



Menopause

The menopause is a workplace issue:

guidance and model policy



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Foreword

This guide is designed to assist branches in ensuring that organisations consider how menopausal symptoms can impact on women, trans and non-binary people experiencing the menopause. The aim is for employers to treat the issue with the critical importance it deserves and for policies and procedures to protect all workers and not disadvantage those who are experiencing the menopause.

The guide is arranged so that you can dip in and dip out, focusing on the areas that are relevant to your employer.

For example, you may already have a workplace menopause policy in place and an engaged employer, so you may want to focus more on specific practical actions to support individual members, as listed in the checklist for branches and reps.

Or you may have a disinterested or hostile employer and need to look particularly at the section about putting the case to an employer, as well as using the model workplace survey to gather evidence.

This guide will help branches to:

- Initiate discussions with an employer to highlight how the menopause can impact on workers and make the case for jointly conducting a thorough review of the organisation's policies and procedures
 - Understand the minimum legal requirements that employers must consider in their handling of workers experiencing the menopause
 - Tap into the resources of established menopause information sources to push forward a commitment to raising awareness about the menopause and the impact of menopausal symptoms
 - Consider how union activists may contribute to raising awareness of menopausal symptoms and communicating the workplace adjustments and other support available
- Set out to employers the key features within a range of core policies that are needed to create a fair and supportive environment for workers experiencing the menopause
 - Press for standard practices and training that enable problems related to menopausal symptoms in the workplace to be identified and for suitable adjustments to be offered.



Why the menopause is a workplace issue

We all recognise that branches and workplace reps have increasing demands on their time. But negotiating for better support for workers struggling with menopausal symptoms will have a wide-ranging benefit for your branch and workplace, as well as our members.

As the UK's leading public service trade union for women, UNISON is determined to ensure that working women have all the support they need to be healthy and safe at work.

Women make up more than 70% of UNISON's 1.3 million members and activists. They are 51% of the UK workforce¹. And these women will inevitably experience the menopause at some point in their lives, and not necessarily in their late forties or early fifties.

It can affect younger women too through a premature or a medical or surgical menopause.

It can also affect transgender and non-binary people.

Statistics show that around 1 in every 3 women has either experienced or is currently going through the menopause. Around 8 in every 10 women will experience noticeable symptoms and of these 45% will find their symptoms hard to deal with.²

Some women may cope well with the physical and emotional changes, but for others they may cause particular difficulties both in work and out of work. And we all know how problems outside of work can also impact on performance at work.

These problems can be made even worse by the fact that there remains considerable ignorance and misunderstanding about the menopause, with it often being treated as an embarrassing or taboo subject, or even a topic to make fun of.

As the Work Foundation report 'More than "women's issues": Women's reproductive and gynaecological health and work' states: "there are a range of issues relating specifically to the female reproductive system which can and do impact on women's health and work; it is time we stopped dismissing them as "women's issues" and recognise and support them as workplace health concerns."

Many women are being driven from the workplace because they find that adapting problematic symptoms around inflexible work expectations is just too difficult. Others may find that managing symptoms mean they miss out on promotions and training, reduce their hours, lose confidence in the workplace and see their pay levels drop, all contributing to a widening gender pay gap.

The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. It should be remembered that this can also be a time of life when women are experiencing difficulties, not least with increasing caring responsibilities, and the onset of age related health conditions. In addition, they may well be feeling that they are already not valued in the workplace.

UNISON says that the impact of menopausal symptoms on women workers is an occupational health issue and an equality issue.

The menopause is a workplace issue and therefore a trade union issue.

¹ www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket

² [The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc](http://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc)

How branches can benefit from negotiating a workplace menopause policy

“For far too long the menopause has been an issue shrouded in secrecy, resigned to whispered conversations between women, or jokes about hot flushes, if even discussed at all... Menopausal women are facing some real challenges in the workplace, and that employers are not really sure what to do to best support them. More and more women are working on well into their 50s and 60s so it’s an issue that employers are going to have to look at much more closely.”

Sharon Edwards, Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Women’s Committee Chair

Most women at some time within their working lives will experience the menopause. This is the same for the members of your branch or workplace – perhaps it even directly affects you!

For some of our members, menopause issues will cause particular difficulties at work and may even lead to discriminatory action by employers, yet it’s not something we usually talk about.

The Government Equalities Office published an evidence review in 2017 of the extent to which menopause transition impacts on women’s economic participation in the UK (www.gov.uk and search ‘menopause transition’). It reported that “significant numbers of working women experience problems at work as a result of individual symptoms... The evidence also paints a consistent picture of women in transition feeling those around them at work are unsympathetic or treat them badly, because of gendered ageism.”

- By agreeing good workplace policies such as health and safety, sickness absence, flexible working and performance management, that take account of the impact of menopausal symptoms, the number of cases requiring steward representation could be reduced, freeing up steward time.
- Improving conditions for workers who may be disadvantaged by practices that do not take account of health issues like those related to menopausal symptoms, may help in addressing the gender pay gap.
- A good menopause in the workplace policy will highlight how UNISON values its members and recognises the specific problems that women may experience, which could result in an increase in your branch’s activist base.
- Agreeing successful policies for a wide range of workers can be a useful recruitment and retention tool, advertising the benefits of joining UNISON for all. It can also highlight how UNISON reps have expert negotiation skills when dealing with employers.
- Organising around the menopause and its impact on workers is a great way to increase involvement and participation of UNISON members in your branch.



What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

There is also a period of time before the menopause, in the years leading up to it, called the perimenopause where there can be significant changes for women, with irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause.

Many women with symptoms have at least two or three years of 'hormonal chaos' as their oestrogen levels decline before the last period, although for some this can go on for five or more years.

Overall this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years, although for some women it can be much longer.

Post-menopause is a term used when a woman's periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon. Problematic symptoms may continue for years.

The menopause affects a wide range of people

Although most women experience this natural change between the ages of 45 and 55, for some women, it can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is known as a premature menopause, or premature ovarian insufficiency. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause.

In addition there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the woman's age, such as a medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids or when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer, or when a woman's ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy. This is known as a medical or surgical menopause.

Women who experience an early menopause may also have to cope with the psychological distress of facing infertility at an early age.

Although it may be supportive for **women in same-sex relationships**, if the partners are also experiencing menopausal symptoms at the same time, it could increase difficulties if symptoms include anxiety, sleep disturbance and depression for example.

And struggling with menopausal symptoms may be additionally difficult for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans plus (LGBT+) people if they already experience discrimination in the workplace.

Trans workers – Some people grow up with or develop a strong sense that their gender identity is different to how they were labelled at birth. They have a strong desire to transition and live permanently in the correct gender for them.

Trans men identify as male but were assigned female at birth. Trans men may experience natural menopausal symptoms if their ovaries remain in place and no hormone therapy is given. They may experience surgical menopause if the ovaries and uterus are removed. If hormone therapy is in place it may complicate it for trans men.

Trans women identify as female but were assigned male at birth. They may experience pseudo-menopausal symptoms if their hormone therapy treatment is interrupted or levels are unstable.

Non-binary people are people who are not solely male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither or something entirely different. Non-binary people don't think of themselves as simply male or female. Their gender identity is more complicated. Some non-binary people may also experience menopausal symptoms.

Everyone's experience of the menopause is individual and may differ greatly. But inevitably the symptoms will be exacerbated by negative or discriminatory attitudes in the workplace.

Struggling with menopausal symptoms may be additionally difficult for disabled women and Black women if they already experience discrimination in the workplace.

Although there has been little research into the matter, it is also reported by **disabled women** and those with pre-existing health conditions, that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Examples reported include women with diabetes who find it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels stable, or conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), mental health conditions, skin conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia etc. being exacerbated. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition. The nature of the impairment may also make it more difficult for the disabled woman to get the medical support they require, or to recognise the symptoms as being related to the menopause.

