

YOU DON'T JUST GO THROUGH **MENOPAUSE** AT HOME



MENOPAUSE

GUIDANCE FOR THE WORKPLACE

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You Don't Just Go Through **Menopause** at Home

Menopause: Guidance for the Workplace

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What is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural stage of life for women which usually starts in the late forties or early fifties but can occur at other stages in life. Menopause symptoms last on average for four years but can persist for longer or shorter periods, sometimes continuing over a decade.

Part of the process includes 'peri-menopause'. This is when a woman's body is starting to change in the run up to menopause, usually in the mid-forties. Symptoms of perimenopause can commonly be as severe as symptoms of menopause.

Surgical menopause can occur when women undergo certain surgeries, therefore triggering menopausal symptoms often at a much younger age. Menopause is a turning point in a woman's life, not a disease, but it can have a big impact on a woman's well-being. Menopause can affect each individual differently.

Menopause can affect women, non-binary people and some trans men. A trans man is someone who proposes to go through, is going through a process, or part of a process, to change their gender from woman to man. Therefore, they may also go through perimenopausal or menopause symptoms. Menopause symptoms can vary from mild to severe. FSU recognise that women, non-binary and trans people can experience menopause, but for the purpose of this document when referencing the effects of menopause on individuals we will use the term 'women'.

Managing the impact of menopausal symptoms at work is important. Some women reach natural menopause with little to no trouble. Others have a very difficult time coping mentally, and struggle with debilitating physical symptoms. When menopause starts suddenly as a result of surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation, the adjustment can be tough. When periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months a woman is then post-menopause. Troublesome symptoms can often persist for some time post-menopause.

Menopause symptoms can be complicated and affect people in different ways; therefore, it is an issue that needs careful handling from an employer. Workers must not be disadvantaged as a result of suffering menopausal symptoms in the workplace. Financial Services Union (FSU) are committed to offering information and guidance to both employers and union representatives to inform the need for menopause workplace policies. FSU believe there is a need for such policies to be agreed throughout the sector and in all workplaces.

Ignoring the Issue

Despite pressure from unions, employers have been slow to recognise that special consideration may be needed for women suffering through menopause in the workplace. It is important both workers and employers are informed and aware of how symptoms can affect the ability to carry out one's job, and how workplace environments can sometimes exasperate symptoms.

Menopause has long been viewed as strictly a 'private and personal matter' shrouded in stigma, but with more women than ever in the workplace, and an increasingly aging workforce, employers have a responsibility to take into account the difficulties women may experience during menopause.

Decades of women feeling isolated and alone, suffering through symptoms in work with no support, has led to a lack of discussion around the issue and leaving women without the confidence to disclose in the workplace when they may need some help. Employers can no longer ignore this issue if they claim they desire the concept of a fully inclusive workforce.

Menopause: A Trade Union Issue

The growth of female participation in the labour market is matched by numbers of women joining trade unions. Female workforce density in Northern Ireland is 51% and in the Republic of Ireland 46%. Female trade union density is also higher than male density in both jurisdictions. More than 50% of trade union membership across the island is female. The Financial Services Union which operates in both jurisdictions has almost 70% female membership.

Unions have a long history of protecting workers and progressing issues of equality. We must ensure that our membership is not disadvantaged as a result of suffering menopausal symptoms in the workplace.

An issue that impacts older women in particular - appears to be of little concern to employers. Ignoring this issue is not an option. We know that suffering through the menopause with no support in the workplace has left many women opting to go on sick leave, or in some cases consider leaving work altogether.

How Menopause Symptoms Effect the Workplace

The number of symptoms a woman experiencing perimenopause or menopause may suffer in the workplace can vary from person to person and range from very mild to severe. Some symptoms of perimenopause and menopause can be the same. They include:

- Hot flushes & palpitations
- Night sweats
- Insomnia & sleep disturbance
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Head aches
- Joint aches
- Skin irritation / dryness
- Dry eyes
- Urinary problems
- Hair loss
- Changes to periods such as heavy / irregular
- Bleeding or painful periods
- Vaginal dryness / discomfort
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Problems with memory
- Loss of confidence
- Weight gain
- Taking longer to get over an illness

The most reported difficulties that menopausal women experience at work include poor concentration, tiredness, poor memory, feeling low / depressed, and lowered confidence. Problematic periods and hot flushes have also been widely linked to women having a higher intention to leave the workforce.

