

Menopause

A Guide for Managers and Staff

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1. Background

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) regards the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees to be of significant importance. As part of its commitment to promoting the health and wellbeing of its employees, WCC provides appropriate support to staff experiencing menopause.

In order for support to be provided, it is important that managers understand the difficulties and anxieties of staff currently going through menopause.

2. Aims / Objectives

The aim of this guidance is to make managers aware of menopause related issues, how these can affect their staff, and how best to support them.

The intention is to create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and to ask for adjustments at work.

WCC will take a pro-active stance by promoting a greater understanding of menopause and seeking to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices.

This guidance provides direction and clarity on how to deal with menopause related issues, either for individuals experiencing this natural stage of life condition, or those who are perhaps affected indirectly, for example, line managers, partners (including same sex partners) and colleagues.

3. Scope / Details

This guidance applies to all WCC employees:-

- Who will have access to information and support regarding menopause
- Whose work conditions can be reviewed to take account of the difficulties that some women experience during menopause, and as a result reasonable adjustments will be considered where necessary

WCC will increase awareness amongst its staff, ensuring that all employees feel supported and comfortable in discussing menopause in the workplace

4. Definitions

Peri-menopause (or pre-menopause) is the time when many women experience symptoms in the years leading up to menopause.

Menopause is when a woman ceases to have periods and is no longer able to get pregnant.

Women are said to postmenopausal (gone through the menopause) when they have not had a period at all for a year.

Menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51 years.

An early (premature) menopause is one that occurs between the ages of 40-45.

Around 1 in 100 women experience menopause before 40 years of age. This is known as premature ovarian insufficiency.

5. Symptoms

Approximately 80% of women will experience menopausal symptoms; the degree of which can vary widely. Some of these symptoms can be quite severe and have a significant impact on their everyday activities, including their work life. Around 25% of women have very severe symptoms. The symptoms of menopause may only last a few months, however, many experience symptoms for several years with over 50% experiencing symptoms for more than seven years.

It is a complicated condition with a variety of symptoms, many of which have potential implications in the workplace, and these can include:

- Hot flushes and sweats
- Palpitations
- Night sweats
- Disturbed Sleep
- Headaches
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Memory loss and difficulty concentrating
- Aches and pains in joints

6. Discussions about menopause

It is important to be aware that many women going through menopause choose not to tell their manager about their symptoms. For some, this may lead to further problems in the workplace and the worsening of symptoms. Sometimes performance or behaviours might change and others may not understand why. There is the potential for women to be reluctant to disclose the real reason for sickness absence and, therefore, may give another reason for their absence.

Common reasons for non-disclosure include:-

- It is private / personal
- It is embarrassing
- Not knowing the manager well enough
- The line manager is male, or is younger, or known to be unsympathetic
- Concern that it is not an issue that the workplace would take seriously, adequately understand or deal with
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Concerns about negative attitudes and discrimination
- Worry about being perceived as less capable than before
- Concerns about the effect on job security and / or promotion opportunities

7. How does menopause impact on women at work?

The effects on a woman's physical and emotional health can significantly impact on how she does her work and her relationships with colleagues.

WCC recognises its responsibility to take into account the difficulties women may experience during menopause and to provide support and advice in this regard.

8. How to support women going through menopause

Although not an exhaustive list, line managers should consider the following:-

- Line managers to be aware of and supportive in respect of menopausal symptoms so that women do not feel embarrassed to approach him/her and discuss how menopause is affecting their health. Menopause can affect a woman's confidence and it can be daunting and embarrassing talking to someone who has no knowledge of it.
- Flexible working arrangements may be considered for those who are experiencing debilitating symptoms. Menopause symptoms can increase in stressful situations and when the individual is tired. In the case of an individual going through the menopause who has trouble sleeping at night, a later start time may be appropriate.
- Reasonable adjustments will need to be fully considered and implemented accordingly for women who are going through menopause and experiencing symptoms. The purpose of a reasonable adjustment is to remove barriers that get in the way of an individual doing their job to the best of their ability wherever possible. The adjustment should be tailored to address the barriers and/or issues experienced specifically by that individual, and should be

identified through the discussions with the individual. It is essential to avoid making assumptions.

Adjustments may include:

- To allow time to rest / recover / make a phone call for personal support. Flexibility and increased frequency in breaks. Allowing greater flexibility to take breaks, e.g. to take medication, will enable individuals to contribute more fully in the workplace.
- Where possible, facilitate a comfortable working environment for those suffering menopausal symptoms. This could include, for example, adequate drinking water supplies, temperature controlled areas, adequate access to toilet facilities, showers/washing facilities. Women going through menopause may request to be positioned near a door or a window or to be provided with a desk fan where possible.
- Staff who wear a uniform may request to adjust or partly remove certain items. Women going through menopause will need to be able to control their temperature by removing unnecessary layers of clothing.
- The provision of additional uniforms may be considered to allow individuals to change during the day if necessary. When purchasing uniforms, it is worth noting that natural fibres such as cotton are preferable to synthetic materials if, for example, an individual is experiencing hot flushes.

9. Risk Assessment

Managers should consider undertaking a risk assessment for women currently going through menopause and experiencing symptoms. Areas to consider include:

- Does the individual have access to the necessary information?
- Would a referral to the occupational health service be helpful?
- Are rest, toilet, sanitary and changing facilities easily accessible?
- Is consideration to workstations, ventilation, uniform necessary?
- Are lighter or different duties an appropriate consideration?
- Is flexibility in relation to working hours, breaks required?
- Is time off for medical treatment or advice required?

10. Additional sources of information

Let's Talk About Menopause pages on Health & Safety & Wellbeing intranet pages

Dr Marilyn Glenville – Leading nutritionist specializing in Women's health www.marilynglenville.com
(Contains advice on healthy eating and nutrition)

Information on a variety of health subjects can be found on the NHS website www.nhs.uk

Henpicked – Wisdom for women website for women's health issues. www.henpicked.net

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