



Supporting Teams to Thrive

Menopause in the workplace guide



South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians on whose land we stand, and the lands our facilities are located on; the lands of the Dharawal, Gadigal, Wangal, Gweagal and Bidjigal peoples.

We would like to pay our respects to the Elders past, present and those of the future.

Artist: Brenden Broadbent

Contents

Introduction	4
Definitions	5
Impact on People at Work	6
Important Considerations	8
Conversations of Support	9
Workplace Support and Adjustments	11
Support in the Workplace for Staff and Managers	13
Employee Self Care	13
Resources for Staff and Managers	14



Introduction

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District acknowledges that menopause is an important workplace matter. A large proportion of our people will transition through menopause during their working life. For some, the impact of menopause can affect career choices, performance, and progression. This in-turn can affect the organisation's operational, financial and strategic performance.

This guide highlights the topic of menopause and how it relates to the workplace; how leaders can promote a positive employee experience; as well as address barriers to equitable opportunity in the context of menopause.

It is acknowledged that this resource is the first step in recognising menopause as a workplace matter. Menopause experiences are individual and influenced by numerous factors, not always openly addressed or adequately supported. This can pose even greater challenges for women, trans, intersex, and non-binary individuals in comprehending and managing impacts of menopause as well as accessing suitable workplace support. While many individuals independently manage menopause symptoms, there's an opportunity for leaders to implement supportive strategies to enhance the workplace experience and empower our people.

Definitions

Menopause

Menopause is the last menstrual period.

There is no reliable way of predicting how long menopausal symptoms will continue.

Throughout this document and for ease of reference, the term ‘menopause’ will be used to describe the period of time that a person may experience symptoms associated with perimenopause or menopause. The symptoms are outlined on page 6 of this document.

Hysterectomy

A hysterectomy is a surgery to remove the uterus.

Oophorectomy

An oophorectomy is a surgery to remove one of or both of the ovaries.

Perimenopause

Perimenopause refers to the time from the onset of menopausal symptoms (some or all of symptoms such as irregular periods, hot flushes, night sweats or sleep disturbance) to 12 months after the last menstrual period.

Postmenopause

One year after the last menstrual period the person or individual is considered “postmenopausal”.

Whilst it is acknowledged that some individuals may have ongoing or new symptoms post-menopause, this guide focuses mainly on the effects of the perimenopause and menopause period.

Premenopause

The term premenopause is often used ambiguously to refer to the one or two years immediately before the menopause or to refer to the whole of the reproductive period prior to the menopause. SESLHD has chosen to use the term in the latter sense to encompass the entire reproductive period up to the final menstrual period.

Symptoms

In this guide, we have used the term “symptoms” to acknowledge that while menopause isn’t a medical condition, some individuals may experience changes that affect their overall wellbeing. Not all employees experiencing menopause will have symptoms that impact on work.

Impact on People at Work



Whilst menopause is a natural process that people usually manage independently, there are varying levels of symptoms, and some employees might find it difficult or distressing.

The following symptoms may be experienced by an individual during menopause:

- ▶ loss or irregular menstrual bleeding, and/or heavy periods;
- ▶ fatigue and difficulty sleeping; hot flushes and night sweats;
- ▶ mood changes, including irritability, anger, lack of self-confidence, intrusive and dark thoughts, depression and anxiety;
- ▶ brain fog;
- ▶ cardiovascular disorders, including hypertension, palpitations, tachycardia;
- ▶ severe headaches, including migraines;
- ▶ muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains, and osteoporosis;
- ▶ needing to urinate more often and more urgently;
- ▶ recurring urinary tract infections; carpal tunnel syndrome;
- ▶ dry eyes, which can be exacerbated by computer screen work;
- ▶ skin changes, such as dry and itchy skin, and acne;
- ▶ hair loss; and
- ▶ genital dryness and soreness that can make sitting down for a long time or moving about uncomfortable.

This experience and managing work can be challenging if employees are dealing with additional stressors such as health problems, taking care of children and/or aging parents, concerns about children leaving home, financial problems, relationship troubles, or other stressful life events. These issues can sometimes compound creating significant stressors being managed by an individual in the workplace.

During menopause, symptoms can be unpredictable, making employees feel uncertain and vulnerable.

Menopause symptoms have the potential to impact people in workplace in the following ways:

- » Loss of confidence in abilities, which may influence a person's decisions relating to career progression opportunities. For example, some people may feel unsure of their ability to perform in a senior or leadership role whilst navigating menopause symptoms;
- » Temporary changes in work performance as a result of the physical symptoms listed above, which may be compounded by stress caused by awareness of changes in performance;
- » Needing to take frequent or infrequent unplanned leave, which may be compounded by stress of high absenteeism and how this may be perceived by others;
- » Feeling embarrassed to attribute some of the reasons to take time off work due to menopause symptoms;
- » Increased risk of mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression;
- » Reduced engagement and productivity;
- » Feeling isolated; and
- » Exiting the workplace.

The consequences this may have on the workplace include:

- » Reduced employee experience, engagement, productivity and performance;
- » High absenteeism, as well as the impact of unplanned leave and ability to backfill accordingly;
- » High turnover, with loss of organisational talent and knowledge;
- » Costs and time imposition associated with recruitment, and training; and
- » Reduced capacity to meet organisational strategic objectives relating to gender diversity in senior leadership (including senior medical leadership) roles.

Promoting and fostering a positive and open environment between an employer and a person experiencing menopause can play a crucial role in preventing adverse outcomes for the individual and the organisation.



Important Considerations



1. Experiences of menopause vary significantly between individuals.
2. It is important to acknowledge that whilst perspectives on menopause often focus on severe physical, emotional and psychological symptoms, there are many people who do not experience these. For people experiencing milder symptoms, menopause may or may not influence their work performance or decisions around career progression. There are also many people who are managing menopause symptoms independently and successfully with minimal impact on work, therefore it is important not to make assumptions.
3. Representations of menopause as an age-linked issue may not be supportive for younger employees encountering menopause prematurely.
4. People can go into medically or surgically induced menopause for several reasons including cancer treatment, hysterectomy or oophorectomy.
5. Menopausal symptoms can coincide with significant non-related mid-life challenges and responsibilities.
6. Employees can struggle to find support to manage symptoms of menopause – it cannot be assumed that everyone has support outside of work.

7. Diverse needs and experiences linked to ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and neurodivergence should also be considered.



Employees with disabilities or underlying medical conditions may encounter additional symptoms and complexities related to menopause.



It is important to consider neurodivergent employees who may notice that their existing challenges, such as sensory sensitivities, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and sleep disturbances, are heightened during this period.



It is important to recognise that trans people, non-binary individuals, and gender non-conforming people can menstruate and experience menopause. This necessitates a gender-sensitive approach in developing strategies.



It is important to consider cultural differences, for instance some cultures do not discuss menopause at all or view and experience it as a transformational and liberating experience.

Conversations of Support

Practical Guidance

It is essential to recognise that some employees may feel uncomfortable discussing private or sensitive matters at work due to concerns about privacy or potential discrimination, this should always be respected. However, in many instances, people usually appreciate genuine inquiries about their wellbeing rather than silence. Please refer to the later section, *Support in the Workplace for Staff and Managers* for further guidance.

Guidance for conversations

- » Hold the conversation in a private environment without interruptions.
- » Provide ample opportunity for the employee to explain the situation in their own words.
- » Show empathy, understanding and patience.
- » Focus on the person, not the problem.
- » Use open and non-judgemental questions to guide the conversation.
- » Do not share personal opinions.
- » Talk in a calm manner and maintain appropriate eye contact.
- » Where possible, help the employee to come up with their own solutions.
- » Discuss preferred coping strategies and working patterns that are mutually beneficial.
- » Do not attempt to diagnose an employee.
- » Provide information and instructions in writing, as well as verbally.



The **Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)**, protects workers against discrimination, which may include discrimination in relation to sex, age or disability.

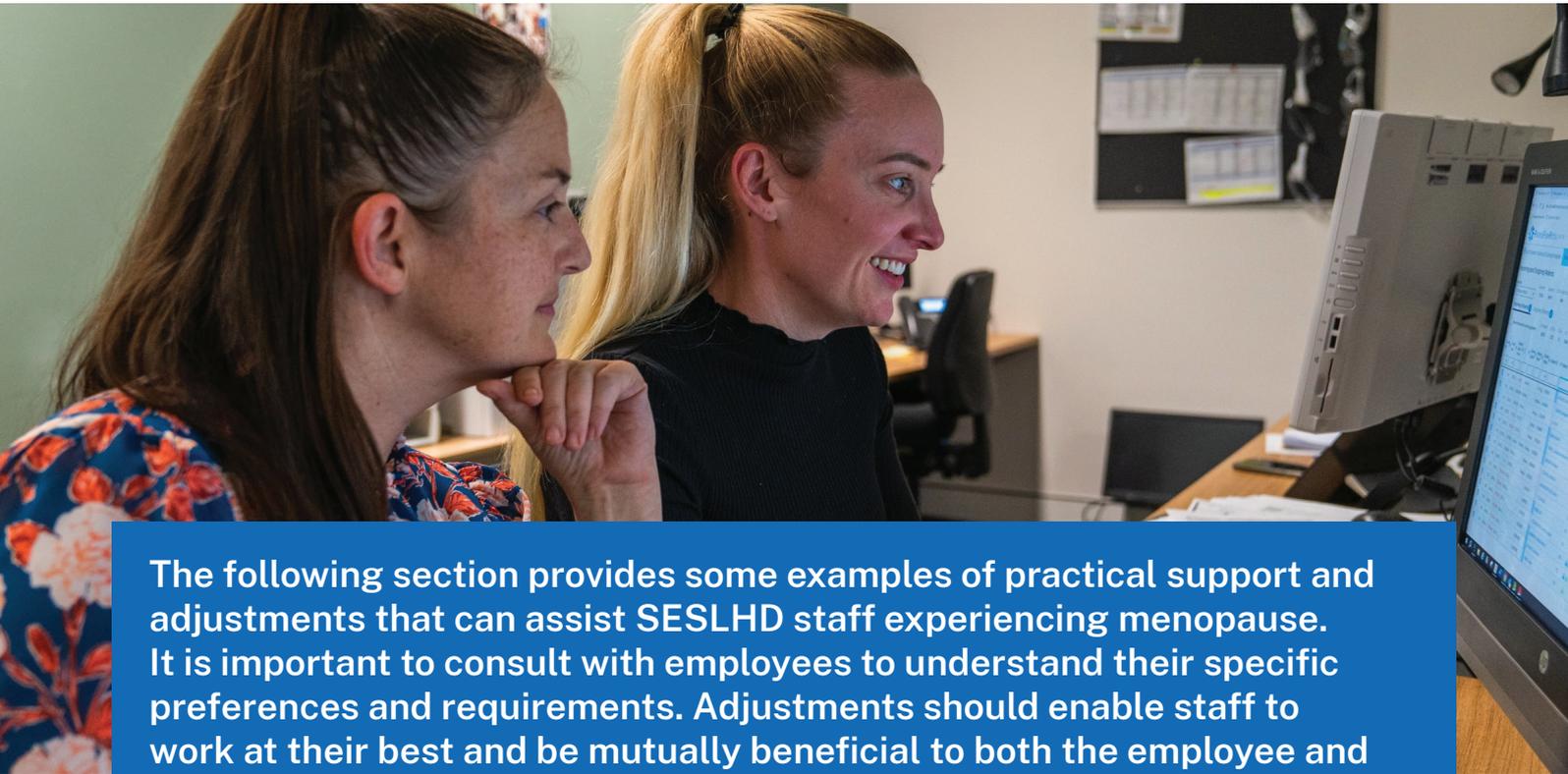
The **Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)** states that it is the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all workers, including psychosocial safety.



Some suggested guiding questions

- “ I am glad that you have requested a meeting, is everything okay? How can I best help you today?
- “ If the manager has requested a meeting: I'm just checking in with you, as I want to make sure you have all the support you need to do your job. Is everything okay?
- “ What can we do to help support you manage the impact on your work?
- “ Are you aware of the resources available to help with your health?
- “ Can I check in with you to ensure you are getting the support you need?
- “ How can I support you to use your leave entitlements to seek medical advice if required? Are you able to take an unplanned break?
- “ Are you aware of specific situations that are more difficult for you? Are you comfortable talking about them?
- “ Is your physical work environment suitable? Could changes be made to support you?

Workplace Support and Adjustments



The following section provides some examples of practical support and adjustments that can assist SESLHD staff experiencing menopause. It is important to consult with employees to understand their specific preferences and requirements. Adjustments should enable staff to work at their best and be mutually beneficial to both the employee and the workplace.

Flexible work

Using flexible work approaches to make periodic or temporary workplace adjustments can benefit most employees with minimal resource implications. We recognise that different approaches need to be adopted for different groups in the workforce. Not all these suggestions will be relevant and there will be differences between frontline teams and back-office teams.

- ▶ Consider ways an employee might be able to take short breaks during the day, such as dividing lunch breaks into smaller breaks.
- ▶ Sometimes, unplanned breaks are necessary, especially for employees dealing with heavy menstrual bleeding.
- ▶ Think about negotiating time in lieu options, so employees can work more hours on some days and then use those extra hours to take a day off or work shorter hours when needed.
- ▶ Consider the use of flexible starting and ending times for a workday, and if possible, enabling employees to avoid the busiest travel times for example.
- ▶ If an employee needs to take unexpected time off, support them by allocating their work tasks if possible.

For more information on flexible work and managing leave, please refer to the following resources:

- NSW Health Guideline GL2023_020 Flexible Work (More than one way to work)
- SESLHDPR/435 -Flexible Work Arrangements
- NSW Health Policy Directive PD2023_045 Leave Matters for the NSW Health Service



At Work

- ▶ Check the suitability of certain tasks and assess whether tasks can be temporarily re-allocated to reduce stress, for example reducing heavy lifting or providing variety in roles to provide an opportunity to take a break from specific tasks.
- ▶ Try to space meetings where able to. For example, to allow time to visit the bathroom more frequently.
- ▶ Provide tools or strategies to assist employees recall specific tasks or actions.



Physical Workplace

- ▶ Give consideration to people with mobile roles without easy access to facilities.
- ▶ Allow sufficient breaks and privacy to attend to menstrual needs (e.g. during clinical and/or long shifts).
- ▶ Review manual handling or work requiring repetitive movements which might be uncomfortable (when appropriate).
- ▶ Provide comfortable working temperatures i.e. enable the ability to adjust artificial light, lower blinds for direct sunlight, provide access to fans if able.
- ▶ Provide easy access to bathrooms and drinking water.
- ▶ Be aware of sensory stimulation. Supportive measures include use of adjustable lighting and reducing noise and odours (where possible).
- ▶ Provide seating when the role requires people to be on their feet for long periods of time. For example, make seating available whilst writing clinical notes.
- ▶ Provide opportunities to move around when the role requires sitting for long periods.
- ▶ Provide access to quiet spaces, either to work or for a time of restoration/recovery.



Management

- ▶ Building relationships based on trust, empathy, and respect may make it easier for employees to feel comfortable talking about menopause.
- ▶ Regular and informal one-on-one conversations with your team members provide an opportunity for discussing any changes in someone's health, including menopause.
- ▶ Checking in with people regularly to see how they're doing helps create an open and inclusive environment and encourages them to share any concerns.
- ▶ It's important not to assume that everyone is the same, so it's best to take your cues from each individual.
- ▶ Encouraging self-care and stress management techniques is also helpful. This can increase motivation, engagement and improve productivity.

For more information regarding health and wellbeing in the workplace, please visit the [SESLHD Health, Safety and Wellbeing Intranet](#) or [SESLHD Wellbeing Resources and Services Intranet](#)



Inclusivity

- ▶ Use of neutral language around menstruation and menopause supports inclusivity and psychological safety for gender diverse people (e.g. "menstrual or period products" rather than "sanitary or feminine hygiene products").
- ▶ Apply consideration that employees with a visible or invisible disability or underlying medical conditions, might experience additional side effects and complications related to menopause.

Support in the Workplace for Staff and Managers

If employees are struggling with menopause symptoms, it is recommended that people visit their General Practitioner for care in the first instance.

The [SESLHD Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) is available for both individual and manager support, and are contactable via the following:

ph: 1300 687 328 or [book online](#)

Organisation code: SOUTRBVJ

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

[Nurse and Midwife support](#)

[Human Resources Business Partners](#)

[Work Health and Safety \(WHS\)](#)

Employee Self-Care

Prioritise your health both before and throughout the menopausal transition



Eat Healthy



Quit Smoking



Manage your stress

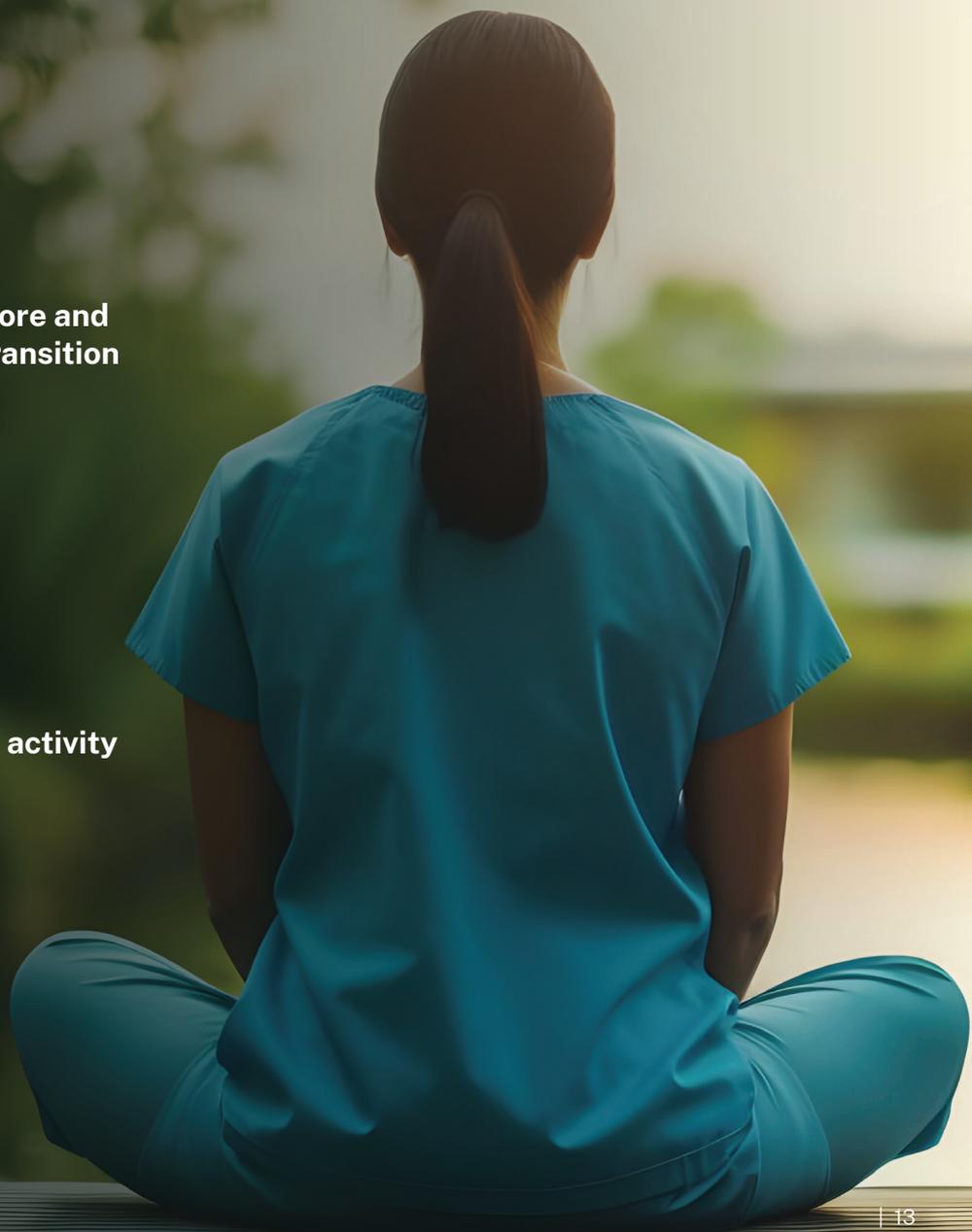


Get plenty of physical activity



Know your numbers

- » Blood pressure
- » Body mass index
- » Cholesterol
- » Blood glucose
- » Calcium
- » Vitamin D



Resources for Staff and Managers

**Jean Hailes for
Woman's Health**

www.jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause

**Australasian
Menopause Society**

www.menopause.org.au
www.menopause.org.au/health-info

**The Menopause
Charity**

www.themenopausecharity.org

NSW Government

[Perimenopause and Menopause Toolkit](#)
[NSW Government Menopause Fact Sheet](#)
[NSW Health Guideline GL2023_020 Flexible Work \(More than one way to work\)](#)
[SESLHD Flexible Work Practices SESLHDPR/435 Policy](#)
[NSW Health Policy Directive PD2023_006 Leave Matters for the NSW Health Service](#)

CIPD

[The menopause at work: guidance for people managers](#)

ACAS

[Managing the effects of the menopause: Menopause at work](#)

**British Standards
Institution (BSI)**

[The British Standards Institution \(2023\), Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace - Guide](#)

**Menopause Friendly
Accreditation**

[Menopause Friendly Accreditation | Menopause at Work](#)

MIPO

[Menopause at Work - Our Free Resources](#)

Acknowledgement

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