Black women may face barriers in accessing appropriate medical support or having their symptoms taken seriously, not least because of racism in the workplace. Evidence suggests that there may also be some variations in the average age at which the menopause takes place between women of different ethnic backgrounds. Some studies suggest that symptoms may be more prevalent and more severe for Black women, although research is not yet clear on the reasons for this. Black workers are also more likely to be in insecure work on casual or zero hours contracts, making it even more difficult to cope with problematic menopausal symptoms.



What are the possible menopausal symptoms and how could they impact on work?

Some women experience almost no menopausal symptoms, but around 80% do experience noticeable changes and of these, 45% find their symptoms difficult to deal with. Without treatment, most menopausal symptoms gradually stop naturally.

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if symptoms are caused by the menopause or other factors. Many of those experiencing the menopause may feel confused or powerless if they don't understand why their body is behaving in the way it is.

For many others it is a distressing time psychologically as a result of the physical symptoms impacting on their relationships and self-confidence (such as a reduced sex drive or weight gain), as well as symptoms directly caused by the menopause such as anxiety and reduced concentration.

As the menopause factsheet from **'Women's Health Concern'** (www.womens-health-concern.org) explains: "For some women this loss of reproductive ability may be deeply felt, and for all women the menopause is a personal experience, not just a medical condition."

All the common menopausal symptoms are associated with a decrease in the body's production of oestrogen.

The impact of these symptoms on a worker's self-confidence, mental health and relationships with others, will clearly have an impact not only on their life outside work but also their working life, particularly, given the stresses and strains of a busy workplace.

These symptoms could include:

- Hot flushes – a very common symptom affecting 3 in every 4 women experiencing the menopause. They can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward. The woman may sweat, the skin may become red and patchy, and the heart rate can also become quicker or stronger.
- Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving women exhausted, some women

anaemic as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently.

- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance – common during the perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause, and with a close association with the presence of flushes and sweats.
- Low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration and memory problems.
- Urinary problems – more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.
- Irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort.
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
- Weight gain.
- Headaches and migraines.
- Menopausal hair loss – very commonly, the volume and condition of a woman's hair appears to worsen, with some women noticing that hair does not grow as much as previously. Some women will go on to experience a more profound hair loss, with thinning at the crown of the head, the sides or more general hair thinning all over the head. This is described as female pattern hair loss (FPHL).
- Osteoporosis – the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis. The first sign that a woman has it is usually the fracture of a bone.
- Menopausal symptoms may also exacerbate existing impairments and conditions that women may already be struggling to cope with.

Clearly any and all of these symptoms would affect someone in their day-to-day lives, including at work.

It's therefore important for managers and trade union reps to be aware of these symptoms so that they can appreciate the full extent of how some workers experience the menopause and its impact on work.

It's worth remembering that some women and trans people who experience the menopause may get all the symptoms at the same time or at different times throughout menopause. Other workers may only suffer with a few symptoms that are manageable whereas a few others may sail through the menopause and hardly notice any symptoms. Everyone is different!

A 2017 survey conducted by the British Menopause Society (BMS) <https://thebms.org.uk> found that "almost half (45%) of women, whose menopause had a strong impact on their lives, felt their menopause symptoms have had a negative impact on their work.

The survey also revealed that the menopause remains a 'taboo' subject in the UK and something women and men don't always feel comfortable talking about."

Key findings from 'The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace' (www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc) include:

- Only just over a third of respondents said they would feel comfortable talking about their menopause status at work.
- Less than 1% said their workplace had a policy on menopause but almost 90% would welcome one.
- Nearly 90% would also welcome training for union reps so that they could support women experiencing the menopause at work.

Comments from respondents included wanting:

"information and training for male and female managers on how to best discuss and support colleagues experiencing menopause. Information that educates colleagues of all ages about menopause and some of the cultural issues that affect the way in which different ethnic groups will experience menopause.....

Maybe a better understanding of the symptoms, particularly for males, so they can understand it's a serious issue and that women aren't just being 'difficult'."

UNISON says we need to talk about the menopause and we need to support those struggling with difficult menopause symptoms in the workplace.



Why do branch officers and reps need to know about menopausal symptoms?

The majority of our members are women.

The majority of our members will experience the menopause.

UNISON says supporting workers experiencing the menopause is not solely an issue for women – it's an issue for everyone who cares about fairness in the workplace.

For many it will be a natural occurrence that is completely manageable. But for many others it can affect them profoundly, leading to emotional and health changes impacting on their work and their relationship with colleagues.

Although symptoms may last a comparatively short time, they can frequently trigger formal monitoring procedures at work. And whilst symptoms may be severely debilitating for some, they are too often written off as 'women's problems' that are trivial or an embarrassing joke.

Unfortunately there is often very little understanding of the issues and very little support for members who are going through the menopause. For too long it has been seen as a private matter and so, rarely discussed with managers who may not have awareness of the issues involved. This means many women feel that they have to hide their symptoms and will be less likely to ask for the adjustments that may help them.

Trans people too may be particularly reluctant to discuss difficult menopausal symptoms that impact on their work, and health and wellbeing, if doing so would disclose their trans status.

But the issues are growing in importance.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) August 2019 figures³ there are approximately 4.45 million women aged 50 to 64 currently in work in the UK. That number will rise as the retirement age for women increases over the coming years.

'The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace' (www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc) found that 85% of women asked felt that the menopause had affected their working life.

Therefore it is crucial for branches and stewards to raise the issue so that employers are aware of their responsibilities and ensure that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse. This means being certain that employers fulfil their duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act, undertaking specific risk assessments to assess conditions for workers experiencing the menopause in the workplace.

Workers who are experiencing the menopause also need to know that there is someone they can go to and discuss any difficulties they are having, someone who is able to provide support within the workplace, to signpost to trusted medical support and information, and who will treat the matter empathetically and confidentially.

UNISON says that the menopause is an equality issue of importance to all branch officers and workplace reps.

It undoubtedly contributes to the gender pay gap.

UNISON reps support members through capability procedures or when they ask for reasonable adjustments to enable them to work. However many managers can be ignorant of or unsympathetic about conditions that affect women. Workplace sickness absence policies often use inflexible trigger levels that don't take account of these issues, setting off formal procedures that could ultimately lead to an unfair dismissal.

Not fairly addressing the workplace issues caused by the menopause could potentially be discriminatory. Branches and reps have a key role in supporting workers facing discrimination, disadvantage and harassment because of menopausal symptoms.

³A05 SA: Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity by age group (seasonally adjusted) www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork

Women's experience at work

The 2018 STUC Women's Committee survey (www.stuc.org.uk/news/1343/menopause) found that too often, the menopause was treated negatively in the workplace (32% of respondents) or as a joke (63% of respondents).

"The ways in which the menopause affects women in the workplace are wide and varied. From not being able to perform at usual levels due to tiredness caused by hormonal induced insomnia to severe bleeding, pain, and discomfort. If these symptoms were as a result of an illness or disease, more often than not measures would be put in place to support the worker to continue to contribute in the workplace.

But because the menopause is seen as just something that happens to women, because of the lack of awareness, because of the lack of conversations about what happens to women before, during, and after the menopause, the same considerations are not made, and more often than not women struggle on in silence, managing as best they can."

Sharon Edwards, STUC Women's Committee Chair

Research by the University of Nottingham (published by the British Occupational Health Research Foundation in 2011 www.bohrf.org.uk and go to 'Ageing Workforce') found that many women found they were little prepared for the onset of the menopause, and even less equipped to manage its symptoms at work. Where time off work was taken to deal with symptoms, only half disclosed the real reason for absence to their line managers. Many worked extremely hard to overcome perceived

shortcomings due to menopause.

The Menopause Survey 2018 was a joint project conducted by researchers at the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) on behalf of PFEW, UNISON, the Police Superintendents' Association and the British Transport Police Federation (www.polfed.org and search 'menopause survey'). It examined the experiences and awareness of the menopause amongst police officers and police staff at a national level in England and Wales.

