

SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Menopause Policy

This policy sets out the terms of agreement reached by those participating in the Council's Consultation and Negotiating Framework

MENOPAUSE POLICY

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MENOPAUSE POLICY

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1. Introduction

According to official figures there are approximately 3.5 million women in the UK of menopausal age in work. Solihull Council's workforce is made up of 76% women and there are a significant number of employees who will be experiencing, or about to experience, the menopause. The Council is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, in their working environment and seeks to continually improve the wellbeing of its workforce.

The policy will help us to understand the difficulties and anxieties of women currently going through the menopause, either naturally or prematurely, and aims to help manage this issue by raising awareness with all line managers and employees.

It is recognised that the menopause is a very individual experience and that people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. The menopause affects all women and can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues too.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees including those on fixed term contracts and casual/zero-hours workers.

This policy has been developed in line with the following legislation:

- **The Equality Act 2010** places a legal obligation on all public bodies to promote gender equality and eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Act protects women and other protected characteristics against direct or indirect discrimination or harassment.

Severe menopausal symptoms may combine to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day-to-day activities – potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act and requiring reasonable adjustments. It is important to note that the menopause is not automatically classed as a disability; it depends on how it affects the individual woman at that stage in her life.

- **The Health and Safety Work Act 1974** requires employers to ensure 'the health and safety and welfare at work' of all employees.
- **The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992** place an overriding duty on employers to make workplaces suitable for the individuals who work in them.
- **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** require the employer to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment of risks and take action to prevent exposure to risks.

The Council has a 'duty of care' towards all of its employees. This places an obligation on the Council to manage and safeguard the physical and psychological wellbeing of its workforce.

To support these objectives, the Council has a range of policies and guidance in place that aims to support wellbeing in the workplace. These policies and guidance documents can be found on the Intranet / Extranet:

- Sickness Absence Management
- Employee Health & Wellbeing
- Equal Opportunities Policy Statement
- Flexible Working
- Agile Working
- Carers Policy

3. Policy Aims

The aim of this policy is to:

- Provide appropriate support to women who are experiencing the menopause.
- Demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting female employees experiencing, in some cases, a significant life change.
- Raise awareness and understanding of all employees and managers to the needs of women experiencing the menopause, ensuring there are no discriminatory practices.
- Create a working environment in which women feel able to openly disclose and discuss their symptoms with their line manager and request adjustments, if appropriate, without fear or embarrassment.
- Ensure that work conditions are reviewed to take account of the difficulties some women experience during the menopause and ensure that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place.

4. Definitions & background

'Menopause': The menopause is when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. Periods usually start to become less frequent over a few months or years before they stop altogether. Sometimes they can stop suddenly (*NHS England*).

'Peri-menopause': This is the period of hormonal change that leads to the menopause and is when many women may experience symptoms.

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

The NHS states that around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before they reach 40 years of age. This is known as 'premature menopause' or 'premature ovarian insufficiency' and this group of women may need to have medical intervention.

Sometimes the menopause is caused by a treatment such as surgery to remove the ovaries, a hysterectomy, some breast cancer treatments, chemotherapy or radiotherapy, or it can be brought on by an underlying medical condition.

On average, most symptoms last around four years from the last period. However, around 1 in every 10 women experiences them for up to 12 years. Not all women will have symptoms and those that do can vary in type, amount and severity.

It should be noted that women from non-binary and transgender communities may also experience menopausal symptoms. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership or sexual orientation status. It is important to recognise that employees' individual experiences of the menopause will vary greatly.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Line Manager's / Headteacher's Responsibilities:

Line managers are key to implementing this policy. Each woman's situation requires a different response from the manager, so managers should take into account the whole range of support options available when putting in place support for team members experiencing the menopause.

