



# British Association of Dental Nurses

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## MENOPAUSE ADVICE

# What is the menopause?

Menopause (from the Greek men = month and pausis = pause, ie the end of monthly cycles), often referred to as "the change of life" or just "the change", is the time in a woman's life when menstruation (periods) stop permanently. This normally takes place between the ages of 40 and 55 but varies from woman to woman.

Physical symptoms can include:

- **Hot flushes**
- **Insomnia**
- **Fatigue**
- **Poor concentration**
- **Headaches**
- **Skin irritation**
- **Urinary problems**

These symptoms, and/or hormone imbalance, can cause women going through menopause to experience:

- **Depression**
- **Anxiety**
- **Panic attacks**
- **Mood swings**
- **Irritability**
- **Memory problems**
- **Loss of confidence**

There are other symptoms which can impact on cognitive functions i.e. unable to remember things; loss of confidence; inability to readily find the right word to express thoughts; having thoughts completely disappear mid-sentence. It may become temporarily more difficult to carry out certain tasks and performance may be affected.

In addition, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), which is often prescribed for menopause, can have side effects eg nausea, headaches, leg cramps.

## DEFINITIONS

**Perimenopause** - this is time in a woman's life when she starts to experience hormonal fluctuations and changes to her periods. During this time, periods may become increasingly heavy and irregular, making easy access to toilet facilities vital. The average length of the perimenopause is four to five years.

**Menopause** - The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. The average time for women experiencing symptoms of the menopause is five years, but many women experience symptoms for up to ten years and 3% of women will experience symptoms for the rest of their lives.

**Post-menopausal** - This is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. Post-menopausal women have an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis and practices should be aware of this.

## MENOPAUSE AND EMPLOYMENT LAW

Women over 50 are the fastest growing segment of the workforce, and many will go through the menopause during their working lives. According to a leading HR company, one in four menopausal women consider quitting their job because of lack of support and understanding from employers and line managers. Those employers who do support their employees through the menopause will benefit from lower sickness absence and employee turnover, as well as increased engagement and loyalty.

In 2012, an employer who sacked a worker for poor performance, failing to take menopause into consideration despite a letter from the worker's doctor, was found guilty of unfair dismissal and sex discrimination – both of which led to considerable compensation payouts to the worker concerned. And menopause related tribunals have doubled since that case.

Although menopause isn't a disability in itself, it can be if:

- It has a substantial effect on a woman's ability to complete daily activities
- It lasts more than 12 months

Employers have a responsibility under the **Equality Act 2010** to make reasonable adjustments to an employee's role or working conditions if they have a disability which puts them at a disadvantage. Under that Act, menopause is covered under three protected characteristics: age, sex and disability discrimination. Compensation under the Equality Act is uncapped – claimants can claim for loss of earnings and loss of pension; they can also issue proceedings against individuals in the workplace, who may then have personal liability for any compensation awarded.

The **Health & Safety at Work Act 1974** covers working conditions when experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Under the **Employment Rights Act 1996** a dismissed employee with two years' service with a practice can claim unfair dismissal. Employees who resign can claim that the behaviour and conduct of their employer led them to resign – "constructive dismissal".

Please see list of other relevant legislation at Annex A.

## WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO SUPPORT MENOPAUSAL EMPLOYEES?

- Have a **menopause policy** – this should include:
  - Who staff can speak to if they need support
  - How managers should support menopausal staff
  - What all staff can do to create a supportive environment
  - Whether you provide access to healthcare or counselling

BADN provides a specimen policy for you to adapt to your own practice (see Annex C).

- **Review your practice environment** – make changes around your practice to ease menopausal discomfort. This could include:
  - Provide cold drinking water
  - Make sure bathroom facilities are easy to access
  - Review uniforms for comfort, etc
  - Provide fans and/or air conditioning
- **Make adjustments** – to working environment of menopausal employees (discuss with them first!), which could include:
  - Changing their working location to ensure better access to toilet facilities, or more comfortable temperature, etc
  - Allow changes to normal uniform
  - Allowing additional rest breaks
  - Assessing work load at specific times of day
- **Boost awareness:**
  - Arrange menopause training workshops for management – ensure that all levels of management are trained on the effects of menopause, how to hold discussions with employees experiencing menopause and on adjustments which can be made to lessen effects of menopause on employees
  - Make advice from reliable sources available to your team (see Annex A)

- **Review practice policies:**

- **Sickness policy** – many practices make allowances for long term illness but not for regular short absences, which can unfairly punish menopausal women with symptoms over a long period.
- **Performance policy** – it is important to take menopausal symptoms into account during performance reviews
- Consider a **flexible working policy** to allow flexible working times – menopause symptoms can disturb sleep and flexible start times would allow menopausal women to catch up on much needed rest.