Key findings included:

- 76% of respondents who had either gone through or were going through the menopause said that they had found symptoms of the menopause either moderately or extremely problematic at work.
- Overall, 20% of respondents said that they had considered leaving because they have found it difficult to deal with the menopause at work; this increased to 44% of respondents who found their symptoms extremely problematic.
- 44% of respondents who had taken sickness absence due to the menopause had not told their manager the real reason for their absence; only 9% who had told their manager the real reason said that their absence had been recorded accurately.
- 35% of respondents had taken annual leave or rest days to take time off because of their symptoms.
- Only 11% of managers said that they had been given training on how to support someone going through the menopause.
- A majority of managers did not know whether their force had a formal policy or guidance on managing the menopause at work; at least two thirds of these managers said that they would find it useful to have a formal policy and guidance.

A 2019 survey compiled by Dr Louise Newson and Dr Rebecca Lewis of the Newson Health and Wellbeing Centre (www.newsonhealth.co.uk) looked at the impact of menopausal and



perimenopausal symptoms upon women in the workplace. It found that:

- Over 90% of respondents felt that their menopausal or perimenopausal symptoms were having a negative impact on their work, with over half of respondents stating that colleagues had noted a deterioration in their work performance.
- As a result of poor performance at work, 9% of women had to undergo a disciplinary procedure.
- Around half of respondents reported having time off work due to menopausal or perimenopausal symptoms with 19% being absent for more than 8 weeks.
- In total, 37% of women had been provided with a sickness certificate from their doctor; of these, 52% listed anxiety/stress as the cause, with only 7% stating menopause as a reason for sickness leave.
- As a result of their menopausal and perimenopausal symptoms, 31% of women had thought about reducing their working hours and 32% had thought about leaving their job.
- Just over three-quarters of women reported that their workplaces offered no information or support regarding the menopause.

UNISON members' experiences

One UNISON member and activist reports:

"My experience with dealing with the menopause issues was awful. At the time I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I was struggling to concentrate and work was all getting too much.

My line manager at the time was a very young man who I had to try and talk to. At first I made up a reason for going sick but soon realised I needed to tell him the real reason why I was off work. I sat in his office sweating and feeling like I was old enough to be his mother! He was struggling to understand what I was talking about so I suggested that he go home and speak to his own Mum and ask her about the menopause!

I eventually went to my GP who was happy to prescribe HRT which has helped a great deal.

We need to be raising awareness and sharing information on the issues and how they impact on women with our line managers."

Another activist explains: *"Currently I'm not menopausal, I'm perimenopausal and some time ago when I worked in a school as a teaching assistant I would describe myself as very perimenopausal! So the hot flushes, severe anemia, palpitations meant that I was exhausted, the lack of sleep, I was physically weak, I had no stamina and I got breathless just by walking down the corridor in the school. I was struggling to work.*

What I like about our workplace menopause policy is the self-help part. I did see my GP.. and with the support of my colleagues at work, I was able to manage the symptoms until they got better.

Her colleague had a different experience:

"I underwent surgery at the age of 36 for health reasons so entered an immediate menopause... What I didn't expect, what I wasn't prepared for was the psychological symptoms and their effect on me. I literally did not recognise myself. Almost overnight I went from a confident 30-something to feeling lost, numb and anxious and that is something I've never experienced before. I'm lucky, after a couple of months, some HRT, some self-help, I started to feel like my old self again. That's not to say all the symptoms disappear but you learn to manage them.

But what made the world of difference for me was the support of my then line manager but also of my colleagues, my friends and my family. With their understanding I felt confident and free, particularly in the workplace to tell people how I felt, to tell them I felt a little out of sorts, or I'm popping outside just to cool down, I didn't need to look for an excuse, I was able to be open and honest to have that 5 minutes, then come back and get on with my working day."



Further sources of information to support women and raise awareness:

NHS information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause

NICE guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment'

NICE guidelines provide advice on the care and support that should be offered to people who use health and care services.

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information

Menopause Matters

An award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.

www.menopausematters.co.uk

Women's Health Concern

A charitable organisation – the patient arm of the British Menopause Society – that aims to help educate and support women with their healthcare by providing unbiased, accurate information.

www.womens-health-concern.org

Daisy Network

Daisy Network is dedicated to providing information and support to women diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency, also known as Premature Menopause.

<https://www.daisynetwork.org>

The Menopause Exchange

The Menopause Exchange gives independent advice about the menopause, midlife and post-menopausal health. They send out a free quarterly newsletter with useful impartial help and support.

www.menopause-exchange.co.uk

Menopause cafés

At a menopause café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss menopause. The website includes guidance on how to set up your own menopause café.

www.menopausecafe.net

Manage my menopause

Website for tailored menopausal advice for individuals provided by experts. www.managemymenopause.co.uk

My Menopause Doctor

A website that aims to help empower women with necessary information to make informed decisions regarding any treatment they may take to help turn the menopause into a positive experience that does not negatively impact their lives.

www.menopausedoctor.co.uk

Changing workplace policies and practices

Key to changing workplace policies and practices is providing a genuine opportunity for women workers to be heard on the issue. Simply asking the question, ‘what type of support might be helpful for those experiencing the menopause?’ will be a positive start towards changing culture and practice.

The Government Equalities Office 2017 research report ‘The effects of menopause transition on women’s economic participation in the UK’ (www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation) found that appropriate employer interventions included “changing organisational cultures; compulsory equality and diversity training; providing specialist advice; tailored absence policies; flexible working patterns for mid-life women; and fairly low cost environmental changes.”

Educating for a changing workplace culture

Employers should ensure that all line managers and HR staff have been trained to be aware of how the menopause can affect work, the implications for both equality and health and safety, and what adjustments may be necessary to support women who are experiencing the menopause.

In addition all staff would benefit from training to raise awareness and understanding, and to share experiences.

Gender specific risk assessments

Being aware of issues relating to gender in occupational health and safety ensures that workplaces are safer and healthier for everyone. Where the differences between men and women (such as with the menopause) are acknowledged, there is a greater chance of ensuring that the health, safety and welfare of all workers are protected.

Sickness absence

Increasingly in workplaces, long-term health conditions are dealt with outside the absence or sickness policies. Similarly menopausal

symptoms should not be recorded in the same way as any other sickness absence.

Difficult symptoms related to the menopause leading to absence should be recorded as an ongoing issue, rather than as individual absences. As with any long-term health condition or impairment, adjustments should be offered to resolve any barriers that the employee experiencing the menopause encounters.

However many employers use sickness absence policies with arbitrary triggers for instigating processes. The Bradford Factor is one example used to evaluate sickness absence, which penalises frequent short-term absences by assigning a negative score to the employee, whilst making allowances for a few periods of long-term absence. Clearly this could disadvantage women facing difficult menopausal symptoms.

Equality-proofing all policies and procedures

Sickness absence policies are not the only policies and procedures that could impact negatively on women. It is important for all workplace practices to be reviewed in case they create potential disadvantages for workers experiencing the menopause.

For example, inflexible performance management may even lead to the unfair implementation of capability and disciplinary procedures and even to dismissal. The employer should take into account the impact menopausal symptoms may temporarily have on a woman’s workplace performance with possible memory loss, poor concentration, fatigue, lack of confidence and other symptoms.

Capability, disciplinary, redundancy, and recruitment and training are some of the key policies and procedures alongside sickness absence, performance management and health and safety, that should be checked in case they could disadvantage those workers experiencing the menopause.

But all policies and procedures should be



equality-proofed as a matter of course in the workplace, and this exercise should include consideration of workers experiencing the menopause.

Flexible working

Working time arrangements should be flexible enough to ensure that they meet the needs of workers experiencing the menopause who may require leave suddenly at short notice. They may also need more or lengthier 'comfort' breaks during the day.

Line management support

Workers who are experiencing the menopause need support from line management. With any longstanding health-related condition this is crucial and can make a major difference to how a worker will deal with the issues arising from the menopause. The workplace can affect those working through the menopause in various ways, especially if they cannot make healthy choices at work.

'The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace' (www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc) found that over a quarter felt that the menopause was treated negatively in the workplace and over half said it had been treated as a 'joke' topic in their workplace.

