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Supporting Menopause at Work - Toolkit

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Purpose
3. What is the menopause?
4. The symptoms of menopause
5. Workplace Health and Safety considerations
6. Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work
7. The Role of the Manager
8. The Role of the Employee
9. The Role of HR
10. The Role of Occupational Health
11. The Role of Trade Unions
12. Support, signposting and further information
13. Appendix 1 – Menopause Wellbeing Action Plan

1. Introduction

Increasingly women are working well into their 50s and 60s and with the number of older women in the workforce expected to continue to rise. Women are working through perimenopause and post-menopause which can mean managing the demands of work and home life, whilst also dealing with sometimes severe menopausal symptoms. It should be noted that for some women, the menopause can occur early naturally or for medical reasons such as surgery (e.g. hysterectomy), chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

Although it is women who experience the physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause, it is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home. Although the majority of people who experience the menopause will identify as women, other people - for example trans, non-binary and intersex people - may also experience the menopause. We have used the terms “women” and “people who experience the menopause” throughout the policy but this policy is inclusive of all people who experience the menopause and applies to everyone.

With average life expectancy for women in the UK currently at 82 years, many women are living in this post-menopausal phase for up to a third or even half of their life and these symptoms can have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing in both work and home. (Currently the number of Halton Borough Council employees, 75% are female and 51% of these are aged over 50).

In response to the above, a Workplace Health Needs Assessment was circulated to all Halton Borough Council's employees. The assessment established a gap around health and menopause and that further provision was required to support the health and wellbeing of employees.

Focus groups were developed in order to gain a deeper understanding from employees with regards to their individual experiences, the effects on work life, home life and from a clinical point of view. As the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers the information gathered has been used to develop support for all employees affected or impacted by menopause.

2. Purpose

Halton Borough Council recognises that the menopause is a key health and safety issue.

Halton has a positive attitude to the menopause and will work proactively with employees to support women experiencing the menopause.

The purpose of this toolkit is to raise awareness of menopause transition and assist managers in supporting employees going through or affected by the menopause in the workplace either directly or indirectly.

Halton wants to ensure that women experiencing menopause symptoms feel comfortable to discuss it and ask for support, including reasonable adjustments so they can thrive in a safe workplace, whilst feeling confident their symptoms or experience will not have a negative impact on their working career. We will encourage women to feel confident to discuss the practical steps needed to support their needs.

Provide managers with training that will enable them to understand the impact of the menopause and possible symptoms associated with this and to act accordingly without breaking the confidence of the individual. This will in turn enable employees to feel confident in fulfilling their job role.

Halton want to support women to remain in the workplace wherever possible throughout their menopause.

3. What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural phase of life when women stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer. Every experience will be different and menopausal symptoms can begin before the age of 40. Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins before the menopause.

Although for many women this is a natural life change, for some women the menopause may be medically induced. Surgery such as a hysterectomy or chemotherapy/radiotherapy treatment can affect women in younger age groups, creating severe symptoms in some cases. So, for some it is not a 'natural life change' or transition and this makes the psychological aspect more important. It is therefore a very personal transitional phase in an individuals' life. Transitions through the menopause are:

- Perimenopause: The time leading up to the end of an individual's periods when changes start to happen.
- Menopause: Happens on the day after they have not had a period for 12 months.
- Post-menopause: The rest of the time after the day of menopause. Symptoms may continue for a long time during the post-menopausal period and may never completely disappear.
- Premature menopause: Can happen naturally, or because of illness, medication or surgery.

- Andropause – Also known as the male menopause, usually occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, during which a man's testosterone levels may fall.

4. The symptoms of menopause

We recognise that the menopause is a very individual experience and that people will be affected in different ways and to different degrees. While symptoms vary greatly, they commonly include:

- Psychological issues - such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence, brain fog and reduced concentration
- Hot flushes – often brief and sudden surges of heat
- Sleep disturbances that can make people feel tired and irritable
- Night sweats – hot flushes that happen at night
- Irregular periods that can be painful and heavier or lighter than usual
- Muscle and Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTI's) including cystitis
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Palpitations – heartbeats that become more noticeable
- Skin changes – dryness, acne, general itchiness
- Fatigue
- Dizziness

Each of these symptoms may affect an employee's wellbeing, comfort and in some cases their performance at work.

