

Menopause Guidance

Academic Year 2022-2025



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Introduction

Anyone can be affected by hormonal changes during their lives for a number of reasons including pregnancy, fertility treatment, gender transitioning, conditions needing hormone treatment and menopause. These can bring about symptoms which could affect a colleague at work.

This document focuses on menopause and uses a few key terms:

- **Menopause:** the point at which oestrogen levels decline and periods stop. Menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years so it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.
- **Perimenopause:** the phase leading up to the menopause when hormone balance begins to change, and when a colleague may begin to experience menopausal symptoms. For some, this can start as early as in their twenties or as late as in their forties.

This document aims to raise awareness of the range of menopausal symptoms that exist and help colleagues and line managers understand how they can support employees experiencing such symptoms.

Menopause can impact women, trans and non-binary people and is a normal part of life. This document recognises that the menopause and perimenopause is an equality and occupational health and safety issue and that colleagues may need appropriate flexibility, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during and after the menopause. It is an individual experience and there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

Connect Education Trust has a positive attitude towards the menopause and will treat all individuals with dignity and respect during this time and ensure that the workplace does not make symptoms worse.

Connect Education Trust is committed to ensuring that colleagues feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms openly and without embarrassment, and are able to ask for support in order to continue to work safely in the organisation. For this reason, the menopause is a workplace issue affecting all employees.

Legislation

Connect Education Trust undertakes to comply with its legal obligations as set out below:

- **The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees.
- **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** place a duty on employers to assess and manage the risks to their employees and others by undertaking general risk assessments which should include specific risks to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.
- **The Equality Act 2010** prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain protected characteristics including gender, age and disability. Conditions lined to the menopause may meet the definition of an impairment under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

What Is The Menopause?

The menopause is a natural transition usually between the ages of 45-55 and is marked by the changes in hormones. There are a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

There is also a period of time before the menopause called perimenopause. Most with symptoms will have at least two or three years of 'hormonal chaos' as oestrogen levels decline. For some this may go on for much longer.

Post menopause is a term used for when periods cease for 12 consecutive months however, other menopausal symptoms may remain for some years.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary greatly, and commonly include but not limited to:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Anxiety
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Memory loss
- Depression
- Headaches and migraines
- Recurrent urinary tract infections
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Osteoporosis
- Reduced concentration
- Heavy periods

Who Could This Affect?

Although most women experience this natural change between the ages of 45-55 for some, it can be experienced at a much younger age. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause.

Some medical circumstances may create immediate menopause, whatever the age such as treatment for fibroids or damaged ovaries, cancer treatment or hysterectomy.

Struggling with menopausal symptoms may be additionally difficult for colleagues identifying as LGBTQ+. If a partner is also experiencing symptoms of the menopause at the same time it could increase difficulties with symptoms such as anxiety, sleep disturbance and depression.

Trans employees may experience natural menopausal symptoms. If undertaking hormone therapy this could make this change complicated.

Non binary employees may also experience menopausal symptoms.

There is a small amount of research into how the menopause affects disabled employees and those with pre-existing health conditions. The menopause could aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Examples include those with diabetes who find it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels stable.

BAME employees may face barriers in accessing appropriate medical support or having their symptoms taken seriously. There is some evidence to suggest that there may also be some variation in the average age at which menopause takes place between those from different ethnic backgrounds.

Roles and responsibilities

It is recognised that everyone has a role to play in ensuring a comfortable working environment for all staff, including those experiencing the menopause.

Connect Education Trust will:

- Educate and inform line managers and staff to be aware of how the menopause can affect colleagues, taking into account the particular circumstances in schools, the potential symptoms of menopause and how colleagues can be supported.
- Support a culture in which colleagues feel comfortable discussing the menopause openly. Understand that some colleagues may not feel comfortable approaching their line manager because of certain barriers they face such as being younger, LGBTQ+, trans or BAME. Where this is the case Connect Education Trust will ensure that there is an alternative contact and confidentiality is paramount.
- Undertake a risk assessment which will consider the specific needs of those experiencing menopausal symptoms. Risk assessments will include consideration of temperature and ventilation issues and will also address welfare issues; such as access to rest facilities, cold water and break times.
- Make adjustments where necessary to support individuals experiencing menopausal symptoms and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse. Measures could include:
 - Leaving doors open (where they can be opened safely)
 - Open windows (where they can be opened safely)
 - Provision of fans (where they can be used safely)
 - Where possible to regulate the temperature of rooms
 - Fitting blinds
 - Establishing rest facilities for those who need to access these more regularly due to menopausal symptoms.
 - Considering requests for flexible working arrangements, change of working pattern or temporary part-time working where the main reason for the request is menopausal symptoms.
 - Seeking further advice where required from occupational health for a holistic assessment to ensure an employee's physical environment is not making symptoms worse.

- Reviewing workplace procedures and processes to support and avoid any detriment to those experiencing the menopause.

This is not a definitive list and Connect Education Trust will actively listen to staff and take on board other suggestions.

All staff will:

- Take responsibility for looking after their health.
- Familiarise themselves with the detail in this guidance. Seek advice and guidance from the support channels available.
- Support colleagues.
- Be open and honest with managers in working through available options together.
- Agree to keep their line manager informed to ensure the support provided continues to be suitable.
- Contribute to a respectful working environment.

Line Managers will:

- Be aware of the potential impact of the menopause on performance.
- Ensure they are aware of the support Connect Education Trust offers and the guidance contained in this document.
- Ensure all team members are aware of the guidance, where to find it and how to seek support.
- Ensure that they listen to each employees needs and are open and willing to have discussions around menopause, maintaining confidentiality where required by the employee.
- Work together with the employee to ensure the appropriate support is provided and continues to meet the needs of the employee.
- Set up regular reviews with employees and make any necessary changes to the support provided.

General Support

It is hoped that colleagues will feel able to have an open and honest conversation with their line manager if they are experiencing menopausal symptoms at an early stage. Employees who do not wish to discuss this with their direct line manager may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with a trusted colleague, their schools HR lead or a seek support from a counsellor using Connect Education Trust's Employee Assistance Hub provided by Health Assured accessed via Perkbox.

An employee may feel unwell and unfit for work due to menopausal symptoms. Employees should follow the absence reporting procedure for their school and should feel they can be open about the reason for their sickness absence without fear.

More details of employee entitlements under the Connect Education Trust Absence Management and Ill Health Capability Procedure can be found on the Connect Education Trust Policies Google Drive.

We encourage employees to speak to their GP when they are experiencing symptoms.