"A number of respondents stated that some male managers did not take the issue seriously. Men sometimes made sexist, mocking and derisory comments."

Because of the way that society treats the menopause, many women will feel uncomfortable going to their line manager, especially if they are a man, and other options should be available. This may be through human resources, or a welfare officer. Many employers have employer assistance programmes that can act as a go-between.

Workplace environment

CIPD⁴ recommend "a proactive approach to the menopause at work" and suggest employers should consider "adopting a 'cafeteria approach', where women can choose from a range of options to help with their specific symptoms."

In the workplace, some factors may not normally be seen as an issue, but become

more problematic for someone experiencing the menopause, such as

- poor ventilation and air quality
- inadequate access to drinking water
- inadequate or non-existent toilet and washing facilities
- lack of control over the temperature or light
- lack of appropriate uniforms or personal protective equipment.

Just as every woman's experience of the menopause is different, it is also important to remember that every workplace is different. For instance in some workplaces it is not possible to open windows to improve ventilation, or women who have to wear a uniform are not able to change the type of clothing they are wearing when they are having flushes or sweating.

Risk assessments should consider the specific needs of women and trans people experiencing the menopause and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. Issues that should be looked at include temperature and ventilation and the materials used in any uniform or corporate clothing provided to women workers.

The assessments should also address welfare issues such as toilet facilities and access to cold water, as well as allowing for more frequent breaks, additional time to carry out a task, and even temporary changes to an employee's job description or duties.

Occupational health awareness

Employers can ensure that, as part of a wider occupational health awareness campaign, the menopause is highlighted so all staff know that the employer has a positive attitude to the issue and it is not something that women should feel embarrassed about.

Guidance on how to deal with the menopause should be freely available in the workplace. All women should be given information of how they can get support for any difficulties that arise as a result of the menopause.

⁴From the CIPD guidance '[The Menopause at Work: a guide for people professionals](http://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide_tcm18-55426.pdf)' www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide_tcm18-55426.pdf

Stress

Employers need to be aware that workplace stress can worsen menopausal symptoms and in some cases has been shown to bring on an earlier menopause. Stress should be risk assessed alongside concerns like temperature and access to facilities.

One key cause of stress for all workers in modern UK, is the increased precarious nature of employment with more agency working, casualisation and use of zero hours contracts. As well as exacerbating symptoms, the working arrangements may also discourage workers from disclosing problems as they may fear that their jobs could be at a risk.

A specific menopause policy

Development of a workplace policy on the menopause could go a long way to help ensure that women are not disadvantaged and that experienced talent is not lost from the workforce. But policies are only useful if they are implemented and regularly reviewed.

Why is a policy important?

“It provides the platform for discussion and training which in turn means we can provide council employees with greater support and help create a shift in attitudes. This will go some way to break the silence – because the well-being of menopausal women matters.”

Councillors Jo Gauden & Kelly Preston of Torfaen County Borough Council

“A standalone policy provides clarity for managers and employees, for example by setting out key responsibilities and signposting to sources of support. Developing a policy provides an opportunity to engage with employees on the issue and shows the workforce it regards the menopause as a serious work-related health issue.”

From the CIPD guidance ‘The Menopause at Work: a guide for people professionals’ www.cipd.co.uk/menopause

“It is time we incorporate respect for women and our bodies into workplace policies. Most women will go through the menopause and many feel ill-equipped to manage the symptoms of the menopause at work.”

Dawn Butler MP, shadow women and equalities secretary, speaking at the 2019 Labour Party conference⁵

But importantly, organisations should seek to equality-proof existing policies first and practices to ensure they do not disadvantage workers experiencing the menopause, as well as ensuring that line managers receive appropriate training and guidance, and there is awareness-raising amongst all staff.

UNISON Cymru/Wales Area Organiser, Jenny Griffin says:

“It’s all fine and well having a policy or guidance for managers, but if it’s only going to sit up on a shelf then it doesn’t mean anything. We want to make sure that whatever is put in place – whether that’s policy, procedure, guidance, training – is meaningful: it’s only as good as what you do with it.”

⁵<https://labour.org.uk/press/dawn-butler-speaking-labour-party-conference>



Recognition that there is no 'one size fits all'

Whatever the approach in the workplace there needs to be a range of adjustments and practices on offer for women experiencing the menopause. Every person experiencing the menopause will have different symptoms for different lengths of time and different levels of severity. So assumptions made on how to deal with those experiencing the menopause may be counter-productive when supporting the individual.

The CIPD advocate the 'cafeteria approach' where workers can choose from a range of adjustments and options, appropriate to their situation.

"Developing and communicating [such] a strategy based on employee need and preference helps to empower the woman experiencing menopause transition to manage her symptoms with the right organisational support in place at the right time.... Women who believe they have high levels of workplace control and autonomy report fewer menopause symptoms."

From the CIPD guidance 'The Menopause at Work: a guide for people professionals' www.cipd.co.uk/menopause

The role of the trade union

Being aware

Safety representatives and stewards have a key role to play in challenging attitudes to the menopause, ensuring that their employer has procedures in place, and in offering support to women who are experiencing problems. Getting the issue raised at branch meetings will help ensure that the problems will not get ignored in the workplace.

UNISON believes all stewards – men, women, non-binary – should be aware of the issues.

Key to any successful approach to supporting women experiencing the menopause is to make sure that women are directly involved in decision-making. Branches could particularly encourage more women to become stewards, branch equality officers and health and safety officers so that these issues never get overlooked.

Finding out

It's important to find out what the actual issues are and what specific support is needed in the workplace. The best way to do this is with surveys or mapping exercises. One example of a workplace survey to use in your workplace can be found on page 30.

The results may even lead to an awareness-raising campaign, with activities such as lunch-and-learn in the workplace, posters, leaflets, and ultimately to negotiating a workplace policy.

For more information on carrying out gender-sensitive risk assessments and using body mapping, hazard mapping and thermal mapping activities, check out UNISON's 'Gender, safety and health: a guide for safety reps' www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/07/23965.pdf and the Wales TUC's 'The menopause in the workplace: a toolkit for trade unionists'

www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Menopause%20toolkit%20Eng%20FINAL.pdf

Raising the issue

Representatives should raise the issue with their employer perhaps using the checklist on page 28, and ensure that the workplace meets the needs of workers experiencing the

menopause.

It could also be included as part of an action plan to address the gender pay gap.

For more information about the gender pay gap and how UNISON members can work with employers to bridge it, check out UNISON's campaign page and resources at www.unison.org.uk/bridgethegap

As well as reviewing all current workplace policies and risk assessments to consider if they may disadvantage workers experiencing the menopause, negotiations may move to the development of a specific menopause policy.

Raising women's health issues within the workplace will show that women can come to UNISON when they have difficulties.

Helping women feel supported

Some workplaces such as at Devon and Cornwall Police, are setting up workplace menopause single point of contacts (SPOCs). This is a specially trained contact from within the staff who aims to ensure that any employee suffering from any type of mental or physical distress due to the menopause, are treated with fairness, respect and understanding in order that they feel fully supported.

Using appropriate language and being sensitive

It's really important for women's health issues, such as those related to the menopause, to be discussed sensitively and confidentially in the workplace, not only with management but with trade union reps and within branches.

Empathy and sympathy is needed, not a patronising or dismissive approach. Responding respectfully is required, not jokey banter that many might find offensive.

Workers experiencing the menopause may themselves feel embarrassed, ashamed, scared – they need someone willing to listen with sympathy and who is able to signpost to practical support.



Some branches have run a women's health day which highlights a range of issues that can affect women in the workplace, not only the menopause. You can also put up leaflets on the issue on the UNISON notice-board.

Having more women safety representatives or stewards also helps. Safety representatives also have a role in ensuring that risk assessments take into account any potential health needs of workers who are experiencing the menopause.

Norfolk and Suffolk Police are an example of a workplace that uses a '**Menopause Passport**'. This one-page document can be used by a member of staff to identify her own symptoms/experiences with the menopause in order to help her to feel more comfortable at work, request reasonable adjustments or to inform her line manager of the symptoms. It is presented as an option for women who find it difficult or embarrassing to talk about their menopause symptoms with their line manager. The document can be emailed or brought to a meeting, and is particularly useful if 'hot-desking'.