Key responsibilities of line managers/Headteachers include:

- To be familiar with this policy and be willing to have open, professional and sensitive conversations, ensuring confidentiality, with the employee. Ensure that follow up discussions are conducted.
- To listen to the employee and understand what symptoms they're experiencing. Acknowledge that they may find the menopause difficult to talk about – discuss somewhere private where it's easy to speak openly.
- Consider requests promptly for medical appointments, flexible working, agile working and other workplace adjustments that may be necessary, making decisions in line with the needs of the service. (Managers can use the adjustments guide in Appendix 3 to prompt a conversation). Liaise with HR if they have any queries about adjustments that may need to be considered to the workplace.
- Ensuring the employee has access and is aware of the support available to them. This may include Occupational Health the Employee Assistance Programme and signposting to other policies and external support or information.
- Create a workplace culture that is supportive and enables women to raise, without inhibition or fear of negative responses, the effects the menopause is causing whilst at work.
- To ensure these employees are not treated less favourably than other employees.
- To ensure a record of any sickness absence due to the menopause or peri-menopause is correctly recorded on Oracle using the correct code. Recognise that it may be necessary to adjust the sickness absence trigger points for absences related to the menopause, where guidance should be sought from HR.
- To agree with the individual which colleagues (if any) should be informed of the situation and on what basis.

5.2 Employee's Responsibilities:

- Employees are encouraged to facilitate a conversation with their line manager (or with a female or similar-age colleague, or HR Advisor, if preferred) if they feel they are experiencing difficulties at work.
- Keep their line manager up-to-date of any relevant changes in their health.

- Be flexible with their line manager in assessing options and suggesting alternative ways in which responsibilities and tasks could be undertaken, where necessary.
- To utilise the external resources and use self-help strategies to alleviate symptoms (see appendices).
- Seek advice from their GP on available treatment options if symptoms persist or are having a significant adverse effect on their health and wellbeing.

5.3 Human Resources Responsibilities:

- Support and advise line managers/Headteachers on the policy.
- Develop HR policies and procedures that promote and support the health and wellbeing of women experiencing the menopause.
- Assist managers and liaise with Occupational Health, other medical professionals and agencies, as appropriate, in order to support employees in maintaining good physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Assist employees requesting a confidential conversation if they feel unable to speak to their line manager about their symptoms.
- Maintain and review this policy.

6. Menopause Symptoms

Most women will experience physical and/or psychological menopausal symptoms. Some of these can be quite severe and have a significant impact on their everyday activities, including work life. Every woman's experience of the menopause will be different but the most common symptoms include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Hot flushes | • Headaches, aches and pains |
| • Night sweats | • Skin irritation |
| • Sleep disruption | • Palpitations |
| • Low mood or anxiety | • Fatigue |
| • Depression | • Loss of confidence |
| • Difficulty concentrating | • Mood swings |
| • Forgetfulness | • Weight gain and slowed metabolism |
| • Urinary problems | • Heavy periods and clots |
| • Clarity of thought impaired | • Dry eyes |

These symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both an employee's personal and working life. At work, they can cause embarrassment, affect confidence and be stressful to deal with.

A common form of treatment for the menopause is known as hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Some women find these treatments helpful for alleviating symptoms, but HRT is not suitable, or appropriate, for all women. Some women using HRT may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

Many women report that the menopause can make existing health conditions worse, triggering, or coinciding with, a flare up of symptoms. Some women report that the menopause seems to trigger or coincided with the onset of a new condition. An existing health condition may also worsen symptoms of the menopause. It may be difficult to tell whether a symptom is caused by the menopause or by the existing condition, or to tell which is making the other worse. Many symptoms can interconnect or overlap.

Women report a wide range of conditions that can be affected by the menopause including arthritis, multiple sclerosis (MS), mental health conditions, skin disorders, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and many others.

Women with conditions that cause differences in communication or sensing and perceiving (such as women with autism), or women with certain mental health conditions, may perceive menopausal symptoms differently, and may find it more difficult to access medical help for symptoms, or to get the right support.

If a woman has an existing condition that is worsened by the menopause, she may need more time off for medical appointments or treatment for that condition and there may need to be a review, and possibly changes, to any reasonable adjustments that were previously in place.

7. Ways to support employees

There is much that line managers can do to support women going through the menopause/ peri-menopause including:

- 7.1 Offering employees the opportunity to discuss their symptoms and any adjustments that can be made in the workplace to help the employee. The tool in Appendix 3 can act as an aid for a discussion and will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments which may be required, according to the employee's symptoms.

If the employee is experiencing more severe symptoms that are having an impact at work or from carrying out their job, it will be necessary for the line manager to complete a risk assessment form with the employee. Managers should use Appendix 3 as a guide to help complete the form, but should also take account of any additional issues/symptoms raised by the employee. A blank risk assessment template form can be found on the [Intranet/ Extranet](#). If you require any advice on completing the form, please contact your Health & Safety or HR Advisor.

