

# Menopause Toolkit for SME Employers

**Morecrofts**  
SOLICITORS

**W**  
The Women's  
Organisation

**WOMEN'S  
WORKPLACE  
WELLNESS**

# Contents

<b>Page 3</b>	Introduction
<b>Page 4</b>	How Menopause can affect work
<b>Page 4</b>	How to support employees through Menopause
<b>Page 5</b>	Create a culture of openness
<b>Page 5-6</b>	Consider making workplace adjustments
<b>Page 6</b>	Flexible working times
<b>Page 7</b>	Provide training
<b>Page 8</b>	Create policies and guidance for management and employees alike
<b>Page 9</b>	Increase awareness throughout the workplace
<b>Page 10</b>	Sickness
<b>Page 11-12</b>	Risk Assessment for Menopause
<b>Page 12-14</b>	Menopause in the workplace – the law
<b>Page 15</b>	Helpful links

# Introduction

The UK Government's Women's Health Strategy published in 2022 highlighted the importance of supporting women's reproductive health in the workplace and the impact it has on productivity, health and wellbeing, staff retention and development.

Women's Workplace Wellness is one project designed to put this strategy into practice. By providing access to information and developing resources the project aims to support SME leaders and their teams to introduce and adopt policies and practices that address women's reproductive health in the workplace. Issues affecting women and people include menstrual health, menopause, fertility and pregnancy.

This toolkit has been developed as part of the Women's Workplace Wellness project, and is a freely available resource designed to address the needs of SMEs and small employers across England. It is the result of a collaboration between The Women's Organisation and Morecrofts LLP.

The Women's Organisation is an award winning women's economic development agency and lead for the Women's Workplace Wellness project.

Morecrofts Solicitors has successfully served the business community for over 200 years with expertise in Employment and Commercial Law.

Women's Workplace Wellness project is supported by the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Fund, part of a partnership programme between Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England and UK Health Security Agency.

# How menopause can affect work

Menopause is a natural process experienced by women, usually between the ages of 45 – 55. This includes non-binary, transgender, and intersex people. Although this toolkit refers to ‘women’, ‘people who menstruate’ also require consideration and people from the non-binary, transgender and intersex communities can also experience menopausal symptoms. Women going through early menopause, those undergoing various medical treatments, relatives, co-workers, and people who are supporting someone going through menopause can also all be affected. In most women the menopause is usually preceded by the perimenopause and can have similar symptoms and problems to those experienced during the menopause.

Challenging aspects of work for a woman to cope with can include poor ventilation, high temperatures, tight deadlines, dealing with clients and high workloads.

Having a male line manager, can often be difficult for a woman as they may feel unable to be open and honest about their symptoms and the stress they may be experiencing. They may fear that they will not be understood or treated with empathy, and that the issues they are dealing with may be viewed in a negative way.

Often problematic symptoms and lack of support in the workplace can lead women experiencing menopause to suffer increased levels of stress in the workplace, causing them to reduce their hours, forego promotions or leave work altogether.

With recent research\* showing that women over 50 were the fastest growing section of the workforce, and with many women finding going through menopause challenging whilst at work, it is disappointing that perimenopause and menopause are still not well understood, or provided for in business.

## How to support employees through menopause:-

Disclosing whether she is menopausal to her manager or peers is a matter of choice for a woman. Some may feel that if they do, they will be judged unfairly, leading them to try and hide, and/or, self-manage their symptoms. In order to combat this there are a number of things that employers can do.

# 1. Create a culture of openness

Raise awareness of the issue – make space for confidential 1-2-1's with managers; have regular, informal catch-ups with employees; approach performance conversations supportively and positively.

Women are more likely to reach out for support or to request reasonable adjustments if they feel confident in their colleagues and managers.

*Employee A has been experiencing symptoms relating to perimenopause and has found them to be particularly distressing at work, as she feels that she has no control over when the symptoms may occur. She speaks to her manager B, who suggests they arrange a time to sit down, somewhere quiet where they won't be disturbed or distracted, to have a proper chat about A's situation.*

*Together, they discuss what help A feels may be needed to try and alleviate her symptoms and make her feel less stressed whilst at work.*

# 2. Consider making workplace adjustments

Consider the physical environment –

- provide fans
- good ventilation and temperature control
- cold drinking water
- easy access to toilets
- rest areas
- additional comfort breaks
- workplace adjustment passports - a tailored record of adjustments agreed between an employee and their manager to support employees with a disability, or other health condition whilst at work. [Read more here >](#)

Address work-related stress by carrying out a stress risk assessment - **see point 8 Risk assessments for menopause.**

*The Health and Safety Executive provides more information on this >*

It is also important to understand that colleagues and line managers attitudes can have a great impact on women regarding their confidence to seek support and in some cases to remain in their job. Whilst menopause is not in itself classed as a disability in employment law, if a woman is suffering from severe symptoms of menopause on a physical and/or mental level, they could fall into the category of being classed in law as disabled and require the employer to consider reasonable adjustments – **see point 9 Menopause in the workplace - the law.**

*Employee A and manager B decide that factors which could assist her feeling of wellbeing at work could include moving A's desk nearer the window, supplying a desk fan and providing a water cooler for general use.*

### 3. Flexible working times

Employers can offer temporary flexible working arrangements, such as occasional working from home or flexible start and finish times.