5. Workplace Health and Safety considerations

The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers.

The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. Whilst the menopause is not in itself a disability, Halton recognises that symptoms arising from it may meet the definitions under the Equality Act 2010 and may require reasonable adjustments.

There are many workplace factors that can make working life more challenging for women experiencing the menopause and which may exacerbate symptoms, these can include:

- Temperature
- Ventilation and air quality
- Humidity
- Noise
- Uniform and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Access to drinking water

- Lighting
- Toilet/washing facilities
- Working times/break times

Halton is committed to ensuring that the above factors are considered and where possible mitigated against to ensure conditions in the workplace do not exacerbate symptoms.

6. Why it matters to support colleagues through the menopause at work

Menopause affects everyone – it is not just an issue for women

Education and information helps to break the taboo whether experiencing the menopause directly or indirectly.

Wellbeing conversations make the difference

Equipping line managers to have wellbeing conversations and provide an effective framework that encourages employees to feel listened to and supported in the workplace.

A healthy workplace and culture is better for everyone

Creating an open, honest and supportive workplace means we can all flourish at work.

Enabling everyone to be their best at work

Physical and psychological symptoms can seriously impact on wellbeing, therefore by providing the right support and communicating openly, enables everyone to perform at their best.

Menopause transition does not necessarily lead to reduced performance at work and with the right support and understanding we can create an open, inclusive and supportive culture.

Retaining employees

Providing the right support can help retain experienced employees and save on recruitment costs which is beneficial to the individual and business success.

Supporting each other

An individual may be affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, therefore it is important to listen carefully and with an open mind, be sensitive to the issues and avoid making any assumptions.

It is important to respect individuals and to keep the information confidential. Traditionally, the menopause has not been widely discussed in workplaces, with some finding it difficult and embarrassing to raise the subject.

Thankfully due to the increased coverage of the menopause in the media and the increased availability of online support and guidance, conversations around supporting employees going through the menopause in the workplace are encouraged.

It is important to acknowledge the impact of menopausal symptoms at work. In some workplaces “banter” may have been the acceptable way menopause has been approached however, this could be interpreted as harassment. Kindness and empathy to all our colleagues is what we endeavour to achieve.

7. The Role of the Manager

- Familiarise yourself with this guidance and associated training by contacting the Health Improvement Team at HITworkplacehealth@halton.gov.uk
- Recognise employee's issues are unique to them and avoid making any assumptions.
- Listen and encourage employees to discuss the impact the menopause is having on them, consider using the Menopause Wellbeing Action Plan with the individual (Appendix 1) to facilitate the conversation.
- Treat the conversation sensitively, respectfully, professionally and confidentially, maintaining the trust of the employee.
- Gain an understanding of what support the employee needs from you, if any.
- Support employees by seeking professional advice from HR and Occupational Health where applicable.
- When considering other policies recognise menopause as a possible contributory factor such as those for absence management, performance capability, bullying and harassment or disciplinary.
- Ensure all employees are aware of the support services available and how to access these and offer support in doing so if appropriate.

Be mindful:

- To listen carefully to what your employee is saying: it can be a very emotional and difficult discussion for them to initiate or take part in.
- When discussing menopause respect a person's right not to discuss intimate issues especially with a male line manager. In this case ask who they wish to talk to.
- Of any reasonable adjustments that have been identified as part of the conversation and seek advice if necessary.
- That all information shared by the employee is treated in the strictest confidence and is not shared further without the employee's express consent.
- To support attendance at medical appointments if required in accordance with the Council's procedure for such appointments.
- To treat everyone with dignity and respect.