More case studies

Inspired by the launch of the **Wales** TUC Menopause Toolkit (www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Menopause%20toolkit%20Eng%20FINAL.pdf), regional organiser, Darron Dupre has encouraged Velindre University NHS Trust – where 75% of staff are female, and 60% of staff are women between the ages of 35 and 60 – to become a menopause aware and supportive employer.

“Our approach has been that whilst policies are great,” explains Darron, “it needs real focussed hard work to create a menopause aware and supportive employer. So we have worked, in partnership, on a specific training programme for all managers, a tailored guide for every manager on how to support staff going through the menopause, volunteer menopause buddies across the organisation who are but a phone call away, and we are working on short workshops for every member of staff to understand the menopause.

But the glue that has held our innovative approach together has been the menopause café, a safe, confidential space, free of all information and marketing, for women and men to just talk about menopause and their menopause experience.

For men like me, this is the thing: a menopause aware and supportive workplace is a great place for women. But it is almost certainly a kind, supportive and caring workplace for men to work in too... this is not a 'women's issue' it is a workplace justice issue.”

UNISON South East has been running a menopause awareness lunchtime workshop in workplaces across the region. Fiona Roberts, the region's women's officer, delivered the workshop to delegates at the 2019 national women's conference where it was one of the best attended sessions.

Suzanne Tipping, one of the officers who delivered the workshop reports that “employers have been really positive about us running these courses: quite a few employers hadn't considered menopause a workplace issue and didn't know what resources are available so they are very interested in what we have to offer.

Now we're starting to talk to employers about developing policy around the menopause so they can support women in their workplaces so they can talk more openly about the issues and reduce the stigma.”

Jane Gebbie, chair of both the regional women's group and **Neath Port Talbot Branch** has run training sessions to raise awareness for women, and also for managers, including occasional male-only management training sessions, as well as informal drop-in sessions to provide advice and guidance.

Rather than agree another new separate policy amongst many, the branch felt it was more meaningful for the employer to agree to use a manager's guidance note that is attached to the workplace's 'Maximising attendance at work' policy covering sickness absence, to help ensure sympathetic treatment of individual circumstances.

Eastern regional organiser, Cheryl Godber has built on the **Suffolk CCGs'** positive response to the idea of developing a menopause policy, by working with a small working group consisting of the Director of Corporate Services and System Infrastructure, members of the CCGs' health and wellbeing group, the manager responsible for health and safety, and UNISON reps. The group received initial training about the menopause and potential impact on workers and their work, and they went on to develop a policy for the organisations based on good practice and research. Management training sessions are currently being designed to go through the policy and work through possible workplace scenarios.

In addition, Cheryl has delivered 'lunch and learn' sessions for staff to raise awareness on the issues. "The feedback from the sessions has been phenomenal," says Cheryl. "They've gone down really, really well."

Every member of staff also receives a specially produced handbook with more information about women's experience during the menopause, the impact on others, and signposting to other information.

One practical issue identified by the unions (UNISON working alongside MiP), was a problem with temperature control in the workplace for some women with menopausal symptoms, particularly as staff's work pattern meant 'hot-desking'. Each work station now has a USB fan, partly subsidised by the unions, as standard. "The fans have gone down a storm in the workplace" and with a very active and visible UNISON in the workplace, not least with the logos on fans and handbooks,

recruitment unsurprisingly is on the up.

Jo Gauden is an Admin/Caseworker at UNISON Newport City, Borough Councillor in Torfaen and UNISON activist. In January 2019, alongside Cllr Kelly Preston, she approached the Chief Executive of **Torfaen County Borough Council**, Alison Ward to lobby for a council menopause policy. They were met with overwhelming support and the proposed policy went to the full Council in May (see the Council webcast dated 14 May 10:30am at <https://torfaen.public-i.tv>).

Joanne and Kelly made a presentation to Council and support from the chamber was positive. It was pointed out that the council employed 2,971 women – 73% of the workforce – of which 60% were within the age range that would be expected to experience menopausal symptoms.

Subsequently emails have been received from members of staff thanking them with comments such as: "This is the first time I have felt supported" and "I don't feel alone anymore."

All involved were keen for the policy to not just be a tickbox exercise but to be the foundation for raising awareness about the menopause. In addition, there is now online training for all staff and face-to-face training for managers on the issues, a poster campaign and a menopause café planned in September.

The policy recognises how health and safety risk assessments need to consider women with menopausal symptoms in work and that this is key to providing reasonable adjustments or signposting to relevant services.



Further information for branches and union reps

UNISON

'Gender, safety and health: a guide for safety reps' www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/07/23965.pdf

Women's health and safety

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2018/03/24899_Womens_HS_guide.pdf

#BridgeTheGap gender pay gap campaign page and resources

www.unison.org.uk/bridgethegap

UNISON Learning and Organising Services (LAOS)

UNISON online learning – 'Wranx' training on 'Raising Awareness: Menopause in the Workplace'

<https://unionlearn.ulp.wranx.com/> to register an interest in undertaking the online course

Contact your regional education teams and / or LAOS to find out what training and resources are available to assist you with negotiating with your employer or promoting the issues in this guide with your members

<https://learning.unison.org.uk>

UNISON South East

'Why the menopause is a workplace issue' workshop powerpoint slides www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/02/Why-the-menopause-is-a-workplace-issue.ppsx

Wales TUC Cymru

'The menopause in the workplace: a toolkit for trade unionists'

www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Menopause%20toolkit%20Eng%20FINAL.pdf

'The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace'

www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc

'Menopause awareness in the workplace' course

www.tuc.org.uk/courses-reps-wales-tuc

Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)

Information including a policy checklist and model menopause risk assessment

www.stuc.org.uk/about/equalities/women/health-and-safety/menopause

STUC women's committee 'Menopause & the Workplace' survey, January 2018

www.stuc.org.uk/news/1343/menopause

TUC

eNote 'Menopause Support in the Workplace' www.tuceducation.org.uk/local/enotes/index.php

Labour Research Department (LRD)

'Women's health and safety at work: a guide for union reps'

www.lrdpublications.org.uk

CIPD

'The Menopause at Work: a guide for people professionals' (aimed at HR managers)

www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide_tcm18-55426.pdf

Also additional guidance is available aimed at managers including

www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause/people-professionals-guidance

Work Foundation

'More than "women's issues": Women's reproductive and gynaecological health and work'

www.theworkfoundation.com/press_releases/55658/

Faculty of Occupational Medicine

Guidance on menopause and the workplace

www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause#

NHS Wales

In the health service sector, trade unions in Wales have worked to implement a workplace menopause policy for use across the NHS in Wales.

www.nhsconfed.org/-/media/Confederation/Files/Wales-Confed/Wales-Employers/FINAL-NHS-Wales-Menopause-Policy-19-Dec-18.pdf



Putting the case to an employer for a workplace menopause policy

Do you understand your workforce?

How much does this issue potentially impact on the employees?

Show the breakdown of employees in age and gender and get in touch with Occupational Health if used in the workplace to get their feedback on how widespread they have found the issue.

For negotiations, Jo Gauden (Admin/ Caseworker at UNISON Newport City, Borough Councillor in Torfaen and UNISON activist) recommends a data crunching exercise, looking at how many women are in the workforce and the age groups. This may help provide the evidence to show how large a proportion of the workforce is potentially affected, not only now but in the long-term. Introducing a workplace menopause policy is one way that employers can show they not only support current employees but also aim to “future-proof the workforce’s wellbeing.”

Confidential staff surveys can help to bolster any data crunching exercise. An example workplace survey is provided on page 30.

You have a social responsibility

All employers are expected to promote and support diversity in the workplace – that’s a given. But how is it achieved in practice? Valuing and supporting individuals in the workplace should also take account of women experiencing the menopause.

Employers could lead the way in removing any old-fashioned stigmas about the menopause and treat it sympathetically as they would any other illness, condition or impairment.

