

MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

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The handbook comprises three sections and is supported by an appendix.

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- 2 Roles and Responsibilities
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Menopause
is a natural
part of every
woman's life.

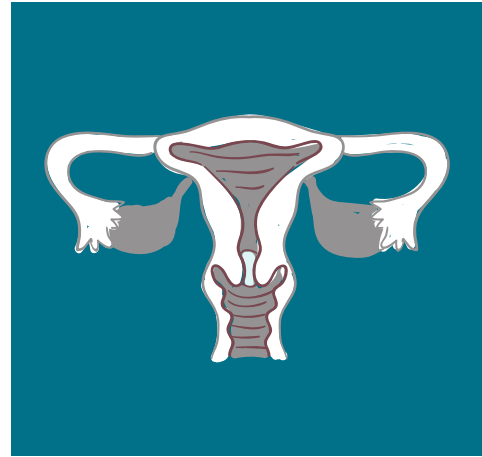
1 UNDERSTANDING MENOPAUSE

Menopause is a transition from reproductive to non-reproductive life stage. It is experienced by women alongside transgender and non binary people who have female reproductive organs. For many it can be a difficult transition and whilst not every person going through the menopause will suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. Anyone should be able to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager and feel able to ask for support or adjustments that they may need.



WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?



Menopause is a natural biological process where the menstrual cycle ends, periods stop and they are no longer able to get pregnant naturally.



Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 as oestrogen levels decline; with the average age being 51 in the UK. Perimenopause usually starts around the age of 45 and can last 1-7 years before the main menopause phase.



1 in 100 people will experience menopause before 40 years of age - this is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency.

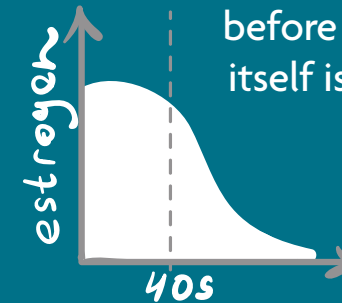


Certain surgical procedures can trigger menopause to start early; including breast cancer treatments, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hysterectomies.

STAGES OF MENOPAUSE

PERIMENOPAUSE

Perimenopause refers to the period of time during which the female body makes its natural transition to menopause. It is still possible to get pregnant but oestrogen levels are decreasing and therefore fertility is reduced. This is typically when symptoms first start and could last a few months or even years before menopause itself is reached.



MENOPAUSE

Generally, once someone has had 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period, the perimenopause period is over and menopause is reached. This means the ovaries have stopped producing eggs and oestrogen production is at minimum level.



POSTMENOPAUSE

This is the period of time after menopause is reached where symptoms may continue to be present. It is expected that with time symptoms will decrease, however some people may continue to experience symptoms for a decade after the menopause transition.



Anyone with a female reproductive system who identifies as a male, non-binary or gender non-conforming, but hasn't undergone any medical interventions, is likely to go through menopause eventually.

WHY MENOPAUSE MATTERS AT WORK: THE FACTS

45-55 years old is the typical age for menopause to occur with average age of 51	3 in 4 experience symptoms	1 in 4 experience severe symptoms
50% menopausal people say they feel depressed	37% menopausal people say they suffer with anxiety	72% say they feel unsupported in work
90% feel unable to talk to managers at work about menopause	29% have significantly lost self-confidence at work	63% feel their working life has been negatively affected
41% said poor concentration or forgetfulness led them to make mistakes	11% did not go for promotion because of the menopause	90% said their workplace had no support for menopausal employees



On average, most symptoms last around 4 years from your last period. However, around 1 in every 10 will experience them for up to 12 years.

If someone experiences the menopause suddenly rather than gradually – for example, as a result of cancer treatment – symptoms may be more severe.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

The most commonly experienced symptoms are:

Joint stiffness, aches and pains	Hot flushes	Night sweats	Skin irritation/new allergies
Poor memory	Fatigue	Depression and low mood	Anxiety and panic attacks
Trouble concentrating	Change in sex drive	Urinary problems	Headaches
Irregular, heavy and/or painful periods	Sleep problems	Hair thinning or loss	Dry skin, mouth and eyes
Chills	Vaginal dryness	Weight gain	Heart palpitations
Taking longer to recover from illness	Exacerbation of existing conditions	Digestive problems	Dizzy spells

Any of these symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working lives, impacting a person's health, performance and attendance at work.

It is worth noting that symptoms can vary over the course of the menopause.



(*<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/treatment/>)

Sources: 1. NHS England. Overview of Menopause; 2.Nuffeld Heath (2017). One in four with menopause symptoms concerned about ability to cope with life; 3. CIPD (2019). The Menopause at Work; 4. Forth (2019). A Study of Menopause in the Workplace.

