause, including some 'helpful hints'.
- Guidance on menopause and the workplace - Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians <https://www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause>
- Menopause in the Workplace - ENEI

Appendix 1

Menopause in the Workplace – Best practice for line managers

Support from line managers

This policy has already highlighted that the menopause is a very personal experience for a woman and can affect an individual at work in a variety of ways.

Managers should therefore not make any assumptions about who is likely to experience the menopause or how an individual is dealing with the menopause. They will listen to staff to better understand their needs. In addition, managers need to understand the equality impacts of any decisions they make relating to staff going through menopause.

Be supportive and have understanding.

It is important that all managers are supportive and understand the symptoms associated with the menopause and the issues likely to be affecting people going through it.

As with any long-standing health-related conditions, support from a line manager can make a major difference to how individuals deal with the menopause, enabling them to continue working well and productively.

Managers can only be sympathetic and supportive if they have received proper training and are aware that their member of staff is experiencing difficulties.

[Employer] recognises that some individuals may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about approaching their manager to discuss any difficulties in managing their menopausal symptoms. This may particularly be the case if their manager is younger than them or male or is not informed about the menopause.

It is therefore key that managers be proactive in familiarising themselves with this policy and have received appropriate regular training.

Confidentiality

The importance of confidentiality cannot be overplayed when discussing the menopause. Staff will only feel confident to be open and honest if they have faith that confidentiality will be maintained. Therefore, if it is necessary to seek further advice or refer the staff member to other support, then you should discuss this with the staff member and ensure they are comfortable that this is being done.

Further support and advice about the menopause can also be sought from either the Wellbeing Team/Occupational Health, HR and your trade union.

Consider a referral to the Occupational Health Unit (OHU).

Managers should talk to the individual to find out if they feel it would be beneficial to be referred to our occupational health provider who will be able to provide some professional advice and/or recommend the individual visit their own GP, if they have not done so already.

Carry out a risk assessment and look at what reasonable adjustments can be put in place.

Reasonable adjustments will need to be fully considered and implemented accordingly for workers going through the menopause and experiencing symptoms. This will include those with perimenopause symptoms.

The purpose of a reasonable adjustment is to, where possible, reduce barriers to the worker being able to do their job.

The adjustment should be tailored to address the barriers/issues experienced specifically by that individual.

For advice about risk assessments and/or reasonable adjustments please contact [...]

Ensure correct records are held and policies followed

Record menopause related sickness correctly

Record risk assessments and reasonable adjustments under the procedure

Line Manager conversation guidance

- Know the Menopause Policy
- Allow adequate time to have the conversation
- Find an appropriate space
- Encourage openness and honesty
- Agree actions and how to implement them
- Ensure the record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom
- Ensure designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting.