



Managing the Menopause

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Introduction

The Breastfeeding Network is committed to providing a positive, inclusive and supportive environment for everyone who works and volunteers here. As a charity we would not exist without your support so it feels critical that we help raise awareness and break down barriers in respect of the menopause and menopausal symptoms that affect us and we hope this guidance helps to support you.

The menopause is a natural part of life for women, as well as trans men and some non-binary, gender fluid or intersex people. For some, it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, the experience can be much better. Whilst not everyone suffers with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work and when volunteering.

We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, everyone should be more aware.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of those going through the menopause are in work.

It is important that we equip managers and Supervisors with information so that they can understand and discuss menopausal symptoms if the staff/volunteers concerned wish to do so. This is especially important as good practice advises that often just talking or making simple changes to an environment can make a world of difference to an individual's experience.

Scope

This document applies to all employees and volunteers of the Breastfeeding Network. It sets out information and guidelines to help employees, volunteers, Supervisors and managers understand the possible effects of menopause and to provide simple, positive and proactive ways to support staff and volunteers during this time.

Aims

This guidance provides managers and Supervisors with information on the potential effects and symptoms of menopause and what they can do to support their staff/volunteers by;

- Fostering an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably start conversations or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Ensuring managers and Supervisors understand what menopause is, can confidently discuss the topic with their staff and volunteers, and are clear on the Breastfeeding Network's guidance.
- Creating an environment where staff and volunteers feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and can request simple adjustments
- Providing advice on simple adjustments.
- Outlining BfNs requirements for supporting staff and volunteers.

- Providing advice on where managers, Supervisors, volunteers and staff can get further information or support.

Background information

All people involved in managing or supervising should know what the menopause is, when it can happen and how it can affect their volunteers and staff.

What is it?

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

When does it happen?

The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55. The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause, when hormone balance starts to change. For some people, this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their fifties.

The average age 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 menopause'. Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can be as a result of surgery (for example hysterectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy).

What are the symptoms?

The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. Many people experience symptoms, but not everyone does.

It is important to note that not everyone will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of those going through menopause experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for staff, dependent on severity, as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

Typical symptoms of the menopause can 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).
- 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).

What can employees and volunteers do?

Employees and volunteers can familiarise themselves by recognising what the menopause is and be aware that there is support to self-manage menopause as well as other areas of support both within the organisation and externally.

What can managers and Supervisors do?

Line Managers' and Supervisors support is crucial and can make a huge difference to staff and volunteers experiencing symptoms. They can ensure that anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health issue.

For example by:

- Familiarising themselves with this guidance and put it into practice within their work/volunteering areas
- Being the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or needs a small adjustment to their work/volunteering or immediate environment, to enable them to perform to their full potential.
- Being ready to listen and offer support.
- Using the guidance to signpost to other available support.
- Agreeing an Action Plan, reviewing support and adjustments periodically as symptoms can change over time.
- Managing absence or time off from volunteering and return to work or volunteering
- Timetabling regular and informal one to ones or supervision sessions, this can provide a forum to discuss changes to someone's health situation.
- Acknowledging that this can be a sensitive and personal issue and that some people do not want to discuss this with colleagues or managers. If appropriate, ask if they would prefer to discuss any issues with HR.
- Ensuring that they do not make assumptions about how the person is being affected.
- Managers and Supervisors should also recognise that some people will not want to discuss the menopause, or their experiences and they should be supported in this choice.
- Signpost to appropriate support, e.g. own GP

If support or adjustments are not working as well as expected, managers and Supervisors may also:

- Discuss with HR
- Update the action plan and continue to review.

Simple but effective support

Simple changes to the working or volunteering environment or the opportunity to talk can make a big difference not only to members of staff and volunteers, but also their colleagues. This can be varied in BfN as staff and volunteers can be home based or work in hospitals and children's centres. There can also be home visits. Consider some of the following:

- Where possible, look at the environment and identify any basic comfort changes – fans, ventilation, provision of cool drinking water, easy access to washing facilities.
- If possible identify a room(s) or area that staff and volunteers can use if they need to cool down, recover or rest, or make a telephone call to access personal or professional support.
- Encourage adaptation of the home working environment to incorporate the above

There is a lot of information available to anyone who may be experiencing menopausal symptoms especially those that may be affecting their wellbeing and capacity at work or while volunteering. Staff and volunteers may find the following tips useful;

- **Don't wait.** It is all too common for people to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.
- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information
- Keep a diary of symptoms to share with your health professional or GP
- **Read the NICE guidelines.** This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are really useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.
- See your GP for advice on available treatment or other options. Ask the Receptionist who the best health professional is at your surgery to discuss these matters.
- Discuss your practical needs with your line manager, Supervisor or another person you feel comfortable talking to.
- Recognise hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks).
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- Consider a desk fan, a desk near a window or near air conditioning outlets.
- If you feel tired get some fresh air.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and other potentially helpful techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy, as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as smoking cessation and exercise.

Managers' and Supervisors Guidance for Discussions and Examples of Support

We recognise that everyone is different. These guidelines are designed to support managers and Supervisors in discussions, and to find a tailored set of responses or assistance for their individual member of staff or volunteer. In many cases discussions and solutions will be found quite informally, if simple measures suffice.

If an employee/volunteer wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a person wishes to speak about a family member experiencing menopausal symptoms, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation;
- Find an appropriate way to preserve confidentiality;
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly;
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below)
- Agree actions, and how to implement them, summarise your discussion, so that all parties agree what has been discussed and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential, and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom;
- Follow up where required.

Menopausal symptom	Examples of support
Hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest temperature control for the work area, such as a fan on the desk or moving near a window, or away from a heat source • Confirm there is easy access to drinking water • Agree that the member of staff/volunteer can adapt a prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket; if possible do not use nylon • Where possible identify a room or work area for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe flush.
Heavy menstrual periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to toilet facilities • Consider if storage space is needed for clothing changes • Is travel necessary? Hold the meeting virtually.
Migraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have ease of access to fresh drinking water • Offer a quiet area to recover • Noise reducing headphones may help
Poor or disturbed sleep, concentration or poor memory issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review flexible working information (liaise with HR) • Confirm actions in writing
Anxiety or stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss if own GP could help

External support

The following information and articles may provide further support to staff effected by menopausal symptoms:

- [Menopause Matters, menopausal symptoms, remedies, advice](#)
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause>
- Healthtalk.org – <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/late-life/menopause/topics>
- Women’s Health Concerns – <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/focus-series/menopause/>
- The Menopause Exchange – <http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/>
- NICE Menopause: diagnosis and management – <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
- ACAS <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461>
- TUC guidance https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_menopause_0.pdf