- 7.2 All managers are expected to take a positive and supportive approach towards discussions about the menopause; however, the Council understands that some individuals who are affected may feel uncomfortable talking directly to their line manager if they are experiencing problems, especially if their line manager is male or much younger than them. Therefore, other options are available, including speaking to another female manager with whom they feel comfortable; or by contacting their HR Advisor for a confidential discussion.
- 7.3 Ensure employees are aware of this policy and the Health & Wellbeing policy and are given details of the [Employee Assistance Programme](#). *(Some schools may also have access to a menopause support service via their school insurance policy.)*
- 7.4 Encourage the employee to seek help in the form of self-help management or medical help. Refer the employee to the Healthy Council menopause pages available on the Council's Intranet for more information.
- 7.5 It may be necessary in some cases to consider temporary changes in work patterns and start times, or recognise that sickness absence may be more frequent if an employee suffers with symptoms such as heavy bleeding, stomach cramps or sleep deprivation. This may require an adjustment to the usual sickness absence management triggers and advice can be obtained from your HR Advisor. Please also see the Flexible Working Policy and Agile Working Policy.

- 7.6 If medical symptoms persist and are impacting on the employee's wellbeing or work performance, a referral to **Occupational Health** should be considered, with the employee's consent, in order to support the employee and look at ways to address work performance.
- 7.7 Review workstations and ventilation when considering the employee's needs. This might include seating the employee next to a window and away from a heat source and providing a desktop fan. The employee should be able to easily access toilet facilities and cold drinking water.
- 7.8 Where the employee is expected to wear a uniform, flexibility should be considered to include the provision of an extra uniform(s) where necessary, optional wearing of layers, being allowed to remove jackets/jumpers etc.
- 7.9 If the employee is in a customer-facing or a teaching role, for example, consider providing access to a room for them to have a short break in order to manage a severe hot flush or heightened emotions. Line managers should ensure cover is available so that staff can leave their posts, if needed.

Information and support

- **Occupational Health**

The Occupational Health service run by Health Management Limited is available for employees who require additional support or may be experiencing symptoms that are impacting the employee at work. Line managers can contact the Occupational Health team directly to discuss the management of particular health conditions. Details of how to do an online Occupational Health referral can be found on the HR section of the Intranet & Extranet.

- **Employee Assistance Programme**

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is an employee benefit designed to help employees to deal with personal and professional problems which could be affecting their home or work life, health or general wellbeing. The programme is run by an organisation called **Health Assured**.

This is a confidential facility that will provide information, expert advice and structured counselling by telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service gives employees a place to turn for support any time of day or night, 365 days a year. Support is available for whatever issues you might be facing; personal or work-related problems including stress, depression, anxiety, medical issues, marriage and relationship issues, coping with change, parenting/caring difficulties and more.

To use the confidential service you can contact the freephone number **0800 030 5182**, the email facility on their website or via the instant web chat facility via the website.

www.healthassuredeap.co.uk using the following login details:

Username: **Solihull**
Password: **MBC**

- **Healthy Council:** The [resources page](#) of **Healthy Council** section of the Council's Intranet has links to lots of resources on the menopause including tips on how to cope with menopausal symptoms at work.
- **Trade Unions** - if you are a Trade Union member, you can seek help and guidance from your Trade Union.
- The **CIPD** has produced a practical guide for line managers '[The Menopause at Work](#)' which offers advice on supporting colleagues to help them thrive at work.
- **External organisations:**

[The British Menopause Society](#)

The BMS provides education, information and guidance to healthcare professionals specialising in all aspects of reproductive health.

[NHS](#)

Provides an overview, together with information about menopausal symptoms and treatment options.

[Menopause Matters](#)

An independent website which gives up-to-date information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.

[Live Better With - Menopause](#)

For practical tips, advice and products to help you get through the menopause as well as a online community forum to share experiences.

[Henpicked](#) - One of the UK's largest, fastest growing communities for women over 40.

[The Daisy Network Charity](#)

A registered charity providing free information and support to women with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) also known as Premature Menopause.

[Simply Hormones](#)

Provides blogs and articles about the menopause and the opportunity to sign up to receive a free Menopause Survival Kit, newsletters and updates.

Self-help measures for employees

Some ways women can help manage their symptoms of the menopause/peri-menopause include:

- Discussing their practical needs with your line manager, HR or another manager that you feel comfortable talking to.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks) at work, especially before meetings or presentations, for example.
- Consider your lifestyle choices. Cease smoking and follow a healthy eating diet: research has shown that a balanced diet can help alleviate some symptoms and keep bones healthy. Cutting down on alcohol, spicy food and caffeine also helps.
- Exercising regularly. Exercise can help reduce hot flushes and improve sleep. It can also boost your mood and maintain strong bones.
- Drink plenty of water; some women find chilled water helpful.
- Wear natural fibres. Consider wearing layered clothing so that they can be easily undone/removed.
- Consult with your GP on the management of the menopause and to ensure that any symptoms are not due to other causes.
- Get adequate rest and relaxation.
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders, to do lists or note taking.
- Hormones can play havoc on the skin, such as causing dry skin, acne, rashes and itchiness. Some people find keeping a good soothing lotion on their desk a help.
- Use the Employee Assistance Programme website and helpline for information and advice on the menopause. Utilise information and support from external organisations (see Appendix 1).
- Going through the menopause with its many physical and emotional symptoms affects not only women but also their partners. You can encourage your partner to read information and use website forums to share experiences and advice.

An example is on Healthtalk website: <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/late-life/menopause/advice-partners-about-menopause#ixzz5gokKZX1W>

Suggested Adjustments for the Menopause/Peri-menopause in the Workplace

(Each employee's individual experiences of the menopause will vary greatly)

Symptom	Examples of how it can affect work	Suggested adjustments
Daytime sweats and hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less tolerant of workplace temperatures. Work clothes/uniform may become uncomfortable/ wet. Lack of access to rest breaks or suitable break areas. Hot flushes and facial redness may cause women to feel self-conscious, or the sensation may affect concentration or train of thought. May suffer with headaches or migraines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to the supply of cold drinking water. Ensure easy access to washroom facilities. Look at ways to cool the working environment: move to a desk near the window; provide desktop fans, etc. Avoid nylon or close-fitting uniforms. They may require an extra uniform.
Night time sweats and hot flushes Sleep difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue at work due to lack of sleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider temporary adjustment to start/finish times/shift patterns to accommodate any difficulties. Consider flexible or agile working. Signpost to support and advice on sleep (Employee Assistance Programme).
Urinary problems (e.g. increased frequency, urgency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to access toilet facilities more frequently. May need to drink more fluids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet. Ensure access to supply of cold drinking water.
Irregular or heavy periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to toilet and washrooms facilities. Access to a shower room, where available. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet. Show understanding if the employee needs to suddenly leave the office or go home. Ensure cover is available so staff can leave their posts if needed.
Muscular aches and pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving and handling or adopting static postures may be more uncomfortable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make any necessary adjustments through review of a risk assessment. Consider providing alternative lower risk tasks.

Symptom	Examples of how it can affect work	Suggested adjustments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow H&S guidance on manual handling. Consider referral to Musculoskeletal (MSK) Clinic (accessed via Occupational Health) if an on-going issue.
Weight gain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniform may become uncomfortable. May require replacement uniform to meet change in size. Difficulties with mobility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote physical wellbeing at work – signpost to Wellbeing policy, EAP website/helpline and Healthy Council pages.
Psychological problems for example: Loss of confidence. Forgetfulness. Memory loss. Difficulty concentrating. Change in mood/low mood. Depression. Anxiety. Panic attacks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May feel isolated from work colleagues. Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily; for example, learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep or fatigue). Performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms. Workplace relationships may be affected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote physical wellbeing at work – signpost to Wellbeing policy, EAP website information and Healthy Council pages. Encourage employee to discuss concerns openly at one-to-one PDR meetings with manager or Occupational Health and negotiate possible adjustments. Signpost employee to the Employee Assistance Programme, explaining the access to counselling services. Address any work-related stress through the stress risk assessment process. Reduce demands if workload identified as an issue. Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed. Ensure a quiet area/room is available when necessary.
All symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The effects of the menopause and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may increase the likelihood of sickness absence in some women. Symptoms may affect concentration and performance at times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symptoms and side effects should be taken into account in the implementation of sickness absence, capability and disciplinary policies to ensure that menopausal women are not unfairly disadvantaged and do not experience detrimental treatment as a result of their symptoms. Line managers should seek advice from their HR Advisor, when necessary.