“The menopause transition need not be an awkward topic and it shouldn’t be regarded solely as a female issue... Organisations have a responsibility to create a stigma-free environment that encourages open discussion and disclosure; this will encourage women to not suffer in silence and discuss the practical steps needed to support their full engagement and productivity at work.”

From the CIPD guidance ‘The Menopause at Work: a guide for people professionals’ www.cipd.co.uk/menopause

You should address the gender pay gap

Every woman of working age will experience some health related, physical and/or psychological, implications of being a woman. This occurs across the life-cycle from periods to menopause. It is important that women’s specific health concerns such as the menopause are understood and supported during their working life to avoid them also feeding into women’s lack of progression. Reviewing all current policies as well as developing a workplace menopause policy could help to close the gender pay gap, by ensuring women don’t feel they have to reduce their hours or leave their jobs because of their symptoms.

You could lose an experienced workforce

Evidence shows that some women experiencing the menopause who are unable to agree changes in working practice, or to work flexibly, or reduce their hours might struggle – hence the number of women who feel they have no alternative but to leave their jobs purely as a consequence of their menopausal symptoms.

As the Work Foundation report “More than “women’s issues”: Women’s reproductive and gynaecological health and work” states: “By 2022, the number of people in the workforce who are aged 50+ will have risen to 13.8million, meaning that enabling older women who are of menopausal age to continue working full-time, as effectively as possible, will become increasingly important. A decline in labour force participation of older women will hit certain sectors very hard, so retaining women going through the menopause is crucial in some sectors – such as nursing – that rely on a female-dominated labour force and also have a larger proportion of older women workers. Therefore, employer support is necessary to deal with an ageing female workforce that will eventually experience this process.”

A minimal change is required for a positive effect

Some changes to the workplace might be so minimal as to not place any significant burden on the employer, such as providing a USB desk fan or allowing a flexible working arrangement, especially when bearing in mind that menopause symptoms will eventually go away!

It's the law!

Sex discrimination, age discrimination, disability discrimination and neglecting health and safety requirements by employers are against the law. Ignoring or penalising employees struggling with menopausal symptoms at work could mean that employers are breaching legislation and they might end up facing costly tribunal claims.



The law and the menopause

“The menopause is... an important gender- and age-equality issue, and should be part of an organisation’s approach to developing inclusive workplaces that support women’s progression at work throughout their employment lifecycle.”

From the CIPD guidance ‘The Menopause at Work: a guide for people professionals’
www.cipd.co.uk/menopause

The Equality Act

Under the Equality Act 2010 it is unlawful to discriminate against people at work because of a protected characteristic. The protected characteristics include age, disability and sex.

Age discrimination is when you are treated differently because of your age. Indirect age discrimination may be the result of a rule or policy which puts people within a certain age group at a disadvantage.

Sex discrimination is when you are treated differently because of your sex. Indirect sex discrimination may happen when an organisation has a particular policy or way of working that applies in the same way to both sexes but which puts a woman at a disadvantage because of her sex unless it can be objectively justified.

Therefore if a woman experiencing the menopause is treated detrimentally because of menopausal symptoms and these are not taken into account within policies or practices, it could potentially give rise to sex and age discrimination.

Case law

In the case of *Merchant v BT PLC* 2012, the employee was found to have suffered from direct sex discrimination and an unfair dismissal. Ms Merchant was dismissed for poor performance but her manager failed to take into account her menopausal symptoms, even though she had given the manager a letter from her GP outlining her impaired concentration. The manager should have investigated her health problems linked to her menopause further but instead he made stereotypical assumptions based on his knowledge of the experience of his wife and a

colleague.

The tribunal decided that the manager would never have adopted “this bizarre and irrational approach with other non-female-related conditions” or treated a man suffering from ill-health with comparable symptoms in this way.

Under the Equality Act, a disabled person is defined as someone who has a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers, where failure to do so would place the disabled worker at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled workers. They must not treat employees less favourably than others as a result of a disability.

In some circumstances, menopausal symptoms may meet the Equality Act definition of disability.

Case law

In the case of *Davies v Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service*, the employee was found to be unfairly dismissed and to have suffered from disability discrimination. The tribunal considered that Ms Davies was disabled as defined by the Equality Act because of the substantial and long-term menopausal symptoms which caused memory loss and confusion.

A mix-up occurred at work about whether her medication had been added to a jug of water or not. The workplace disciplinary panel decided that she had deliberately misled them and she was dismissed for gross misconduct. This dismissal meant that the employee was treated unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of her disability i.e. the menopausal symptoms. The employment tribunal found that the action of dismissal was not justified.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Duty was also created by the Equality Act 2010 covering public sector

employers. The general equality duty means that public sector employers must give 'due regard' to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, which involves:
 - 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
 - encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The protected groups are those as defined within the Equality Act, so clearly the issue of women experiencing the menopause is included within the duty.

One of the ways in which an organisation can show that it has given 'due regard' to these issues is to carry out an equality impact assessment (EIA) of both external policies affecting service users, customers and clients and internal policies affecting the employees.

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Act requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. The Regulations require employers to assess the risks of ill health (including stress related conditions) arising from work-related activities, ensuring that the hazards are removed or proper control measures are put in place to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practical.

Therefore employers should include the consideration of specific risks for women experiencing the menopause.



Checklist for branches and reps

- Does the employer appreciate the potential scale of the issue within their particular workforce? Have the trade union reps undertaken a workplace survey?
- Is the employer aware of the potential gender pay gap implications through practices that do not take account of health issues caused by menopausal symptoms?
- Do both the employer and trade union reps encourage an environment of openness and transparency where everyone can talk about gender-specific conditions such as the menopause?
- Do managers promote the use of appropriate language, sensitivity and confidentiality when referring to women's health issues such as related to the menopause, and are offensive banter and ridicule clearly outlawed in the workplace?
- Do UNISON branch and workplace reps help raise awareness and a sympathetic understanding about the menopause and the potential impact of symptoms in the workplace?
- Do they create an environment where workers experiencing the menopause feel comfortable to discuss the issues?
- Are staff encouraged to raise issues of concern about difficult symptoms related to the menopause with their line managers, and do the line managers feel informed and confident enough to have supportive conversations with the employees?
- Do line managers receive training to be aware of menopausal symptoms and other gender-specific health conditions and the type of adjustments that may be necessary to support women at work?
- Similarly do UNISON branch officers and workplace reps receive awareness training?
- Is there a wider occupational health awareness campaign so that everyone knows that the employer has a positive attitude to the issues?
- If staff are unable to speak to their line manager is there someone else who is appropriately trained, able to support them in the workplace empathetically and practically?
- Are all existing policies and practices fully equality-proofed, taking into account the issues and potential barriers affecting women experiencing the menopause?
- Does this also include consideration of the additional barriers encountered by disabled women, Black women and LGBT+ workers experiencing the menopause?
- Do performance management processes fully take into account that the menopause is an occupational health issue and do not unfairly penalise workers experiencing the menopause?
- Are sickness absence procedures sufficiently flexible so as not to penalise women taking time off for gender-specific health conditions?
- Do sickness absence procedures specifically highlight the menopause as a potential long-term fluctuating health condition?
- Do return to work interviews consider if a range of symptoms could be related to the menopause and are managers trained to deal with this in a supportive and sympathetic way?
- Does the employer provide paid time off for on-going treatments and check-up appointments (such as for HRT treatment) to manage conditions that are not recorded as sick leave?
- Does the flexible working policy clearly state that the symptoms of menopause may require flexible working adjustments and allows for temporary changes in work patterns?
- Are employees reassured that they will not be penalised or suffer a detriment because they request and are granted workplace adjustments or flexible working to deal with symptoms that are not manageable?
- Do health and safety risk assessments consider the specific needs of women experiencing the menopause?
- Have stress risk assessments been undertaken and actions to address work related stress implemented?
- Is there a specific workplace menopause policy?

