

Introduction to Menopause – A GUIDELINE DOCUMENT

Why talk about the menopause?

Queen Mary University of London is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone who works and study here.

Menopause is a natural part of life, and it isn't always an easy transition. People undergoing menopause may experience a combination of different symptoms and their severity will vary dramatically from one person to the next. By providing the right support to everyone affected, we can improve their working life.

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. This is not just an issue for those who experience menopause, everyone should be aware.

Changes in the profile of the UK's workforce means that employer support for people experiencing menopausal symptoms is more important than ever. Between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work, and research shows that the majority of women are reluctant to approach their line manager to discuss menopause-related health problems, and to ask for support and adjustments to their work.

This document provides information and raises awareness on how to offer the right support to colleagues experiencing menopausal symptoms at work.

What is menopause?

Menopause is a biological stage which marks the end of the natural reproductive life for people who menstruate. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a person has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally). For women, the average age to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.¹

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause where changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms, may be experienced. This can be years before menopause.

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a person has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

Symptoms of Menopause

Whilst not all experience symptoms, or even need help or support, evidence suggests that 75% of menopausal women experience some symptoms. Symptoms can be physical, psychological or a combination of both. These may include, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. A number of people may also experience disturbed sleep or insomnia.

There are a number of ways that colleagues can be supported to manage their symptoms.

Suggestions for the individual to consider:

- Request temperature control for your work area, such as a fan on your desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly); moving near a window, or away from a heat source (e.g. to manage hot flushes).
- Ask to be considered for [flexible working](#)/working from home (e.g. to manage hot flushes, or particularly suffering from a lack of sleep).

¹ Some women enter menopause in their 30's (c.1%) or even in their 20's (0.1%). Early menopause is also commonly triggered in women who undergo chemotherapy or radiotherapy to shrink a tumour.

- Agree to take time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.
- Make/agree time for [mindfulness activities](#), to undertake relaxation techniques, or to go for a walk.
- Identify a 'buddy' or the colleague to talk to – outside of the work area.

Suggestions for managers to consider (see also Appendix 1):

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly.
- Review task allocation and workload.
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment.
- Discuss whether they have visited their GP, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.
- Make them aware of sources of information and support available for QMUL staff (outlined below).
- Consult HR if the individual is experiencing acute problems related to menopause symptoms.

Other support available - Where to go for help?

- All QMUL staff can access **counselling** via [Workplace Options](#) which is a free, confidential and independent service.

Freephone: 0800 243 458 (username and password not required)

Email: assistance@workplaceoptions.com

Website: www.workplaceoptions.co.uk - (username: queenmary and password: employee).

- [Remploy](#) offers counselling for QMUL staff struggling with mental health issues (in this case applicable to anxiety/panic attacks/depression etc.).
- The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\) menopause guidelines](#) explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you.
- 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/>. Alternatively, the Society for Endocrinology have produced accessible information on their 'You and Your Hormones' website at: <http://www.yourhormones.info/endocrine-conditions/menopause/>.
- **Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)** information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk> or at <http://www.yourhormones.info/endocrine-conditions/premature-ovarian-failure/>
- **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/>).

Appendix 1

Guidance for line managers – how to have discussions with staff

We encourage line managers to be open to having conversations with staff about how the menopause is affecting their work. We recognise that every person is different, and therefore it is not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if an employee wishes to speak about a family member, here are some suggestions to help with the conversation:

- Allow enough time to have the conversation.
- Find a suitable place to talk to preserve confidentiality.
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (refer to the suggestions and sources above).
- Schedule time for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on chance encounters in the corridor or break room.