Almost a third of women will experience severe menopausal symptoms that can impact on their quality of life. It is in the work context that women often report greater difficulty in managing symptoms and can feel embarrassed and unable to disclose their menopausal status, fearing they may be stigmatised for being menopausal. (WomensHealthConcern.org)

If a worker does not get the support and help that is needed, it may be increasingly likely that the effects of the menopause can, for example, lead them to:

- feel ill
- lose confidence to carry out their job
- increase absenteeism
- suffer work performance issues
- suffer from mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety, and depression
- potentially leave their job

Feeling supported in the workplace can be a hugely positive factor in helping workers through this particularly difficult time in their life. Yet, because of historic stigma, many menopausal employees will never be open with their employer about the effects they are experiencing as a result of menopause. Symptoms may sometimes be embarrassing to discuss with a manager or HR. Or worse still, there may be a fear that bringing this to an employer's attention symptoms may not be taken seriously, nothing will be done in response, or they will be treated less favourably.

Non-disclosure in the workplace is common. For trade unions harnessing a culture of respect and responsibility in the workplace from employers is paramount. Encouraging and supporting our members through tough times and ensuring employers accept their responsibilities is the reason trade unions need to highlight just how important the many reasons are for implementing menopause workplace policies.

These policies will not only serve to support our members through this tough time, but also ensure retention of valuable employees and skills within the workplace for employers. The cost of recruitment and training for new employees far outweigh the small adjustments needed to ensure female workers are comfortable and confident enough to continue to carry out their roles.

Menopause Workplace Survey

In order to develop and negotiate menopause workplace policies with employers and improve the working lives of our female members, it is important that we have data to support our claims.

Financial Services Union carried out the FSU Menopause Workplace Survey in July 2021. We felt the need to carry out our own research because when the Union initially embarked on exploring how menopause affected the workplace, we realised no menopause data specific to the workplace was available for the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

Northern Ireland Congress of Trade Unions had carried out a very successful survey in Northern Ireland (NI) in 2018, (our own survey yielded very similar results), but no particular fixed data was obtainable for ROI.

The FSU survey results were launched on World Menopause Day, October 18th 2021.

1,335 respondents contributed to the survey. The breakdown by jurisdiction was:

- 71% ROI
 - 26% NI
 - and 2.9% Britain.
- Staggeringly 6,109 member comments were recorded, often with disturbing revelations. The results of our survey and the commentary included, have shaped discussions with employers to outline the urgent need for workplace policies to be implemented.*

Included in this document is a summary not only of the results of the survey, but also a selection of comments from members that describe how depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, cognitive impairment, not to mention debilitating physical symptoms can affect menopausal women in the workplace.

Results indicate that a majority of women are too afraid to discuss their difficulties with anyone at work for fear of repercussion, a lack of interest or understanding from their employer, or worse being treated as a joke.

Sadly, there was an overwhelming thread throughout of how aging women are overlooked or seen as disposable or marginal in the workplace, so it is no surprise to learn:

97.5% of respondents don't have, and would welcome, a menopause workplace policy.

Survey Results

89.4%

89.4% say menopause **affects working life**

74.9%

74.9% say the **gender of their manager** influences how much they talk to their manager about menopause

96.1%

96.1% would welcome management & union reps to be **trained to support women experiencing menopause**

38%

38% say menopause has been **treated as a joke** in the workplace

17%

Only 17% say that menopause is 'not' **treated negatively** in the workplace

15%

Only 15% are comfortable **talking about menopause** in work

84%

84% of respondents are currently experiencing or likely to experience menopause

95%

95% of respondents were employed in banking

Member Comments

"Menopause is not spoken out loud and is viewed as a disadvantage...a woman is not up to the job if she has issues going on so I wouldn't raise it".