CONVENTIONAL TREATMENTS FOR MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS

While these symptoms are not life-threatening, they can be really difficult as they can interfere with quality of life. If your symptoms are troubling you, please seek advice from your GP or a medical professional as they will be able to offer treatments and suggest lifestyle changes.

Refer to Section 4; How to Speak to Your GP.

CONVENTIONAL TREATMENTS INCLUDE:

- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) – this can be in the form of tablets, skin patches, gels and implants and relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing the lost oestrogen
- Vaginal lubricants or vaginal oestrogen creams or tablets to treat vaginal dryness and discomfort
- Antidepressants can be taken to balance mood and help symptoms of depression and/or anxiety
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – a type of talking therapy that can help with low mood and anxiety.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES THAT HELP REDUCE MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS

Loss of oestrogen during menopause can lead to bones being brittle as the body is not able to use the calcium, which creates a risk factor for osteoporosis, a condition in which bones weaken and are more likely to fracture.

RECOMMENDED LIFESTYLE CHANGES INCLUDE:

- Not smoking as smoking is a known risk factor for osteoporosis.
- Eating a healthy diet that is low in fat and high in fibre, making sure to get your 5 portions of fruit/veg every day.
- Eat foods rich in calcium such as dairy products, kale, spinach etc.
- Avoid trigger foods – certain foods/drinks can trigger hot flushes, night sweats and mood swings. These include caffeine, alcohol and sugary or spicy foods.
- Drink plenty of water
- Get enough vitamin D
- Trying to maintain a healthy weight
- Doing weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, jogging, or dancing, at least three days each week
- Engaging in mind/body practices (e.g. meditation, mindfulness and guided breathing exercises) has been found to help manage menopausal symptoms.



DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Linked to lifestyle changes on the previous page, it is important to listen to your body and ensure you rest and practice good sleep habits. It is often the case that night sweats, hot flushes and insomnia can directly impact how you feel the next morning and generally exacerbate feelings of low mood and fatigue. Don't be afraid to raise this with your line manager, as agreeing some flexibility in your working patterns may alleviate some of the pressure here.

You can make positive changes like those outlined, however if you are sleep deprived, it will negate the good work you're doing, given that sleep deprivation can be so damaging to both your physical and mental health.



COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR MANAGER



As difficult as you may perceive the conversation to be, informing your manager (or HR team) if your symptoms are negatively impacting your work or vice versa, is the best way to tackle the problem. There are reasonable adjustments that can be taken to support you, but if they are not aware they cannot implement these. You should go to the meeting prepared; with a good understanding of how your symptoms are affecting you and your work, and potential solutions that may be able to help.

Refer to Section 3 of this document for more information.

BREAK THE SILENCE

Too often, people do not talk about menopause due to the stigma associated with it. However, it is a transition that affects almost half of the UK population directly and nearly everyone indirectly. Therefore, if no one is talking about it, you might be doing others a favour too by starting the conversation. This can help to increase awareness, emotional support, advice and information sharing; all of which will reduce the stigma surrounding menopause in the future.

Workplace support groups are often helpful and provide a safe space to share thoughts and offer practical advice. There is the Wates Women, the BuildOut Together and the Women's Health Yammer groups which you can join any of to support you. You can also speak confidentially to a Mental Health First Aider if you are struggling.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Wates Employee Assistance Programme

Call any time on 0208 068 0035 [quoting Wates] which offers confidential, independent support. You can also visit the online portal at www.wecare-cl.com or download the app from your app store by searching 'WeCare Programme'.

Search 'Menopause' in the **EveryMind at Work app** for more information and support on this topic.

Balance App is a free tool designed to help you become more informed and prepared for the perimenopause and menopause. It allows you to track your symptoms, access personalised expert content, download a Health Report®, share stories in the community and lots more. Search 'Balance App' on the app store or visit <https://www.balance-menopause.com/balance-app/>

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.