- Appoint a **menopause champion**, who will:

- run practice-wide workshops to raise awareness among staff
- let all staff know that the employer will try to support those having difficulties because of symptoms, for example through posters or newsletters
- check that health and safety risk assessments cover the different stages of the menopause
- set up a support network for staff affected by the menopause
- tell staff where they can find more information

- Make sure staff are made aware that the practice management will handle menopause issues in the practice **sensitively, with dignity and respect.**

## ANNEX A

### RELEVANT LEGISLATION

#### **England, Scotland and Wales:**

- Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, GB Regulations 4
- Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) introduced by the Equality Act 2010 (Eng, Scotland and Wales)
- Equality Act 2010

#### **Northern Ireland:**

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, NI Regulation 3(1)
- Health and Safety, NI Order, 1978
- Sex Discrimination Order 1976 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (NI)
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999

## ANNEX B

### USEFUL ARTICLES/WEBSITES/INFORMATION

[www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)

<https://www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

[www.cipd.co.uk/menopause](http://www.cipd.co.uk/menopause)

[www.cipd.co.uk/menopauseresources](http://www.cipd.co.uk/menopauseresources)

<https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/employment-law/menopause-andemployment-law/>

[Womens Health Concern: Menopause in the workplace \(19 Oct 2021\)](#)

[Global consensus recommendations on menopause in the workplace: A European Menopause and Andropause Society \(EMAS\) position statement. \(8 Sept 2021\)](#)

[Response to the BMA report 'Challenging the culture on menopause for doctors'. \(14 Aug 2020\)](#)

[Challenging the culture on menopause for doctors \(Aug 2020\)](#)

[The menopause nearly killed me \(6 June 2021\)](#)

[New menopause and the workplace guidance and model workplace policy \(Oct 2019\)](#)

[Why companies should be supporting employees going through the menopause \(18 Oct 2019\)](#)

[Protecting staff and preventing ill health - taking a targeted approach: menopause in the workplace \(10 Oct 2019\)](#)

[Menopausal women 'should get flexible work hours' - BBC News \(21 Sep 2019\)](#)

[Menopause and the workplace - PDF \(British menopause Society publication - Feb 2019\)](#)

[Information for employers - dealing with health problems in the workplace: advice on the menopause \(2016\)](#)

[Union leader calls for bosses to act on menopause](#)

[Financial sector takes part in survey about impact of menopause](#)

[MPs to examine lack of support for working menopausal women](#)

[Menopause training for men](#)

[We need to stop the menopause hijacking careers](#)

[Northern Ireland MPs and journalists call for stigma to end](#)

## ANNEX C

### PRACTICE MENOPAUSE POLICY

<Insert name of practice> is committed to providing an inclusive working environment for all employees throughout all stages of their working lives. This includes enabling employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms to get the support they need in order to manage their symptoms at work. To achieve this, it is important for all practice employees to have an awareness of the menopause and to know that not everyone experiences this in the same way. This topics should not be taboo or hidden and can be discussed openly and without embarrassment.

The menopause can have a negative impact on an employee's personal and working life. Although not everyone will experience symptoms, by supporting those who do, it is hoped that this will improve their wellbeing at work and minimise any impact on attendance at work. By creating an inclusive working environment it is hoped that this will encourage staff to ask for what they need, without judgement.

This practice will aim to:

- Create an environment in which employees can openly and honestly initiate or engage in discussions about the menopause, whether they themselves, or someone they are supporting, is experiencing symptoms
- Provide advice and information to practice managers/menopause champions on the symptoms of the menopause and how they can best support employees who may be experiencing issues at work
- Allow those experiencing symptoms to discuss these openly, if this is their preference, and ask for support/reasonable adjustments in order to sustain their attendance at work
- Recognise that the menopause is an individual experience and that people can be affected in different ways and to differing degrees, and therefore, different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed

#### Practice Responsibilities

- Provide opportunities for staff to raise any issues relating to their wellbeing
- Be open to discussing the concern that the employee has about the impact on work as a result of problems with the menopause, acknowledging the personal nature of conversations and treating them professionally and confidentially
- Not make any assumptions regarding the menopause and ensure they listen to the needs of each individual
- Discuss and agree with the employee how best they can be supported and be prepared to make reasonable adjustments to take account of any symptoms they are experiencing

- Use a Wellness Action Plan (WAP) to record adjustments agreed and any actions to be implemented, ensuring all agreed adjustments are adhered to and that ongoing conversations take place and review dates are set
- Be aware of the potential impact of menopause on performance – if someone's performance suddenly dips, it is worth considering whether the menopause may be playing a part in this
- Discuss what, if anything, the employee wants shared with colleagues, how this will be done, by who and in a way that respects the individual's privacy but that allows colleagues to understand
- Deal with any inappropriate conduct aimed towards someone because of their symptoms