"I have seen how ladies who were menopausal have been made fun of, so I wouldn't bring it up".

"Currently going through it...I feel I am being dismissed as a vital staff member and I am not any use".

"Symptoms like brainfog, tiredness, struggling to make decisions, stress with new things, hot flushes, all make the day hard, it's a lot easier working from home".

"Symptoms of menopause can be extremely debilitating...affecting both physical and cognitive ability, without support for some women it means giving up work".

"I had to take sick leave for months, I couldn't cope".

"Women have enough pressure at work aside from this one..."

"It is not recognised as a serious condition that has real side effects... more of a joke condition that you can make fun of",

"Male colleagues often make disrespectful comments about women of a certain age and the fact that they are probably going through the change".

"It's something that's never dealt with except for bad atmosphere and snide comments".

"They don't want older female employees".

"There have been days when I have been so low and emotional".

"The word menopause is always used when joking".



"Any woman over a certain age is deemed deadwood".

"Women going through menopause are seen as less important".

"Menopause is often the punchline to a joke".

"I had a male manager laugh and remark at me personally when I was having a hot flush. It was in front of 6 people at a meeting...not funny or acceptable".

"I was suffering anxiety due to menopause, no understanding at work...just felt like a silly woman and got home in such a state I cut my hair off".



What Employers Can Do:

Workplace policies play an important role in guiding managers on how best to support employees. Having a menopause workplace policy in place will not only support women suffering through menopause, but also educate co-workers and break the stigma attached to perceptions of women experiencing menopause. This in turn helps to also counteract effects of sexism and ageism in the workplace.

All employees should also be provided with appropriate training so that they better understand the effects of menopause. They should be comfortable discussing and addressing the impact that it may have on employees and co-workers. Ideally all workers should be in a position to signpost information to colleagues.

When a worker knows there is a menopause policy in place and that the issue can be openly spoken about in the workplace without any recourse, this will give workers the confidence to speak up and ask for support and assistance without fear. Those in a position to give support should do so sensitively and with dignity and respect.

Raising awareness is key to breaking the stigma.

Developing a Menopause Workplace Policy

Workplace policies should include several practical support measures as well as awareness raising and education. A policy that simply outlines practical support for workers in the absence of education and training will likely miss the mark of embedding that policy into the culture of the organisation. Women will still feel uncomfortable speaking up if line managers and HR are not sufficiently trained to be aware of just how menopause can affect work.

General health & safety needs to be addressed. Any assessment of the workplace regarding perimenopause or menopause should include checking ventilation and temperature of the workplace, re-evaluating the fabric used in uniforms to avoid workers being too hot or uncomfortable, having a suitable place for individuals to take time out, easily accessible toilet and washroom facilities, and access to cold drinking water. This is a basic start to minimising any discomfort and allowing the worker an environment to manage their symptoms.

Allowance should be given by managers should sickness absence be associated with managing menopause symptoms. This should be considered an ongoing condition rather than automatically triggering absence procedures.

Difficult menopause symptoms can impinge on the performance of a worker. People may be forgetful, stressed, or anxious, or lose confidence while carrying out their work. Managers must be sympathetic to this rather than move straight to triggering disciplinary or capability procedures. Some reasonable time off may also be necessary to attend doctors' appointments.

We know that menopause symptoms may include depression or anxiety. Therefore, any workplace policy should allow for access to counselling or an Employee Assistance Programme.

Some reasonable adjustments are a simple way to alleviate difficult symptoms and are not costly to employers. Providing desk fans or allowing employees to move location in an office to a cooler space possibly near a window or better ventilation is a good place to start. Being less strict on dress codes to allow for more comfort, and temporary changes to duties if duties or workplace situations are becoming stressful.

Allowing for flexible working arrangements to work around symptoms, and homeworking, if possible, are a supportive way to alleviate stress on an employee who may find severe symptoms embarrassing. One size does not fit all, therefore a range of adjustments is preferable.

It is always important to remember that workers are protected against unfair treatment because of their age.