These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. You can find out more information by using the following link <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>

The **National Health Service** provides an overview of menopause. You can find more at <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Menopause information. **The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause>

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>

Information on **hysterectomy**. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk>

Henpicked. This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories - see <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>

Menopause and Me: An organisation that provides tailored information about all stages of menopause and the tools and support to help make informed choices when it comes to managing symptoms. <https://www.menopauseandme.co.uk>

Manage My Menopause: A website providing the opportunity to get tailored menopausal advice from experts in post-reproductive health that is specific to each individual's needs. <https://www.managemymenopause.co.uk>

My Menopause Doctor: Empowering women with the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding the treatment options that are available. <https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk>

The Daisy Network: A charity dedicated to providing information and support for women who experience early menopause, premature menopause and/or premature ovarian insufficiency. <https://www.daisynetwork.org>

Menopause Matters: An award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate

information about menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options. <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk>

Women's Health Concern: The patient arm of the British Menopause Society, providing a confidential, independent service to advise, reassure and educate women of all ages about their gynaecological and sexual health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns. <https://www.womens-health-concern.org>

The Menopause Charity: A charity on a mission to bust myths, overcome ignorance and make menopause symptoms history. Supporting women and healthcare professionals with fact-based menopause research and access to the safest treatments. <https://www.themenopausecharity.org>

If you feel uncomfortable talking to your GP about your menopause symptoms for any reason, Stonewall has a list of NHS organisations that are Diversity Champions and an information service that can offer advice on who to contact. You can call them on 08000 50 20 20.

2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following identifies our responsibilities as employees, colleagues and line managers.

- EMPLOYEES**
All staff responsibilities.
- LINE MANAGERS**
See Section 3 for manager's guide on supporting employees and colleagues.
- HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)**
Support to managers.



1. EMPLOYEES

All staff are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health;
- Educate themselves about the menopause
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers/ HR and Occupational Health
- If a member of staff would prefer not to speak to their line manager, or if their line manager is not supporting them, they can speak to HR
- If you are concerned about speaking to your line manager initially, you can contact a Mental Health First Aider, the Wates Women's community, or the BuildOut Together community, via Yammer to find out who your Menopause Ambassadors are
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment including challenging any unwanted or inappropriate comments or 'banter' around menopause
- Respecting any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms
- Reporting menopausal absence and symptoms correctly using **Ppl-020 Sickness or Injury Form**.

“ALL staff are responsible for contributing to a **respectful** and **productive** working environment...”

2. LINE MANAGERS

All line managers should:

- Familiarise themselves with this guidance document
- Take part in any awareness training
- Be ready and willing to listen and have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally
- Hold regular check-ins with employees that focus on wellbeing as well as performance
- Encourage impacted employees to seek help from their GP
- Use the guidance in Sections 1 and 3, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, e.g. discuss with them any temporary appropriate adjustments they require
- Implement and record any adjustments that are agreed / other actions, including periodic reviews using a Discussion Record and issue this to HR (contact a HR Advisor for a copy of the template)
- Carefully manage changes in absence and performance
- Signpost to further support, information and resources on page 10 of this document.

See Section 3 for Line Managers' Guidance.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more challenging, the Line Manager may:

- Discuss with HR a referral to Occupational Health for further advice, if required
- Review any Occupational Health advice, and implement any reasonably practical recommendations
- Update the action plan, and continue to review.

3. HR

Human Resources will:

- Offer support to managers on the interpretation and implementation of this guidance
- Refer employees to Occupational Health for further advice, if required
- Support managers to monitor issues, e.g. absence, relating to menopause symptoms.

3

GUIDE FOR LINE MANAGERS

Research shows that the majority of women and those experiencing menopause are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, or ask for support or adjustments that they may need.

Wates is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone. As an employer, Wates has a duty to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees and menopause, which is covered under the Equality Act 2020, should be managed in the workplace like any other employee health condition.

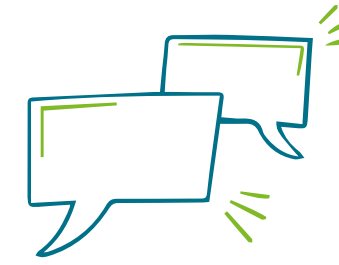
We will ensure that our working environment and/or working practices support those experiencing menopausal symptoms and that reasonable adjustments and flexibility is offered to reduce the risk of making symptoms worse.

These guidelines will help employees and managers understand how menopausal symptoms can impact the employee at work and the steps that may be taken to support the employee, including helping to alleviate some of the symptoms.

Menopausal women are the **fastest growing demographic in the workforce** and according to the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM), **nearly 8 out of 10** menopausal women are in work.



HOLDING CONVERSATIONS



Menopause can affect people's confidence and it can be daunting talking to someone who has no knowledge or awareness of the menopause. The more supportive and knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms and the support available at Wates, the more confident you will feel as a line manager discussing the issue.

Building relationships based on trust and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.

Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your team can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause.

Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture, and encourage someone to raise any concerns.

Remember the power of asking twice. Sometimes, when we ask someone how they are, they respond with "I'm fine, thank you", or "I'm good thanks". If you ask twice, you might get a different response on the second attempt because you are signalling that you care.