## **Employee's Responsibilities**

- Taking personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and raising any concerns they have with the practice manager or practice menopause champion;
- Seeking advice from their GP should symptoms begin to affect their ability to carry out the full remit of their role;
- Being open and honest when having conversations with practice managers/menopause champions and Occupational Health (where appropriate);
- Being willing to help and support colleagues;
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

## **Sensitive Conversations**

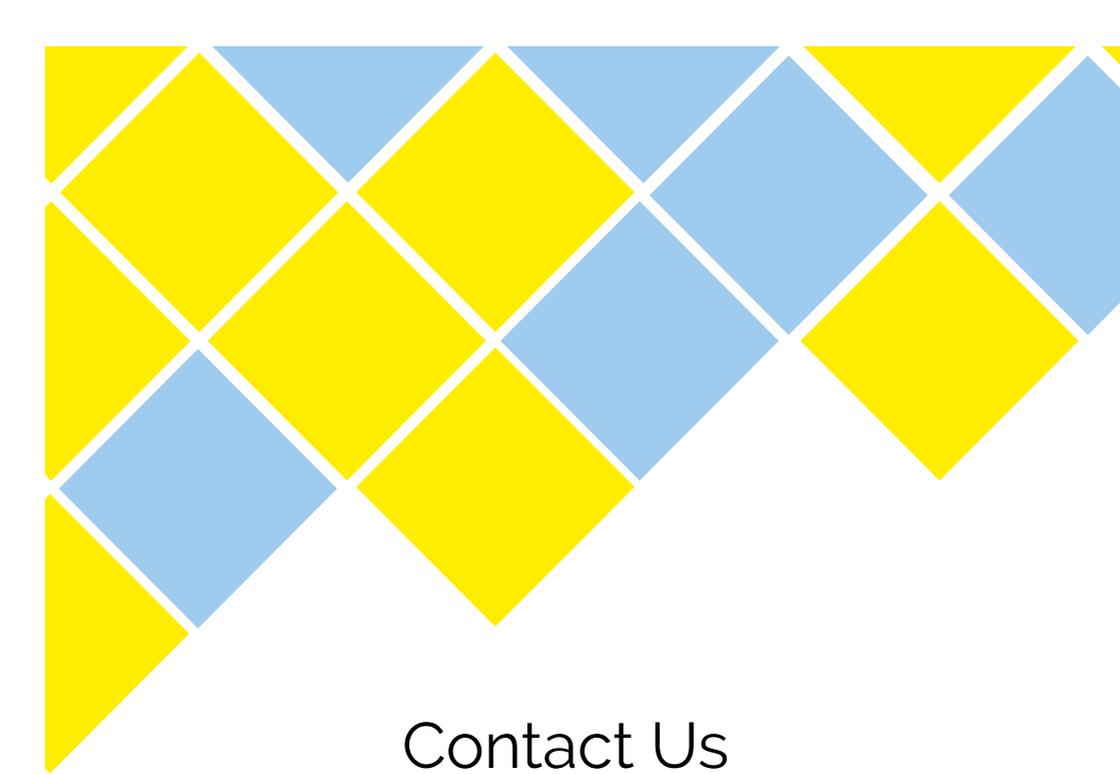
This practice recognises that some employees may find it particularly hard to talk to a practice manager/menopause champion about the impact of menopausal symptoms and may wish to:

- Keep a symptoms diary noting how their symptoms are affecting them;
- Consider what reasonable adjustments may help, bearing in mind the need to be flexible and what is operationally feasible;
- Consider what timescale the adjustments are likely to be required for.
- Talk to the practice manager/menopause champion about their current situation, what's happening and most importantly, how it's affecting their work.
- Consider how their circumstances could be improved and offer a reasonable solution i.e. working from home; coming in later if poor sleep is an issue; obtaining a fan or moving closer to a window if suffering from hot flushes; ready access to drinking water and washroom facilities.

## Workplace Adjustments

This practice recognises that some aspects of the workplace can exacerbate employees' menopausal symptoms. The practice will therefore consider whether any of the following adjustments can be used, appropriate and reasonable to the working environment, to help those experiencing symptoms:

- Allowing the employee to have control of the temperature in their work environment i.e. having access to a fan, sitting near a window or away from a radiator
- Easy access to washroom facilities
- Access to a quiet area for breaks
- Access to drinking water
- Flexible working options (i.e. working hours and/or working arrangements)
- Review of task allocation and workload, if any cognitive behaviours are impacted
- Allowing uniforms to be adapted (where practicable) or offering additional clothing items (for those who are required to wear uniform)
- Ensuring storage space is available for spare clothes/toiletries i.e. a locker
- Signposting the individual to Employee Assistance Programmes (if available) and other useful links
- Carrying out a stress risk assessment to identify any stressors in the workplace
- Recommending the employee seek advice from their GP if their symptoms are impacting on their daily life



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