Statutory equality law does not expressly provide protection for menopause or perimenopause. However, women who have suffered discrimination in the workplace directly or indirectly involving menopausal symptoms have in some cases in the UK and Northern Ireland been successful in tribunal cases. Precedent has been set in these jurisdictions where allegations of unlawful discrimination have been brought on the grounds of sex, disability or age. Unions can provide advice to members who feel they are being treated unfairly by their employer in this regard. Despite menopause not being a protected characteristic in legislation and depending on the severity of symptoms and the facts of the case, employers too should be aware of potential negative outcomes should they not show consistency with fair treatment of workers.

It is also important to reassure workers that health & safety legislation in both jurisdictions require that employers carry out risk assessments and have a duty of care to their employees. Occupational health and safety impose duties on employers to look after the health and safety of their employees and responsibilities lie then on employees to comply.

FSU believe that employers have a responsibility to consider the difficulties that women may experience during menopause. It is the responsibility of good employers to ensure that as part of a wider occupational health awareness initiative issues such as menopause are highlighted so all staff know that the employer has a positive attitude to the issue. Menopause should not be something that women feel embarrassed about and cannot raise in the workplace, therefore having a menopause workplace policy in place that also includes guidance for managers, is both important for workers and employers.

Guidance for Trade Union Reps

We want to ensure our members who may suffer through menopause are supported on their journey and protected in the workplace. In doing so we strive to remove the barriers that have existed around menopause for many years. Developing workplace policies is an important place to start but having some guidance for reps is an important part of the process too. Members rely on Union representatives for support with industrial relations issues in the workplace, but equality issues are equally as important. Therefore, it is essential that our trade union representatives are equipped with the tools to understand perimenopause and menopause and are in a position to offer assistance to members, challenge attitudes, and to signpost information as necessary.

Supporting members that have concerns in relation to menopause and having the ability to then raise these issues with the employer is key. Empathy and confidentiality are expected when discussing this sensitive issue with members.

Union representatives should also discuss menopause and the need for workplace policies at their committee meetings.

The FSU has been negotiating menopause policies throughout the finance and tech sector but there is always more work to be done. It is important to keep up to date on what specific supports are needed for the workplace.

Having women at the centre of decision-making when it comes to the issue of menopause is vital to ensuring successful outcomes. It also allows our female membership to have more confidence in the unions approach.

Western culture has long been obsessed with youth. But today, women are making the most of - and even celebrating - their new phase of life.

This can be a time for our members to recommit to their health, celebrate their past, and envision their best future.

Draft Menopause Workplace Policy

(Insert employers name) is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment.

(Insert employers name) recognises that approximately 50% of the population will experience the menopause. Whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, these staff members may need additional consideration, support, and adjustments in the workplace.

(Insert employers name) is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports staff experiencing the menopause for them to feel confident to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work.

The aim of the policy is to

- make line managers aware of their responsibility to understand how the menopause can affect staff, and how they can support those experiencing the menopause at work
- foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about the menopause in a respectful and supportive manner
- raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about the menopause
- outline support and reasonable adjustments available

(insert employer name) recognises that many of the changes to workplace culture and adjustments offered here may not only be of benefit to workers experiencing the menopause, but to all staff.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all staff who are employed at (employers name).

Definition of the menopause (See also the section headed 'Glossary')

The menopause is a natural transition stage in the lives of approximately 50% of the population. For some it will be medically induced. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the individual stops having periods. People may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms whilst experiencing the menopause and perimenopause and may often encounter difficulties at work because of their symptoms. Each person will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families, and colleagues as well.

(Insert employers name) recognises that for many reasons, peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. Menopausal symptoms may include:

- Hot flushes – a very common symptom that can start in the face, neck, or chest, before spreading upwards and downward, may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate.
- Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving those affected exhausted, as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently. Some affected may become anaemic.
- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance.
- Low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, loss of confidence and memory problems.
- Urinary problems - more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.
- Irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also, vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort.
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
- Weight gain.
- Headaches and migraines.

- Menopausal hair loss.
- Osteoporosis - the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis.
- Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).

