

# Menstruation/Menopause Policy



**ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Issued: xx

# Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only    School-based staff only    Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
Apr 2020	Reformatted	DMT
May 2024	Previous Menopause Guide extended to create a Menstruation/Menopause Policy	

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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# 1. Policy Statement

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This Policy is intended to make managers aware of menstruation/menopause-related issues either for women experiencing this natural stage of life or for those employees who are perhaps affected indirectly, for example, managers and colleagues or partners.

The Council/School is committed to creating an open and supportive culture and wants women to feel comfortable speaking about how their periods may be affecting them at work and able to ask for the support that they need to help them manage their symptoms.

Menstruation/the menopause is often seen as a private matter and as a result there is sometimes a lack of awareness and lack of discussion in the workplace. By raising awareness this should help to create an environment where employees feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and if necessary ask for reasonable temporary adjustments at work.

# 2. Scope

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This Policy applies to all employees of the Council/School.

# 3. Menstruation

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It is recognised that menstrual symptoms can affect individuals differently. Some individuals may experience little or no symptoms and for others, menstrual symptoms may affect their daily lives.

Period pain is not of itself a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. However, it is possible that menstruation symptoms experienced by an employee may meet the statutory definition of a disability under the Act. While it is always therefore good practice to agree adjustments with an employee who is experiencing menstruation symptoms, there may also be a statutory duty to consider reasonable adjustments under the Act if the severity of the symptoms amount to a disability.

While the severity of menstrual symptoms vary between different individuals and different cycles, some of the most common symptoms experienced in the weeks before or during a period include:

- mood swings
- depression
- anxiety
- irritability
- tiredness
- insomnia
- stomach cramping
- headaches

## 4. The Menopause

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Everyone will experience the menopause differently and some may be affected both physically and mentally.

The menopause is a natural stage of life which affects most individuals who have a menstrual cycle which can include trans and non-binary individuals.

Factors that can influence an employees experience include ethnicity, age, gender, disability, neurodivergence, sexual orientation, so it is important for the employee to seek support for their individual needs.

Menopause in the workplace is covered by relevant legislation to protect employees including:

- Equality Act 2010, which protects workers against discrimination.
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, including subsequent legislation, which says an employer must, where reasonably practicable, ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare at work.

The menopause is not a specific protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. But if an employee or worker is put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of their menopause symptoms, this could be discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, for example, age, disability, gender reassignment, sex.

The menopause is when a woman has gone 12 months without a period and an individual is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age to reach the menopause is 51. However, around 1 in 100 individuals experience the menopause before 40 years of age.

Peri-menopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause, it can often last for four or five years. However, in some cases, it may continue for many more years and for others, just a few months, so it can differ from individual to individual. For some people, the symptoms of the perimenopause can be much worse than those of the menopause.

The menstrual cycle is governed by natural changes which usually result in monthly bleeding. This process typically happens in a 28 day cycle however, there are significant individual variations. Irregularity of the cycle can be more common in the years leading up to the menopause. This is known as the perimenopause.

For some, going through the menopause may be uneventful and may not impact on their working life but for others it may become increasingly difficult to function effectively at work and their working conditions may exacerbate their symptoms.

A premature menopause can occur before the age of 40, either naturally or as an effect of a medical condition or its treatment. It should also be noted that some individuals experience sudden menopause after surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

Symptoms associated with the menopause may include:

- Hot flushes
- Palpitations
- Night sweats
- Sleep disturbance
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Skin irritation and dryness
- Aches and pains
- Heavy blood loss
- Weight gain

There may also be associated psychological symptoms, such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood changes
- Panic attacks
- Poor concentration and forgetfulness/"brain fog"
- Loss of confidence

It may not be possible for women to stop symptoms of the menopause because for many it is a natural occurrence, but making some simple changes in lifestyle such as diet and exercise can help.

### **Self-help measures**

Current health promotion advice highlights the importance of lifestyle choices before, during and after the menopause and the benefits of:

- Healthy eating – research has shown that a balanced diet can help alleviate some symptoms and help keep bones healthy.
- Eating regularly.
- Drinking plenty of water - some find chilled water helpful.
- Wearing natural fibres.
- Exercising regularly – exercise can help to reduce hot flushes and improve sleep. It can also help boost mood and maintain strong bones.
- Consulting with a GP on the management of the menopause and to ensure that any symptoms are not due to any other causes.
- Not smoking.
- Cutting down caffeine, alcohol and spicy food.
- Having access to natural light.
- Getting adequate rest and relaxation.

## 5. How to support employees

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Employees are more inclined to disclose health-related conditions if they regard managers as supportive and where there is a culture of openness about health issues. It is important for managers to be supportive and be aware of the symptoms, so that employees do not feel embarrassed to approach them and discuss how their health is being affected.

Confidence can be affected and it can be extremely daunting and embarrassing talking to someone who has no idea about menstruation/the menopause. However, managers can be sympathetic to these needs and make suitable work adjustments if they are aware of a problem. It is important that employees discuss their practical needs with their manager or another manager they feel comfortable talking to.

The Council/School recognises the potential impact of symptoms on performance by women experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures.

It is good practice to ask all employees about any health conditions that they may have or been experiencing. This could be undertaken as part of one to one meetings/supervisions. Such conversations can identify support at work that can help employees remain fully productive and encourage them to discuss any relevant health concerns with their GP or if relevant via a referral to [Occupational Health](#). Any specific needs that are identified, including agreed reasonable adjustments, should be recorded and reviewed regularly. Managers will need to maintain confidentiality in handling this health information.