8. The Role of the Employee

- Familiarise yourself with this guidance.
- Seek medical advice and treatment if required.
- Share any health-related matters that may be impacting on your employment with your manager or someone you feel comfortable talking to, so that appropriate support can be agreed.
- Take reasonable steps for ensuring your own wellbeing for example, eat a balanced diet, be active, manage stress, sleep well, be mindful of how much alcohol you drink, as the healthier you are, the more likely you will have a better experience of menopause.

- Not to be embarrassed about asking for support or additional resources.
- To consider using the Menopause Wellbeing Action Plan with your manager or nominated support (Appendix 1).
- Promote positive health and wellbeing for employees experiencing menopause related matters and signpost to additional support.

9. The Role of HR

- To provide managers with advice and guidance that promotes positive health and wellbeing for employees experiencing menopause related matters.
- Provide advice and guidance on other policies and procedures and recognise menopause as a possible contributory factor such as those for absence management, performance capability, bullying and harassment or disciplinary.
- Provide advice and guidance to managers when making a referral to Occupational Health.
- Provide advice and guidance to managers on individual cases to enable the manager to make an informed decision on workplace matters.
- Contribute to training for managers and employees.

10. The Role of Occupational Health

- To enable managers to make informed decisions on workplace matters, assess the health of employees.
- Offer advice and make recommendations to managers and employees with regards to health and wellbeing during menopause.
- Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice.
- Provide advice and recommendations on any reasonable adjustments in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

11. The Role of Trade Unions

- Familiarise yourself with this guidance.
- If requested, support your member when completing the menopause wellbeing action plan with the Manager or someone your member feels comfortable talking to, so that appropriate support can be agreed.
- Treat the conversation sensitively, respectfully, professionally and confidentially, maintaining the trust of your member.
- Promote positive health and wellbeing for employees experiencing menopause related matters and signpost to available support.

12. Support, signposting and further information

- **NHS Menopause Guidance** www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

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

- **Menopause Matters** www.menopausematters.co.uk

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

- **British Menopause Society** www.thebms.org.uk

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

- **Women's Health Concern (WHC)**
www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause

WHC is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society and provides factsheets about the menopause, linked articles (e.g. about experiencing a healthy menopause), FAQs and recommended further reading.

- **Manage My Menopause** www.managemymenopause.co.uk

A not for profit organisation providing tailored menopausal advice about post reproductive health.

- **The Daisy Network Charity** www.daisynetwork.org

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

- **Simply Hormones** www.simplyhormones.com/women

Provides blogs and articles about the menopause and opportunity to sign up to receive free Menopause Survival Kit, newsletters and updates. It also has available a Menopause: A Guide for Men information booklet that has been designed to help men understand more about the menopause, including some 'helpful hints'.

- **Balance by Newson Health** <https://www.balance-menopause.com>

An app that can be downloaded to your phone which provides an evidenced-based and unbiased information to those experiencing the perimenopause and menopause.

13. Appendix 1

Menopause Wellbeing Action Plan

Employee Name	
Job Title	
Department	
Manager Name	
Date of Action Plan	
Date for review	

You can use the Menopause Wellbeing Action Plan to start a conversation about the menopause that will support your health and wellbeing in the workplace

You only need to give information that you're comfortable sharing, this form isn't a legal document – but it may help you and your manager to agree what support you need in the workplace.

1. What helps you stay healthy at work?

For example: participating in exercise before or after work, taking in some fresh air at lunchtime, time to talk to your manager.

2. Are there any situations at work that can exacerbate your menopausal symptoms?

For example: having to stand for a long period, temperature changes, uniform etc.

3. How might experiencing menopause symptoms impact you at work?

For example: concentration issues, tiredness, needing to use the toilet more frequently, needing access to fresh air and water.

4. What can your manager do to support you to manage any symptoms at work?

For example: changing your start time if you're experiencing disturbed sleep, making sure you've got access to cold water while you're working, making sure you've got easy access to toilet facilities, making sure the temperature is comfortable, providing a fan or access to fresh air, giving you somewhere to store extra clothes or change clothes during the day.

5. Is there anything else that might be relevant that you may wish to share?

For example: any medication you may be taking.

Manager Signature	
Employee Signature	