Menopausal symptoms may also exacerbate existing impairments and conditions that those affected may already be struggling to cope with.

Support for Staff members experiencing the menopause

(insert employers name) is committed to a program of action to make this policy effective and to support staff experiencing the menopause.

All staff will be provided with appropriate information and training so that they are able to better understand the effects of the menopause and be comfortable about discussing and addressing the impact that it can have on employees in carrying out their roles.

(Insert employer name) recognises that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels, and types of support and adjustments may be needed. Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to let their line manager or the alternative contact (see below) know if they are struggling with symptoms that may impact on their work, so that appropriate support is provided. Such information will be treated confidentially and in accordance with (insert employers name) data protection policy.

An alternative contact is available to employees experiencing the menopause should they not feel comfortable discussing their problems with their line manager. This is NAME OF ALTERNATIVE CONTACT

Employees may also prefer to discuss their problems with an alternative manager or elected representative. Managers should make allowances should there be an additional need for sickness absence by staff members experiencing the menopause to manage their menopausal symptoms.

Specified paid leave of up to ten days will be available to those who are suffering severe symptoms or may need to avail of time off to attend medical appointments in relation to menopause.

Absence will be recorded as related to menopausal symptoms and managers will consider such absence as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in absence procedure triggers.

(Insert employers name) recognises the potential impact of menopausal symptoms on performance by staff members experiencing the menopause. Line managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures.

Staff members who are experiencing the menopause can seek the following adjustments to support them at work:

- Control over environmental factors – with provision of desk fans on request, review of office seating plans so that affected employees can be near the window or open doors, or away from direct sources of heat such as radiators, fitting blinds to windows, greater access to chilled drinking water, and to toilets and washing facilities.
- Flexibility over dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating, and provision of additional spare uniforms.
- Changing facilities for staff to change clothes during the working day.

Flexible working arrangements including options for flexitime (to work around symptoms or adjusting start and finish times for example), and homeworking etc.

- Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day, and if required providing cover as necessary for these breaks.
- Temporary changes to the employee's duties, such as undertaking fewer high-visibility work like formal presentations or meetings because it can be difficult to cope with symptoms such as hot flushes or assessing how work is allocated or whether the employee is affected at point of the day.

Responsibilities of line managers

Managers should ensure that all staff members are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employers responsibilities.

Training on the menopause will be provided to all line managers and their reps. This will also include any specific issues for BAME women, disabled women and trans employees.

Managers will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those staff members who are experiencing the menopause and put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner.

All requests for support or adjustments must be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the data protection policy.

Managers will support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

Responsibilities of employees

All staff should take a personal responsibility to look after their health.

Staff members are encouraged to inform their line manager (or the alternative contact) if they are struggling with menopausal symptoms and need any support.

All staff have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful and productive working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving because of their menopausal symptoms.

Glossary

Menopause – a natural transition stage in most women's lives lasting from four to eight years, although for some people it can be much longer. Most people experience the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55, although it can start earlier. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the person will stop having periods. Some people may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms because of the menopause.

Premature menopause – for some people, it can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is sometimes called premature ovarian insufficiency. The World health estimates that 1 in every 100 people who go through menopause will experience premature menopause. Medical or surgical menopause – there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the person's age, such as a medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids or when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer, or when a person's ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy.

Perimenopause – a period before the menopause, in the years leading up to the menopause where there can be significant changes for women, including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause.

Post-menopause – a term used when a person's periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon. Problematic symptoms may continue for years.

Self-management for staff experiencing the menopause

Staff members experiencing the menopause are encouraged not to suffer in silence. Consider:

- Seeking medical advice from your GP
- Discussing symptoms with your line manager or with the alternative contact (see above) or with your union rep and requesting appropriate workplace adjustments

Further Information / Useful Resources

- Irish Congress of Trade Unions Menopause Survey Results
- Henpecked Menopause in the Workplace
- Daisy Network
- CIPD Guidance 'The Menopause at Work, a Guide for People Professionals'
- NHS Guidance on Menopause and Treatment
- HSE Guidance on Menopause