* TOPTIPS *



Allow adequate time to have a confidential two-way conversation with the employee

To start the conversation, **find an appropriate confidential setting** where the employee feels at ease

Approach conversations with empathy, try not to be embarrassed by the issue or how the individual feels. Show understanding and be patient

Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt

Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions

Speak calmly and maintain good eye contact

Listen actively and carefully, and encourage the employee to talk, giving the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words

You don't have to be an expert - it's ok to ask questions to better understand someone's situation

Encourage them to speak openly and honestly and ask them what they need – everyone is different, so take your lead from the individual.

Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom.

APPROPRIATE ADJUSTMENTS & SUPPORT

- **Improve temperature control** for their work area, such as a fan on their desk or moving near a window, or away from a heat source
- Easy access to **cold drinking water**
- Be allowed to **adapt any prescribed uniform**
- Have access to a **rest room for breaks** if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage symptoms
- Ensure **washroom facilities are properly stocked** and appropriate, eg. ensure sanitary products are available in washrooms and that there is adequate storage space available for changes of clothing
- **Moving desk space** nearer to a bathroom
- **Encourage the person to speak to their GP** and allow time during work for GP appointments
- Discuss **flexible working principles**, particularly if suffering from sleep disruption.
- **Allow cameras off** when on Teams calls, and also have a walking meeting instead if helpful.
- Ensure regular **Personal Development Discussions**; one to ones and check-ins planned to discuss any issues/ review task allocation and workload
- Agree some **protected time** to catch up with work
- Consider offering **noise-reducing headphones** to wear in open offices where concentration is affected
- **Promote counselling services** provided by our Employee Assistance Programme www.wecare-cl.com and support of Wates Mental Health First Aiders; the Wates Women and the Women's Health Yammer groups
- **Identify a 'buddy'/ Menopause Ambassador*** within work who can support the person
- **Consider relaxation** techniques such as mindfulness, breathing exercises, or walking
- **Consider an Occupational Health referral** to give specific advice regarding the workplace if the above support is not helping.

Workplace stress can exacerbate menopausal symptoms. Please refer to **Gov-120 Group Organisational Stress Risk Assessment** and **WPS-Gov-22 Mental Health and Wellbeing** for more information on managing this.

*contact the Women in Wates network (via Yammer) to find out who your Menopause Ambassadors are

MANAGE PERFORMANCE PROACTIVELY AND POSITIVELY



In some cases, menopausal symptoms can be so serious that they affect a person's performance at work. Where there are suspected or known health issues, these should be explored, prior to any formal processes for underperformance.

Refer to **WPS-Ppl-16 Improving Performance** for more information.



* TOPTIPS *

ON HOW TO MANAGE HEALTH ISSUES AND PERFORMANCE

- Have **regular, informal catch-ups** with employees
- Approach performance conversations **supportively and positively**
- Take any **health issues fully into account** where there is underperformance on the part of an individual
- Identify any **extra support or coaching** the person may benefit from
- Set **reasonable timescales** for improvements.

4 APPENDIX
HOW TO TALK TO YOUR GP ABOUT MENOPAUSE

If you are experiencing menopause symptoms and they are impacting on your day to day life, please make an appointment to speak to your doctor. But, sometimes, that's easier said than done.

We know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's often only ten minutes. And talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We've put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

*** TOPTIPS ***

Don't wait. It is all too common for people to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.

Prepare for your appointment. It's easier for your doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren't always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, and any changes you've noticed. Write them down, and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it's more likely that together, you'll find the right solution faster.

And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

Ask for a longer appointment. If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.



Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. They are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery, and can help you find the best person to speak to – it might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling, and how it's affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. Occasionally, there are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or a friend with you. The chances are you spend your life supporting others and, during menopause, it's your turn to ask them for support. Your partner, or a friend, will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment, and also find out how they can continue supporting you. Keep a note of your GP's advice to refer back to.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR DOCTOR:

There are certain things a GP should – and should not – do during your appointment.

- THEY **SHOULD:**
- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms, and your longer-term health;
 - Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options;
 - Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment.

- THEY **SHOULD NOT:**
- Tell you that it's just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don't feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help;
 - Tell you they don't prescribe HRT. It's up to you what you want to try, and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history;
 - Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them.

Remember, your GP is there to help and support you and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms.

All employees can also access We Care - Wates Employee Assistance helpline on 0208 068 0035 for GP consultations, second medical opinions, and mental health support.

Source: Study by University of Leicester



CREATING TOMORROW TOGETHER

wates.co.uk