- Does the policy recognise that options for potential adjustments and support in the workplace should be discussed sensitively with individual employees so that adjustments can be specific to the individual and their role?
- Are women as well as men involved in relevant decision-making bodies and in monitoring and reviewing of related processes?
- Are staff allowed opportunities to meet up informally with colleagues experiencing similar issues such as through a menopause café?
- Does the organisation have access to occupational health services and are these used effectively to support with menopausal symptoms?

Practical issues to consider

- Are workers experiencing the menopause able to adjust the temperature or increase ventilation to help with their symptoms e.g. the provision of small desk fans, able to sit near a window or door that opens, able to pop outside as and when needed to cool off, access to well-maintained toilets and rest areas, shower facilities?
- Is there easy access to cold drinking water including off-site venues?
- Is there access to natural light and an ability to adjust artificial light?
- Are there enough breaks during the working day or a flexibility allowed about taking additional breaks?
- Are workers experiencing the menopause able to leave their posts to deal with symptoms at times other than allocated breaks and is there cover available if needed?
- Is there easy access to washroom, showers and toilet facilities including when travelling or working in temporary locations?
- Are sanitary products easily available within the workplace?
- Are uniforms made of natural fabrics, ideally with options for layering that can be adjusted, as well as the provision of changing facilities?
- Are workers experiencing the menopause able to easily request extra uniforms if needed?
- Is the time wearing personal protective equipment such as face masks limited?
- Do any dress codes exacerbate certain symptoms for workers experiencing the menopause and if so, can these be adjusted?
- Does the employer make truly flexible working hours and practices available to address periods of time where symptoms are difficult to manage, including opportunities to temporarily adjust shift patterns or hours, ability for home working, options for alternative tasks and duties?
- Does the employer provide quiet areas to work and opportunities for time out from others?
- Is there access to a rest room particularly where work requires constant standing or prolonged sitting, or is there access to space to move about for those workers in sedentary roles?
- Are workplace stress and excessive workloads properly addressed?
- Does the employer provide access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes?
- Is there a knowledgeable and confidential workplace point of contact that a woman can go to particularly if their line manager is male?
- Is there a wellbeing champion or menopause champion identified in the workplace that staff can talk to in private?



Model workplace survey on the menopause

By completing this survey, you will assist your trade union representatives in providing information to the employer about the issue of how the menopausal symptoms of some members of staff can impact on their health and wellbeing in the workplace.

The survey is completely confidential. All information will be kept anonymous and any details collected that could identify individuals will be treated as confidential and securely stored.

1. Are you experiencing or have you experienced the menopause or perimenopause (the period of time leading up to the menopause)?

YES NO

If 'NO' please skip straight to question 11.

2. One of the most common symptoms reported during the menopause is fluctuations in body temperature or 'hot flushes', which can be made worse by the workplace environment.

Have you had difficulty regarding an uncomfortable working temperature or poor ventilation in your place of work?

YES NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES NO

3. If your job has a strict policy on breaks, having adequate access to suitable washing and toilet facilities may not always be possible when needed. Have you ever had any difficulty?

YES NO

NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES NO

4. Some people experiencing the menopause have interrupted sleep patterns which result in tiredness, lack of energy and loss of concentration during the day which may have an impact on work. Have you experienced any of these symptoms that have had an impact on work?

YES NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES NO

5. It is sometime possible to experience mood swings, irritability, tearfulness, lowered confidence, feelings of not being able to cope, anxiety and depression during the menopause.

Have you ever experienced any of these symptoms or feelings while at work?

YES NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES NO

6. There are sometimes more physical symptoms associated with the menopause, such as an increase in headaches and/or migraines, aches and joint pains, dry or sore eyes and menstrual problems such as flooding.

Have you ever experienced such symptoms while at work?

YES NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES NO

7. Please tick all things below you have access to in your place of work

a) Unlimited toilet breaks

b) Sanitary bins

c) Sanitary products

d) Access to fans, windows or air conditioning

e) Menopause time off included in workplace sickness policy

f) Women's health policy or a menopause policy

f) Ability to make changes to your working patterns due to the menopause

h) None of the above

8. Would you find it difficult to approach your line manager to discuss your problems at work because of symptoms relating to the menopause?

YES NO

If YES, what reason would you give for not discussing it with your manager?

a) Opposite sex/male

b) Embarrassment

c) Not sympathetic

d) Ineffective

e) Unapproachable

f) Lack of understanding

g) Other (please describe)

9. If you have approached a line manager to discuss difficulties at work because of symptoms relating to the menopause, did you receive a positive response?

YES NO

10. Has your line manager made reasonable adjustments for you, when you have explained you are suffering with a health issue related to the menopause?

YES NO

NOT APPLICABLE

11. It can be difficult even embarrassing to discuss some personal matters with a manager or supervisor. Do you believe an appropriate designated person should be appointed for women and others experiencing the menopause to talk to at work?

YES NO

12. Would you support the introduction of (please tick all that apply):

a. a workplace awareness-raising campaign on the issues?

b. a workplace policy on the menopause (if not already in place)?

c. a menopause support group for staff members experiencing the menopause?

d. a menopause support group open to all staff?



Menopause and the workplace policy

The following policy can be used in the workplace to help support women experiencing the menopause. Please note that the text in square brackets [...] indicates where you need to complete information specific to your workplace, or else are notes for you to consider in relation to your negotiations.

Please do adapt and develop this policy as appropriate to your workplace.

Policy Statement

[Name of employer] is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.

[Name of employer] recognises that women experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments.

[Name of employer] recognises that the menopausal symptoms can also affect transgender people including non-binary people.

[Name of employer] is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports workers experiencing the menopause in order for them to feel confident to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work.

The aim of the policy is to

- make managers aware of their responsibility to understand how the menopause can affect staff, and how they can support those experiencing the menopause at work
- foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about the menopause in a respectful and supportive manner
- raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about the menopause
- enable workers experiencing the menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs
- outline support and reasonable adjustments available
- help us recruit and retain employees experiencing the menopause.

This policy is part of **[Name of employer]**'s commitment to ensuring the health and safety and wellbeing of all the workforce, and will ensure the workplace does not make the menopausal symptoms of employees worse.

This policy is part of **[Name of employer]**'s commitment to equality and diversity. We are committed to creating a workplace that respects and values each other's differences, that promotes dignity and combats prejudice, discrimination and harassment. This policy seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance and enhance the reputation of [name of employer] as an employer of choice.

[Name of employer] recognises that many of the changes to workplace culture and adjustments offered here may not only be of benefit to workers experiencing the menopause, but to all staff.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all staff who are employed at [name of employer].

This policy is supported by and developed with the trade unions representing the employees.

Definition of the menopause

(See also the section headed '[Glossary](#)')

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. For some it will be medically induced. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms whilst experiencing the menopause and peri-menopause and may often encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms.

Each woman will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

Some studies suggest that Black women may have more prevalent and severe symptoms.

Disabled women and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition.

Some trans men may experience natural menopausal symptoms.

Some trans women may experience pseudo-menopausal symptoms related to their hormone therapy treatment.

Some non-binary people may experience menopausal symptoms.

[Name of employer] recognises that for many reasons, peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly.

Menopausal symptoms may include:

- Hot flushes – a very common symptom that can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward, may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate.
- Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving those affected exhausted, as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently. Some affected may become anaemic.
- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance.
- Low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, loss of confidence and memory problems.
- Urinary problems - more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.
- Irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort.
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
- Weight gain.
- Headaches and migraines.
- Menopausal hair loss.
- Osteoporosis - the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis.



- Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).

Menopausal symptoms may also exacerbate existing impairments and conditions that those affected may already be struggling to cope with.

Support for employees experiencing the menopause

[Name of employer] is committed to a programme of action to make this policy effective and will work with the trade unions to take **positive action** to support staff experiencing the menopause.

All staff will be provided with **appropriate information and training** so that they are able to better understand the effects of the menopause and be comfortable about discussing and addressing the impact that it can have on employees in carrying out their roles.

All staff training will be supported by **awareness campaigns** aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture.