Flexible working patterns can be beneficial to employees experiencing menopausal symptoms.

*Employee A has been experiencing broken sleeping patterns, and some nights she has no sleep at all, due to night sweats and general anxiety brought on by her menopause. After discussions with manager B, they agree on a temporary basis, to be monitored over the coming year, that she may come into work an hour later than normal and make up the time in the afternoon, if she has had a particularly bad night. Employee A agrees to call manager B an hour before she is due to start work that day, at the latest.*

## 4. Provide training

Training for line managers to recognise menopausal symptoms and understand how symptoms may affect women, and the policies and procedures their respective organisation has in place to support them. Training could include:

- developing listening skills; and
- handling difficult conversations

Encourage line managers to seek support from specialised HR advisers if they are struggling to deal with a particular case. Make sure they are aware how the law relates to menopause, the different stages of menopause and how it can affect individuals differently. Ensure that managers feel confident to have open conversations with any employee who is experiencing menopause, but also remain receptive to the fact that, if they are male, an employee may wish to speak to a female instead.

*On discussing the issues with employee **A**, manager **B** speaks to their employer and informs them that there was a lot of information they didn't know about menopause and perimenopause. Manager **B** suggests that training on this matter would be helpful and thinks that training should be available to all employees in general to help them understand menopause.*

Training for employees can be helpful for those who may not be aware of the impact of menopause, such as younger workers or male colleagues. Training can be accessed online and there are many free apps that can be downloaded and used by companies on a tighter budget.

## 5. Create policies and guidance for management and employees alike

Publish and promote menopause policy guidelines – helping both those transitioning through menopause and their colleagues to increase their understanding of the issues a woman may be facing. The policy should be used as a basis for training provided.

Due to the variable nature of symptoms, there is not an easy ‘one-size fits all’ approach to developing such policies.

A recent House of Commons Committee Report regarding the subject has recommended that model policies should cover, as a minimum: ‘how to request reasonable adjustments and other support; advice on flexible working; sick leave for menopause symptoms; and provisions for education, training and building a supportive culture.’ *More information on this [here](#) >.*

With the variable nature of menopause, the policy should aim to create a culture of understanding as to what menopause is and how it can affect people differently.

*Following the training manager **B** suggests the company could draw up a policy to build on what they have learnt. You can find a [Menopause Policy Template here](#).*



## 6. Increase awareness throughout the workplace

Treat menopause as a natural process and not a taboo subject; create posters with signposts to where staff can find more information and advice, both inside and outside the workplace.

*The company sends out an anonymous staff survey every year, and this year they decide to add some additional questions concerning peri menopause and menopause. The questions include:*

- *Would you feel confident to talk to your manager regarding perimenopause etc?*
- *Are there any practical things that you think we could do to assist colleagues experiencing peri menopausal or menopausal symptoms ?*

Create a staff network or provide an employee assistance programme. This offers a point or points of contact when staff may need advice or a listening ear and provides an additional network within which to support those staff affected by menopause.

*Following the staff survey, the Company looks to introduce:-*

- *an on-line noticeboard for those who wish to use it; and*
- *a Menopause Champion*

*The company decides to set up a 'women's network group' to look at ways of improving the experience of female employees undergoing peri menopause and menopause.*

# 7.

# Sickness

Understand that coping with severe symptoms of menopause may lead to temporarily higher absentee rates and also drops in performance. Many women experience the menopause for a number of years.

Employers can opt to record absences related to menopause as an on-going issue and not treat them as a series of separate short-term absences. This ensures that the sickness procedure is not unnecessarily implemented, and hopefully provides additional peace of mind.

Effective management of employees whose menopausal symptoms are affecting their work can help improve team morale, retain valuable experience, skills, and knowledge, and could reduce sickness absence. It is good practice for employers to understand that some performance issues may be caused by menopause and should make necessary changes to support those staff accordingly.

*Employee **A** has started to suffer from migraines which her doctor has diagnosed as being related to her peri menopause. On occasions this results in employee **A** having to take occasional days off work.*

*Rather than calculating each separate absence as an individual instance, manager **B** decides to treat them as an on-going issue. (N.B. Other absences, not related to her peri menopause, would be treated in the normal way).*

## 8. Risk Assessment for Menopause

Two kinds of risk assessment can be carried out at work:-

Health & Safety Risk Assessment – this aims to identify any risks that may affect employees whilst at work, how they may cause a detriment or hazard to an employee and attempts to take steps to reduce or eliminate that harm.

Stress risk assessment - a consideration of all the issues in a work environment that may result in employees experiencing mental health issues.

