

The Moray Council

MENOPAUSE POLICY

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1. Introduction

Moray Council recognises that menopause is a natural stage of life and it is acknowledged that for some people the symptoms of menopause can have a big impact on their daily lives. This in turn can have an impact on an employee’s ability to perform and maintain attendance at work.

Moray Council understand that people experiencing menopausal symptoms have a recognised health condition and require the same support and understanding from their employer as anyone experiencing any ongoing health conditions.

Moray Council is committed to work towards removing any stigma and taboo surrounding menopause at work and support an inclusive working culture where employees feel enabled to talk about their health and practical needs through this transition period to ensure as far as possible individuals can maintain their full engagement at work.

This policy aims to ensure that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect and ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce is maintained in line with the council’s Employee Charter and Code of Conduct.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all 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.

3. Purpose

3.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- raise awareness across the workforce and provide clarity and direction on how the council will support menopause related issues. It provides information on the council's approach along with support and guidance for the workforce to ensure that managers and employees feel comfortable talking about menopause regardless of their age or gender.
- encourage open and honest discussion about menopause and the effect it may have on the individual(s) experiencing this, including teams and colleagues.
- ensure compliance with equalities responsibilities and obligations. Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty not to discriminate on grounds of sex, age and disability, and employees should be treated with respect in terms of their age and gender. As the menopause is a predominantly female condition, any detrimental treatment of a woman related to the menopause could represent direct or indirect sex discrimination.

3.2 Whilst there is no direct legislation addressing the impact of the menopause in the workplace, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees. As part of this Moray Council have a duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees. This includes identifying groups of workers who might be particularly at risk and this may be extended to those assessing any specific risk that some people may experience during menopause. This would involve carrying out risk assessments for those employees experiencing issues in line with the regulations. As an employer the council should ensure that the hazards are removed or proper control measures are put in place to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practical.

3.3 Employees will have differing experiences of menopause and for some this may cause particular difficulties both in and out of work which may impact on their ability to perform at work. Moray Council recognise this can be a challenging time of life and can be compounded by other issues such as increasing caring responsibilities and perhaps the onset of age related health conditions. This policy aims to support employees manage this period of life and ensure they are provided with the support they need to be healthy and safe at work.

4. What is menopause?

4.1 Menopause is a natural stage of life when an employee's oestrogen levels decline and they stop having periods. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

4.2 When does it happen?

The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55, but for some employees it can be much earlier or later. The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause, when an employee's hormone balance starts to change. During this time an employee may start to suffer with menopause symptoms but is still having periods. They are said to have reached the menopause when they have not had a period for a year. The symptoms last on average for four years, but for some can last much longer.

The average age for an employee to undergo the menopause in the UK is 51, but around 1 in 100 experience it before the age of 40. This is known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), premature ovarian failure or 'premature menopause'. It is called 'early menopause' if it occurs between the ages of 40 and 45. Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can be as a result of surgery (for example oophorectomy which is removal of one or both ovaries), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy).

4.3 What are the symptoms?

The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of menopausal employees experience symptoms, but everyone is different.

Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for employees as they go about their daily lives including work.

Some of the most typical symptoms of the menopause include:

- psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- hot flushes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest and often require fresh air to relieve)
- sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night)
- irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- headaches
- weight gain
- palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- reduced sex drive
- hair thinning/loss

Everyone is different, not everyone will notice symptoms or need help and/or support.

5 Responsibilities

5.1 Moray Council will:

- ensure that line managers are aware and sufficiently informed to enable them to support employees experiencing menopause
- encourage management and trade unions to work in partnership to assist in raising awareness and understanding of menopause and how it can affect people in the workplace
- ensure that managers adopt a fair and consistent approach and create an open and honest culture to aid management of the impact of menopause in the workplace
- ensure all parties fulfil their obligations in line with the Equalities Act 2010 and Health and Safety requirements
- ensure that employees are made aware of the support mechanisms available within the council and signpost to further resources externally
- encourage employees to seek help and support with problems relating to the menopause in order to manage their working environment.

5.2 Line managers are responsible for:

- ensuring they are aware of their responsibilities within the Menopause Policy and Guidance
- promoting and ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of all employees, including the use of risk assessments to identify and manage hazards impacting on both physical and mental health in the workplace
- being aware of and encouraging the use of all Council support mechanisms including Occupational Health and signposting as appropriate to other external resources
- support open discussion and communication on the menopause regardless of work location
- maintaining a positive and proactive approach and culture to supporting understanding of the menopause
- being sensitive and supportive to those experiencing the effects of the menopause
- fairly, consistently, and timeously applying procedures to support employees and manage employee absence via application of the Health and Work policy where applicable

5.3 Employees are responsible for:

- understanding their responsibilities within the policy and guidance
- looking after their general health and wellbeing and seeking medical or other support where necessary
- communicating with their line manager about their experience of the menopause where support is required
- where they feel not able to speak to their line manager, seeking assistance and advice from another line manager, HR Advice Line, Health & Safety team or a trade union representative