All policies and procedures should take account of the effects of the menopausal symptoms to ensure that employees experiencing the menopause are not disadvantaged as a result of their symptoms.

[Name of employer] recognises that some employees experiencing the menopause may find that related symptoms may impact on their health and wellbeing, and we aim to provide as much support as is reasonably practicable for individuals.

[Name of employer] recognises that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to let their line manager or the alternative contact (see below) know if they are struggling with symptoms that may impact on their work, so that appropriate support is provided. Such information will be treated confidentially and in accordance with **[Name of employer]**'s data protection policy.

An alternative contact is available to employees experiencing the menopause should they not feel comfortable discussing their problems with their line manager, (particularly if they are male). This is **[complete as appropriate]**. Employees may also prefer to discuss their problems with an alternative manager, Occupational Health **[if appropriate to your organisation]** and/or a trade union rep.

Managers should make allowances should there be an additional need for sickness absence by employees experiencing the menopause in order to manage their menopausal symptoms. Absence will be recorded as related to menopausal symptoms and managers will consider such absence as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in absence procedure triggers. Further details can be found in the **'Sickness absence policy and procedure'** **[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]**.

[Name of employer] recognises the potential impact of menopausal symptoms on performance by employees experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures. Further details can be found in the **'Performance management, capability and disciplinary procedures'** **[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policies]**.

[Name of employer] will ensure that **gender sensitive risk assessments** are undertaken to consider the specific needs of employees experiencing the menopause and to ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments that may be required.

- Common areas in particular to consider are:
- workplace temperature and ventilation
- access to adequate toilet and washing facilities

- access to drinking water
- uniforms and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- working times and break times
- workplace stress and workload
- bullying and harassment.

Further details can be found in the ‘**Health and safety policy and procedure**’ *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]*.

[Name of employer], working with the trade unions, will develop a **menopause support group in the workplace** where employees affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, can share knowledge and information, gain peer support and review workplace policies that may have an impact on staff experiencing the menopause. The group is organised by
[complete as appropriate, and signpost to further information.]

Employees who are experiencing the menopause can apply for the following **adjustments** to support them at work:

- Control over environmental factors – with provision of desk fans on request, review of office seating plans so that affected employees can be near the window or open doors, or away from direct sources of heat such as radiators, fitting blinds to windows, greater access to chilled drinking water, and to toilets and washing facilities.
- Where uniforms are provided, to use natural fibres wherever possible.
- Flexibility over uniform and dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating, and provision of additional spare uniforms.
- Changing/washing facilities for staff to change clothes during the working day.
- For employees who are required to drive as part of their usual work pattern, duration of travel to be reduced and increased rest breaks provided.
- Flexible working arrangements including options for flexitime (to work around symptoms or adjusting start and finish times for example), shift-swapping, and homeworking etc., more details to be found in the ‘**Flexible working policy and procedure**’ at *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]*.
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day, and if required providing cover as necessary for these breaks.
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments, more details to be found in the ‘**Time off for medical appointments policy**’ at *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]*.
- Temporary changes to the employee’s duties, such as undertaking fewer high-visibility work like formal presentations or meetings or on reception because it can be difficult to cope with symptoms such as hot flushes, or assessing how work is allocated or whether the employee is affected at particular points of the day.
- Provision of private spaces for women to rest temporarily, to talk with a colleague or to phone for personal or professional support.

(For further advice on adjustments available contact HR).

This is not a definitive list of adjustments. *[Name of employer]*, working with the trade unions, will consider additional suggestions put forward by members of staff, union reps and the menopause support group.



[Name of employer] will provide temporary staff cover wherever possible, where there is a lengthy absence related to menopausal symptoms.

Confidential support is available for individual employees from the **employee assistance programme** and this may include counseling if appropriate, in addition to practical information and advice. *[include a link or signpost to further information.]*

Responsibilities of managers

Managers should ensure that all employees are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer's responsibilities. Training on women's health issues including the menopause will be provided to all managers. This will also include any specific issues for Black women, disabled women and trans employees.

Managers (with the support of HR where requested) should encourage employees to discuss the impact of their menopausal symptoms on their work-life and encourage them to access the support and adjustments offered. They should promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues.

Managers should be ready and willing to have open discussions about the menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treat the discussion sensitively, confidentially and professionally.

Managers will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing the menopause, and put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner. All employees must be treated fairly and consistently. Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they take up any support available to employees experiencing the menopause.

[Name of employer] will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality.

All requests for support or adjustments must be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the data protection policy.

Managers will support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

Responsibilities of employees

All staff should take a personal responsibility to look after their health.

Employees are encouraged to inform their manager (or the alternative contact, should they not feel comfortable speaking to their manager) if they are struggling with menopausal symptoms and need any support, so that they can continue to be effective in their jobs.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to seek support through their GP, the employee assistance programme and other external organisations (see sections below headed 'Self-management for staff experiencing the menopause' and 'Further Information') as well as participating in the menopause support group.

All staff have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful and productive working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause.

If an employee is found to have harassed, victimised or discriminated against another employee in relation to the menopause, then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

Trade union involvement

Consultation will take place with the recognised trade union on the implementation, development, monitoring and review of this policy.

Union reps will be given training equal to that of managers and supervisors and sufficient time to carry out their duties.

Review and monitoring

[Name of employer] will ensure that all new employees, supervisors and managers will receive induction on the policy.

Adequate resources will be made available to fulfil the aims of this policy. The policy will be widely promoted, and copies will be freely available and displayed in *[name of employer]'s* offices and through the staff intranet **[amend as appropriate to your workplace]**.

This policy will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

The recommendations of the menopause support group on how working conditions, practices and policies may impact on staff experiencing the menopause, will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

The purpose of this monitoring and review is to identify where reasonable adjustments can be made to working conditions, practices and policies in order to make this policy effective.

Glossary

Menopause – a natural transition stage in most women's lives lasting from four to eight years, although for some women it can be much longer. Most women experience the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

Premature menopause – for some women, it can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is sometimes called **premature ovarian insufficiency**. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause.

Medical or surgical menopause – there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the woman's age, such as a medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids or when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer, or when a woman's ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy.

Perimenopause – a period of time before the menopause, in the years leading up to the menopause where there can be significant changes for women, including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause.

Post-menopause – a term used when a woman's periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon. Problematic symptoms may continue for years.

Black person – here the term is used (with a capital B) in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK with a shared history, who have suffered from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today's society.

Disabled person – under the Equality Act, a disabled person has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. In some cases, menopausal symptoms may meet the definition of 'impairment'.



Trans man – identifies as male but was assigned female at birth.

Trans woman – identifies as female but was assigned male at birth.

Non-binary – people who do not think of themselves as simply male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither or something entirely different. Their gender identity is more complicated.

Self-management for staff experiencing the menopause

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged not to suffer in silence.

Consider:

- Seeking medical advice from your GP
- Discussing symptoms with your manager or with the alternative contact (see above) and with your trade union rep and requesting appropriate workplace adjustments
- Discussing symptoms with Occupational Health [if appropriate for your organisation]
- Contacting the employee assistance programme.

Employees are also encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:

- Eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Exercising regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels.
- Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke.
- Ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes.
- Having access to natural light.
- Staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats.
- Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi)
- Trying vaginal lubricant or moisturiser – available from shops and pharmacies for anyone experiencing vaginal dryness.

Further information

Workplace alternative contact details..... *[complete as appropriate]*

Workplace menopause support group – contact *[complete as appropriate]*

NHS information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause

NICE guidelines on ‘Menopause: diagnosis and treatment’

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information

Menopause Matters

www.menopausematters.co.uk

Women’s Health Concern

www.womens-health-concern.org

Daisy Network

https://www.daisynetwork.org

The Menopause Exchange

www.menopause-exchange.co.uk

Signatories

This agreement is made between *[name of the employer]* and UNISON, a registered trade union.

This agreement comes into force on:

Date:.....

This agreement will be reviewed on:

Date:.....

SIGNED for *[name of the employer]*

DATE

SIGNED for UNISON

DATE



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