*For more information, click [here](#).*

Common reasonable Health and Safety adjustments include, but are not limited to:-

- Easy access to a water fountain
- A quiet room enabling staff to take a short break
- Accessible toilets
- Heating and ventilation control
- Additional fans
- Assess the material used in staff uniforms
- Controlled lighting
- Flexibility with working hours, where possible

By law employers should conduct a stress risk assessment to protect vulnerable employees from stress at work. You should work with your employee to highlight potential stress risk factors, try to eliminate, or minimise these risks and also build in a review procedure to monitor the individuals stress health on an on-going basis.

A risk assessment should be undertaken after any employee informs an employer or their manager that they are experiencing work related stress or if they have time off due to work related stress.

*In her workplace risk assessment employee **A** and manager **B** identified the things that could be put in place to actively manage or reduce the symptoms she was having at work. These included:*

- Hot flushes - employee A's desk has been moved to a space near an office window, which ensures a source of fresh air, she has also been supplied with a desk fan*
- Migraines – in moving her desk to the window, this also provides a natural light source to hopefully reduce the risk of her experiencing a migraine*
- Increased need to go to the toilet – her desk is now nearer to the toilets*
- Hot flushes and joint pains - a water cooler has been obtained for general use in the office*

## 9. Menopause in the workplace – the law

Having robust procedures in place to support and encourage workers through menopause is crucial, as these will provide clarity for both the employer and employee and could avoid any problems emerging that may lead to legal action to be taken by the employee.

At present, there is no specific mention of menopause within the law, although parliament have recently been debating whether this needs to be addressed.

In order to recognise what needs to be achieved, managers and employers first need to understand how menopause relates to the law. The main areas are:-

- Equality Act 2010, which protects workers against discrimination
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which says an employer must, where reasonably practical, ensure everyone's health, safety, and welfare at work
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 – employers must make a 'suitable and sufficient assessment' of the risks to the health and safety of their employees at work

This means that by law employers should:

- pinpoint risks to employees' health, e.g. through a risk assessment
- try to prevent or minimise work-related stress

The Equality Act 2010 does not provide a specific provision for menopause, but it could, in certain cases, be linked to acts of discrimination. Where an employee is treated less favourably and this is due in part to her menopause symptoms, and if this is related to a protected characteristic, this may well be seen to be an act of discrimination. Examples include:-

## Age

If a person experiencing menopause is subject to any detrimental treatment, there is the potential for this to be deemed age discrimination. This is because typically, it is woman over 45, who are most affected.

It is important to remember however, that younger women going through early menopause and also women going through a medically induced menopause can also fall victim to age discrimination.

*The company decides to arrange support and awareness training, but only invites female employees over the age of 45. Employee C is 35 and currently experiencing early peri menopause symptoms. Employee C feels side lined by the company and that her symptoms are not being taken seriously.*

## Disability

An employer should consider making reasonable adjustments when dealing with a disabled employee, to attempt to alleviate or remove any difficulties that employee may encounter as a result of their disability. In relation to menopause, an employer could agree to maintain a separate sickness absence record when dealing with absences relating to menopause symptoms.

*In our previous example manager B informed employee A that any absences related to menopause would be kept separately from any absences unrelated to menopause. Simply put, days off with migraines would be considered to be related to her menopause, and therefore, an on-going issue, but days off with flu symptoms would be considered standard absences and treated separately.*

## Sex

Unwelcome actions concerning an employee's menopausal symptoms could amount to harassment, or sexual harassment depending on the type of the behaviour.

*In our previous example employee A is having a hot flush when one of her colleagues says laughingly to other colleagues close by, 'we don't need to turn the heating on, we can warm ourselves on your face'.*

i. If you think that one of your colleagues may be suffering with perimenopause or menopause, you can direct them to some specialist advice or help - they should consult their local GP or pharmacy first but the following links might be useful;

ii. On-line information:

- [NHS](#)
- [British Menopause Society | For healthcare professionals and others specialising in post reproductive health \(thebms.org.uk\)](#) the specialist authority for menopause and post reproductive health in the UK.
- [Menopause Matters](#) an independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.
- [The menopause at work: guidance for people managers | CIPD](#) Guidance for managers on how to support employees through menopause.
- [BSI Standard menstruation-menstrual-health-and-menopause-in-the-workplace-guide](#) is designed to help identify practical workplace adjustments and activities that reflect good practice for supporting employees who menstruate and experience peri/menopause symptoms.
- [Menopause at the Workplace - Help to Grow](#)

Follow the [Women's Workplace Wellness LinkedIn page](#) to keep up to date with resources and podcasts designed for small employers to support women's reproductive health issues in the workplace.

### References

\*Page 4, Paragraph 2: [UK Parliament - Menopause at the Workplace](#)

The background is a solid blue color with several faint, light blue icons scattered across it. These icons include gears of various sizes and orientations, and tools such as hammers and wrenches. The icons are semi-transparent and serve as a decorative backdrop for the text.

**info@morecrofts.co.uk**

**0151 236 8871**

**Morecrofts**  
SOLICITORS

**W<sup>o</sup>**  
The Women's  
Organisation

**WOMEN'S  
WORKPLACE  
WELLNESS**