- advising their line manager of any symptom which may or does affect their ability to attend work or to undertake the duties of their post, particularly with regards to health and safety implications
- working proactively to find mutually acceptable adjustments
- raising concerns at an early stage with their line manager
- attending any appointments and co-operating fully with the Occupational Health (OH) Service and other organisations that provide support to the Council and its employees
- ensuring that any medical advice and treatment received is followed

6. Support

6.1 Working Environment

It is important to remember that the menopause is a natural and temporary stage in an employee's life and that not all employees experience significant symptoms. However, for those experiencing the impact of menopausal symptoms the council want to ensure that these individuals feel properly supported and included in their working environments. This will be assisted by:

- line managers being aware of the symptoms of the menopause and of the support that can be put in place
- recognise that every employee is different and a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate
- employees will have access to services which can assist with managing their transition through menopause including Occupational Health and signposting to external support services. These will be promoted to the workforce over different communication platforms.
- where demand is identified peer support groups will be considered to allow a safe environment for employees to gather support and guidance from their peers whilst providing an opportunity to share their experiences
- monitoring of facilities to ensure access to toilet facilities, cold drinking water, appropriate working temperatures are achieved where reasonably practical dependant on the nature of the job/service i.e. extreme weather is outwith the council's control for those not working in an office environment, availability of access to toilets for a frontline worker working in a client's home is outwith the councils control so consideration of alternative facilities needs to be taken etc

6.2 Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments should be considered where it has been identified that there is a requirement for additional support. The purpose of considering reasonable adjustments is to enable an employee experiencing menopausal symptoms to continue to undertake their job as comfortably as possible. Any adjustments should consider both the employee's needs and service requirements. The aim is to understand the barriers the employee is experiencing and put adjustments in place to resolve them. It's very important, therefore, that a manager involves the employee in discussions about the potential adjustments that could help to mitigate the impact of any menopausal symptoms at work. Each experience of menopausal transition is different and

so there is no uniform set of adjustments that can be put in place. These adjustments should be considered for employees regardless of their work location e.g. for those working in a hybrid or remote location.

The following provides options of adjustments that may be considered however this is not exhaustive:

- **Flexible Working:**

This may include:

- flexible working hours or practices
- temporary changes in work patterns
- review of absence triggers to assist in managing attendance at work via the application of the Health and Work policy
- additional breaks including being able to briefly access fresh air and return without having to explain
- part time working or reduced hours in line with the Flexible Working policy
- shift changes
- support to leave work if they are feeling unwell or experience heavy bleeding or flooding
- time off for medical appointments in line with the Special Leave policy provisions

- **Facilities**

Whilst it is acknowledged that the council offers a diversity of roles to employees across the workplace and working environments differ depending on the role being undertaken, discussion around individual needs may result in consideration of providing additional facilities which may include:

- provision of an additional or alternative uniform or PPE
- adjustments to uniform or PPE to support managing symptoms subject to risk assessment (e.g. use of natural fibre garments)
- provision of a space or area for employees to use to make a telephone call for professional support or take medication
- provision of time to walk around to ease joint pain
- facility to store sanitary products, etc

7. What can employees who experience menopausal symptoms do to help themselves?

For employees experiencing menopausal symptoms which are affecting their wellbeing and/or their capacity to work, there are a number of actions that should be considered by the individual.

- seek advice and/or support from a GP or medical professional
- discuss individual practical needs with the line manager, HR or another manager that they are comfortable talking to

- where appropriate to the employee's job, use technology to support the management of some symptoms, e.g. set reminders, notes, etc
- discuss with the line manager a referral to Occupational Health for help and guidance
- consider any other changes which the individual can make to maintain and manage ongoing good health. This may include support from other organisations or sources as detailed in section 8.

8. Further sources of information to support women and raise awareness:

NHS information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause

NICE guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment'

NICE guidelines provide advice on the care and support that should be offered to people who use health and care services.

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information

Menopause Matters

An award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.

www.menopausematters.co.uk

Women's Health Concern

A charitable organisation – the patient arm of the British Menopause Society – that aims to help educate and support women with their healthcare by providing unbiased, accurate information.

www.womens-health-concern.org

Daisy Network

Daisy Network is dedicated to providing information and support to women diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency, also known as Premature Menopause.

www.daisynetwork.org

The Menopause Exchange

The Menopause Exchange gives independent advice about the menopause, midlife and post-menopausal health. They send out a free quarterly newsletter with useful impartial help and support.

www.menopause-exchange.co.uk

Menopause Cafés

At a menopause café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss menopause. The website includes guidance on how to set up your own menopause café.

www.menopausecafe.net

Manage my Menopause

Website for tailored menopausal advice for individuals provided by experts.

www.managemymenopause.co.uk

My Menopause Doctor

A website that aims to help empower women with necessary information to make informed decisions regarding any treatment they may take to help turn the menopause into a positive experience that does not negatively impact their lives.

www.menopausedoctor.co.uk

Trade Unions

Direct support is available from Trade Union representatives and their related websites

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