Reasonable adjustments must be considered for employees if they are experiencing symptoms which are impacting on their work.

It is good practice to make adjustments that are 'reasonable' for any employee with health conditions, whether or not they may be covered by the Equality Act. The employee may also be able to advise what adjustments would best help them.

The purpose of a "reasonable" adjustment is removing barriers wherever possible that get in the way of an employee doing their job to enable them to keep doing their job. The adjustment should be tailored to address the barriers/issues experienced specifically by that employee, and should be identified through discussions between the individual and manager (below are some example questions to consider in conjunction with the Risk Assessment). Where appropriate [Occupational Health](#) can also be consulted.

- Do you have access to information on menstruation and menopause?
- Have any previous arrangements been put in place for you regarding menstruation and menopause in the workplace?
- Are workstations near accessible toilets, changing facilities and rest facilities?
- Are you able to take a break from your work or workstation to access toilets and rest facilities at a time of your choosing?
- Do you have enough space to work comfortably?
- Are you able to adjust the temperature or ventilation of your working area, or take breaks to cool down/warm up when needed?

- Are the uniforms suitable (i.e. loose fitting, made of natural fibres, easy to change if needed)? Is spare clothing provided? Are there any concerns about the PPE, if provided?
- Are you able to find a comfortable position while working?
- Are you able to switch to lighter duties or different duties when needed?
- Do you have support tools available for manual handling tasks?
- Do you have stress management support in place?
- Are you aware of the Right to Request Flexible Working Policy?
- Are you able to share tasks with team members on a temporary basis?
- Do you have peer support around you?

A manager should give appropriate consideration to the nature of an employees work and to their working environment when considering the reasonableness of adjustments. The following adjustments could be considered:

- If accommodation allows, provide private area/spaces available for employee to rest/recover/make a telephone call to personal or professional support. Women going through the menopause may need to manage the impact of the symptoms, a private space to rest temporarily or talk with a colleague before they can return to their workspace.
- Flexibility and increased frequency in breaks – consider the flexibility to take breaks which will enable women to contribute more fully in the workplace. A member of staff with medication may want to take it in quiet/private space at specific times to maintain health and wellbeing. Some may just need time to walk around and ease any pain/discomfort they may be experiencing.
- Facilitate a comfortable working environment for those suffering menstruation/ menopausal symptoms.
- Women going through the menopause may request to be positioned near a door or window or may be provided with a desk fan where possible. Positioning in an area where they can get a breeze should be considered. Consider the use of window blinds in areas that do not benefit from shade.
- Flexible working arrangements may be considered for those that are experiencing debilitating symptoms. Menopause symptoms can increase in stressful situations and when the person is tired symptoms can increase. This also enables women to work productively and manage the impact of their symptoms. This may include flexibility for women who need medical treatment or to attend clinics, hospital or appointments.
- Public-facing employees including those who work directly with service users could have access to a quiet area for a short break to manage any symptoms.

## Requesting support

If women are finding it difficult to cope at work because of uncomfortable menopause/menstrual symptoms, they are encouraged to speak to their manager. If for any reason they are unable to approach the direct manager for any reason then they are encouraged to speak with a senior manager.

Managers are asked to encourage employees to be as open as possible about any particular issues that they are experiencing or adjustments that they need to ensure that they are provided with the right level of support.

Any health-related information disclosed by them during discussions with the manager or Organisational Development will be treated sensitively and in confidence.

Employees are encouraged to seek advice and support from their GP about available support from the NHS or if appropriate a referral to [Occupational Health](#) should be made.

Additional support can also be accessed via your Trade Union.

## Working flexibly on a temporary basis

The option to work flexibly on a temporary (rather than permanent) basis may be appropriate and may be agreed in conjunction with medical information received from [Occupational Health](#) and in line with Health and Safety guidelines – this can be discussed and agreed between Manager and employee using the [Risk Assessment Form](#) and example questions (see above).

## 6. Related Documents

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- [Attendance Management Policy \(council staff\)](#)
- [Attendance Management Policy \(school-based staff\)](#)
- [Right to Request Flexible Working](#)
- [Stress Management Toolkit](#)



## 7. Employee Assistance Programme

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An Employee Assistance Programme is in place with an independent provider called Vivup. With Vivup, you can benefit from confidential access to fully qualified counsellors and support specialists to discuss any emotional, personal, or work-related issues – 24/7, 365 days a year.

Whether you are facing problems at work or at home, you will be able to access impartial, confidential advice for issues such as anxiety, bereavement, stress, depression, workplace issues, trauma, relationships, family difficulties, finances, etc.

The service is free of charge and you don't need to ask your manager to use it. Contact details are below and additional information is available on the [intranet](#).

### HOW TO CONTACT VIVUP

Call the free 24/7 helpline on  
**0800 023 9387**

Visit the Vivup [website](#) to access self-help workbooks, podcasts and blogs.

Visit Vivup's "[Your Care](#)" proactive health and wellbeing platform and create an account to carry out wellbeing assessments, set goals and much more.

## 8. Other Support Organisations

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- British Menopause Society: [thebms.org.uk](http://thebms.org.uk)
- Menopause Matters: [www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)
- NHS (HRT): [www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt)
- NHS (Menopause): [www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
- NHS (Period Problems): [www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/period-problems](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/period-problems)
- Simply Hormones: [www.simplyhormones.com](http://www.simplyhormones.com)
- The Menopause Exchange: [www.menopause-exchange.co.uk](http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk)