

Menopause Workplace Resource Guide for Women





SWHR acknowledges that there are valued groups of people who may benefit from our materials who do not identify as women. We encourage those who identify differently to engage with us and our content.

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* This poster can be printed and placed in an office breakroom or bathroom to increase awareness about menopause in the workplace.

About This Guide

About SWHR

The Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR) is a national nonprofit and thought leader dedicated to advancing women's health through science, policy, and education while promoting research on sex differences to optimize women's health. Founded in 1990 by a group of physicians, medical researchers, and health advocates, SWHR is making women's health mainstream by addressing unmet needs and research gaps in women's health. Thanks to SWHR's efforts, women are now routinely included in most major medical research studies and more scientists are considering sex as a biological variable in their research. Visit www.swhr.org for more information.

The EMPACT Menopause Study

The **Employee Perspectives and Challenges Concerning the Transition of Menopause (EMPACT Menopause) Study** aims to improve workplace experiences for the significant portion of the workforce that transitions into menopause. As part of the study, SWHR conducted a survey – Understanding the Impact of Menopause on the Workplace – to collect valuable insights about the experiences of individuals who have entered or completed the menopause transition, as well as their coworkers and employers. Data from the study and SWHR's broader Menopause Program will be used to inform resources and activities that support menopause wellness for all women. Read the [EMPACT Menopause Study Bulletin](#).

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Menopause 101

Although the term menopause is often used loosely to describe the entire time frame of **midlife** changes, there are different stages to menopause.

PERIMENOPAUSE

The transitional time when the body experiences a natural decline in reproductive hormones, resulting in the end of a woman's menstrual cycles.

This **menopause transition** typically lasts 4-8 years, but can last more than a decade.

MENOPAUSE

The moment in life that is defined once 12 consecutive months have passed after the last menstrual cycle.

POSTMENOPAUSE

The life stage after menopause has completed.

The average age of menopause in the United States is 51. However, medical procedures, such as surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy, that damage or remove the ovaries can result in the onset of menopause, regardless of age. Between 5-10% of women will enter menopause before the age of 45, and another 5% after the age of 55.¹

There is no right or wrong way to progress through the stages of menopause.

Common symptoms associated with menopause include:

- ▶ Changes in your menstrual cycle
- ▶ Hot flashes, night sweats
- ▶ Sleep disturbances, insomnia
- ▶ Brain fog, difficulty concentrating
- ▶ Weight gain
- ▶ Vaginal dryness or irritation
- ▶ Reduced sexual desire or arousal
- ▶ Joint pain



It is important to note that treatments exist for every menopause symptom – from over-the-counter supplements, lubricants, yoga, and lifestyle practices to cognitive behavioral therapy, **hormone therapies**, and nonhormonal medications.

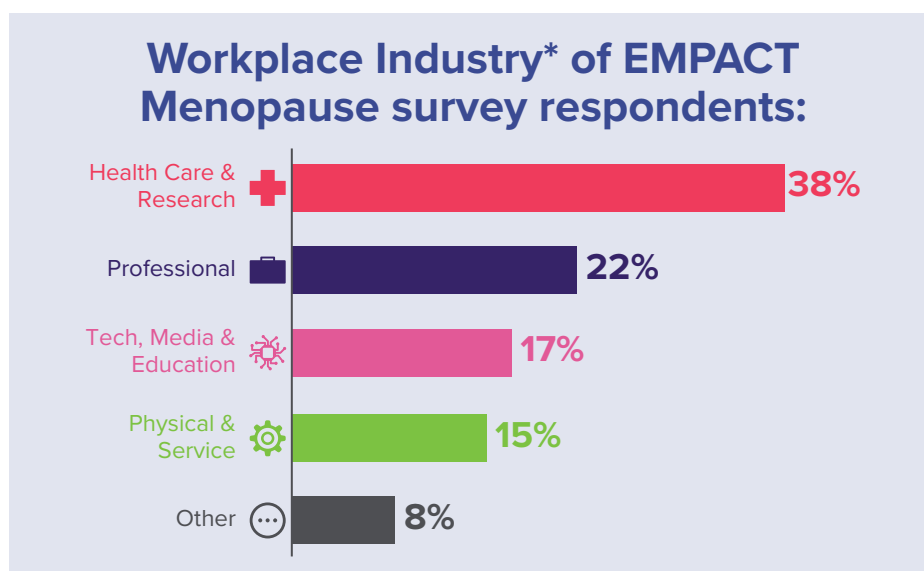
The **SWHR Menopause Preparedness Toolkit: A Woman's Empowerment Guide** has additional information to support women through major menopause milestones, including treatment options for menopause symptoms, and tips for conversations with health care providers, family, and friends.

Menopause At Work

Navigating Midlife in the Workplace

Over half (57%) of all women in the United States work and many have multiple jobs.² Women are employed in a diverse array of industries and account for over half of essential workers in industries, such as education, health care, finance, and hospitality. More than 75% of women work throughout their menopause transition (which is typically in their 40s and 50s) and for years postmenopause.

The timing of the menopause transition often overlaps with key career growth years for many women, as they may pursue management or senior leadership positions. Regardless of their career goals, the [EMPACT Menopause Study](#) survey shows that menopause can have far-reaching impacts on a woman's career-related decisions.



1 in 4

women considered not pursuing or did not pursue a leadership opportunity



1 in 3

women considered reducing or reduced their workload



2 out of 5

women considered finding or found a new job



* Health Care & Research Industries include health care and life and social sciences jobs

Professional Industries include professional, administrative, government, and financial service jobs

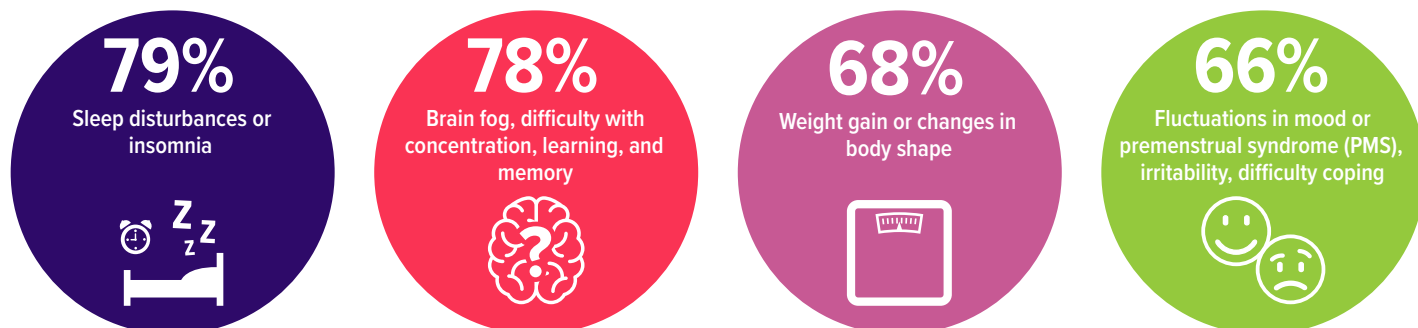
Tech, Media, & Education Industries include arts, media, engineering, computer, and education jobs

Physical & Service Industries include retail, hospitality, transportation, utilities, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and protective services jobs]

Disruptions in the Workplace

While every individual experiences menopause differently, the symptoms associated with menopause can lead to challenges at work.

Most Bothersome Menopause Symptoms:



Other symptoms that women reported disrupting their work included hot flashes, joint pain, depressive symptoms, and increased anxiety or panic attacks.

Menopause symptoms do not have to be a barrier to your work. Know that millions of other women share in the menopause experience every day and that your symptoms will likely not go on forever. With appropriate resources, accurate information, and a good support system, you can successfully navigate the challenges of your menopause transition and address most or all of your menopause symptoms.

Impacts on Work Life

Many women go to work when they do not feel well ([presenteeism](#)) or feel that their self-confidence and self-esteem in the workplace has been affected during menopause. In fact, almost 1/2 of the survey respondents experienced these impacts.

While it is natural that your body and lifestyle might undergo several changes during the menopause transition, it is not necessary for your symptoms to significantly affect your work or day-to-day life. Consider speaking with a health care provider, as well as your family and friends, to help you address these challenges. As symptoms are treated and/or naturally go away, many women express gaining a greater sense of autonomy and energy throughout their postmenopausal years.

\$150 Billion
Menopause-related
productivity losses
worldwide

While there are treatment options for all menopause symptoms, and many will likely go away in time, symptoms can sometimes be difficult to manage and lead to challenges at work. For many individuals, menopause impacts how they feel about their job rather than their work productivity or quality. Work conditions, policies, and stigma associated with aging, womanhood, and menopause also add to the burden of menopause. Companies that address these issues can not only limit legal risk, but also attract talented employees, increase retention, and improve work environments for staff.

More Information about conversation guides and tips for managing your menopause care can be found in the [SWHR Menopause Preparedness Toolkit: A Woman's Empowerment Guide](#).

Working Through the Menopause Transition

Seeking Support

Half of all individuals employed between the ages of 40 and 64 are women – the majority of which have begun or completed the menopause transition.² Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and a comfortable work environment can help to manage symptoms and their impacts on your work-life productivity. Your company might also offer workshops, resource groups, or [employee assistance programs \(EAP\)](#) to support a more inclusive environment.

Employers are responsible for creating and maintaining an accessible and healthy work environment for all employees, including those going through menopause. **If your workplace does not have menopause-friendly accommodations or policies, consider speaking with your supervisor or Human Resources department about how they can best support you.**

It can be difficult to discuss menopause, aging, and your health at work, but consider the potential benefits of policies that could support your menopause transition. Increasing the availability of resources and policies for menopause benefits not just you, but also your coworkers and your company.

61-70% employees and supervisors indicated there were no formal menopause-specific policies at their place of work.

Menopause Workplace Policies

Increasing Awareness

Awareness and open conversations about aging and menopause are important first steps in creating more supportive environments at work. Less than half of the women surveyed felt comfortable discussing their personal menopause symptoms or experiences at work. Reasons included the stigma attached to menopause and lack of education on the topic. However, **71%** of women and **80%** of supervisors said they would feel comfortable offering support to a coworker going through menopause. In fact, more than half of supervisors agreed that trainings or workshops about menopause would be a valuable use of company time and resources.

Only 47% of respondents working in the United States rated their knowledge of the causes, symptoms, and impacts of menopause 8 or higher on a 10-point scale.



Eliminating Discrimination

While some workplace discrimination policies might indirectly address menopause through anti-ageism or sexism policies, clear inclusion of menopause in discrimination policies is important for protecting individuals, especially in certain age- or gender-dominated industries. Protection against discrimination and backlash is especially important for individuals who are courageous enough to advocate for reasonable accommodations.



Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

Menopause does not have a stereotypical look, age, or experience. Some individuals may experience premature menopause before the age of 40, and other menopausal workers may not present as a woman “of a certain age” or a woman at all. Gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, ability, and socioeconomic status are just some of the many factors that impact a woman’s menopause journey and workplace experience. Inclusive policies that honor the great diversity of menopause experiences are more likely to foster patience and compassion from others in the workplace.

Menopause-Friendly Workplace Accommodations

In addition to formal policies, menopause-friendly accommodations can help improve your work environment and productivity. A majority of supervisors (over 70%) reported feeling comfortable setting up accommodations to address their employees' menopause symptoms at work. Be encouraged to request the support you need to maintain your career goals and productivity – whether it is verbal support, understanding of your experience, or concrete accommodations.

According to a national survey by the Job Accommodation Network, 49% of employers said the accommodations needed by their employees cost absolutely nothing.³

Workplace accommodations can look different depending on the industry, as well as the demands and tasks associated with your job. Consider which adjustments might best meet the unique needs of your health and job. Examples of accommodations are listed below, based on overarching demands of a job, regardless of industry, and many are simple and/or cost-effective for your company to provide.

Physically Demanding Work

- ▶ Extra or frequent breaks throughout the day
- ▶ Access to cold water or cooling devices (e.g., fans, towels, misters)
- ▶ Consistent access to restrooms
- ▶ Flexible uniforms or adapted dress codes
- ▶ Comfortable workspaces (e.g., adjustable temperature, dedicated rest areas)
- ▶ Shift in job duties to reduce physical labor
- ▶ Designated areas to freshen up, change clothes, or access sanitary products



Intellectually Demanding Work

- ▶ Flexible work hours or alternative work schedules
- ▶ Flexible deadlines or deadline extensions (as appropriate)
- ▶ Use of supportive services and devices (e.g., adjustable desk furniture, notetaking support, adaptive tools)
- ▶ Access to quiet workspaces or white noise/sound machines
- ▶ Broad spectrum or natural lighting
- ▶ Flexible meeting schedules
- ▶ Access to task management tools



Emotionally Demanding Work

- ▶ Time off for medical appointments
- ▶ Telework options
- ▶ **Employee resource groups**
- ▶ Individual coaching or therapy sessions
- ▶ **Employee assistance programs (EAP)**

Crucial Conversations About Menopause

Discussing menopause in the workplace is becoming more common as organizations recognize the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive environments for their employees at all life stages. Employers worldwide are embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives to create a greater sense of community and understanding, which includes addressing the needs and challenges faced by employees experiencing menopause. Efforts are also being

made to raise awareness, reduce stigma around menopause and aging, and provide support for women navigating the menopause transition. Menopause is not about age; it's about transition.

The door may be more open than you think...

Almost half of supervisors said they have participated in conversations about menopause, and 1/3 of those who have not had conversations said they would like to.

Talking to Your Supervisor or HR Department

Navigating menopause is an important experience of women's health that often remains silent in the workplace, with only 3 out of 5 women feeling comfortable asking for accommodations to address challenges during work. Although talking with a supervisor or HR representative about personal health matters can be sensitive and unfamiliar territory for both employees and employers, these conversations are crucial for fostering your best work life. The opportunity may also allow you to share your thoughts on your productivity, job satisfaction, career goals, and the organizational commitment to equity and inclusion.

You are not obligated to disclose a specific diagnosis to your employer. However, you should work with your health care provider to communicate your health challenges and your need for accommodations to your employer.

Some things to prepare before you meet with HR and/or your supervisor/manager:

- ▶ List of symptoms and how they specifically affect your ability to function at work
- ▶ List of actions you have taken to address symptom disruptions to your work
- ▶ Suggestions for accommodations
- ▶ Questions about current policies or resources for employee health and wellness



Talking with Coworkers

Having conversations about menopause with coworkers and peers is a vital step toward breaking down barriers, creating a supportive workplace culture, and normalizing discussions about the menopause experience. Personal health can be a challenging topic to discuss in a professional setting; however, such conversations with trusted coworkers can result in individuals feeling seen, heard, and better supported.

Because menopause symptoms vary widely from one individual to the next, showcasing its diversity helps to combat stereotypes and promotes a better understanding of this life stage. Creating spaces for open dialogue can encourage others to share their experiences and foster a sense of community and mutual support that prioritizes the well-being of all employees. After all, 2 out of 3 survey respondents said they felt comfortable offering support to a coworker going through menopause.

Before speaking with your employer, talk to your health care provider about your bothersome symptoms. They may have recommendations for medical and/or lifestyle approaches to manage your symptoms. Bringing a letter from your provider may also support your request for workplace accommodations.



Employee Resource Groups are a valuable way to connect with peers for support. Check if there is one dedicated to women's health or menopause at your workplace. If not, consider starting one and asking your coworkers to join.

Key Terms

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – A voluntary program through which companies offer free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems

Employee Resource Group (ERG) – A voluntary, employee-led group whose aim is to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organizations they serve

Hormone therapy (HT) – A medical treatment for menopausal symptoms that involves replacing hormones that the body's ovaries are no longer producing; also known as hormone replacement therapy

Menopause – A life stage, typically in a woman's late 40s or 50s, defined once 12 months have passed after the last menstrual cycle. Medical procedures that damage or remove the ovaries can also result in the onset of menopause, regardless of age.

Midlife – The central period of a person's life, spanning from approximately age 40 to 65; also referred to as middle age

Perimenopause – The transitional time (typically lasting 4-8 years) when the body experiences the natural decline in reproductive hormones, resulting in the end of a woman's menstrual cycles; also known as the menopause transition

Presenteeism – The loss in productivity when an employee is not fully functioning in the workplace because of an illness, injury, or other condition

Reasonable Accommodation – A modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring process to enable an individual with a disability to have an equal opportunity to get and successfully perform their job tasks to the same extent as people without disabilities; sometimes referred to as productivity enhancers

Vasomotor symptoms (VMS) – Menopausal symptoms involving temperature regulation, including hot flashes and night sweats

References & Resources

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Menopause Workplace Resources

- **EMPACT Menopause Bulletin:** https://swhr.org/swhr_resource/empact-menopause-study/
- **Endocrine Society Menopause Map:** <https://www.endocrine.org/menopausemap/index.html>
- **Job Accommodation Network:** <https://askjan.org>
- **SWHR Menopause Preparedness Toolkit:** https://swhr.org/swhr_resource/menopause-preparedness-toolkit-a-womans-empowerment-guide/
- **SWHR Menopause Workplace Resource Guide for Managers:** https://swhr.org/swhr_resource/menopause-workplace-resource-guide-for-managers
- **The Hot Years Magazine:** <https://www.mymenopausemag.com/>
- **Working Through Menopause: The Impact on Women, Businesses and the Bottom Line** (book by Seibel & Seibel, 2022): <https://drmache.com/workingthroughmenopause/>

Support Organizations

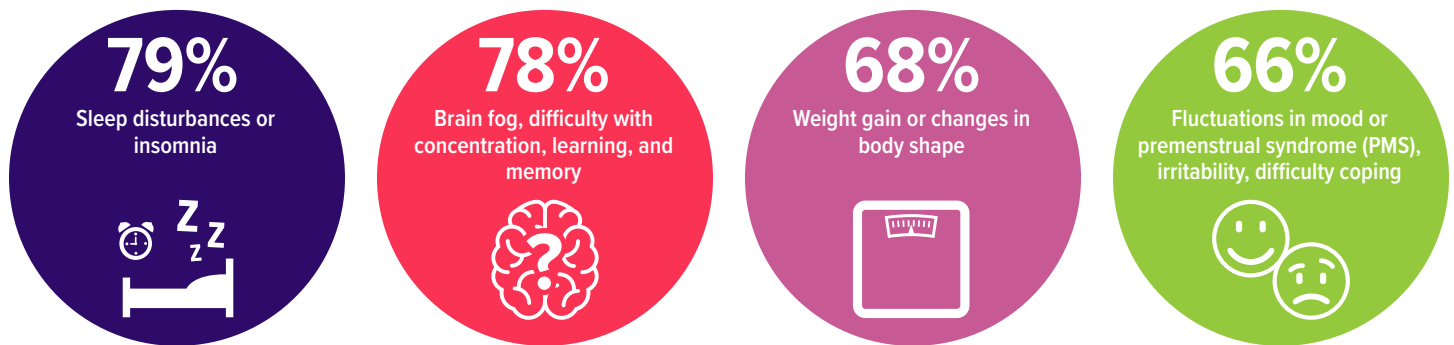
- **Black Girl's Guide to Surviving Menopause:** <https://blackgirlsguidetosurvivingmenopause.com/>
- **Let's Talk Menopause:** <https://www.letstalkmenopause.org/>
- **Menopause Information Pack for Organizations (MIPO):** <https://www.menopauseatwork.org/>
- **National Menopause Foundation:** <https://nationalmenopausefoundation.org/>
- **Red Hot Mamas:** <https://redhotmamas.org/>
- **Smarter Menopause (UK):** <https://smartermenopause.com/index.php/blog-2/>
- **Women Living Better:** <https://womenlivingbetter.org/>
- **The Menopause Society (formerly North American Menopause Society):**
<https://www.menopause.org/for-women>

Supporting the Menopause Journey in the Workplace

Women in their late 40s and 50s typically undergo menopause when the body experiences a decline in reproductive hormones, resulting in the end of her menstrual cycles. The menopause transition typically lasts 4-8 years, but can also occur due to medical procedures that damage or remove the ovaries, regardless of age.



According to the **EMPACT Menopause Study**, women reported certain menopause symptoms significantly disrupting their work:



Only 31% of women felt comfortable talking about their personal menopause symptoms or experiences at work. Building awareness of the diverse experiences of women during and after the menopause transition helps to create more inclusive workplaces.

How can you show support?

► ENGAGE.

Open the door to building relationships with your coworkers. Ask about how they are doing and what support they might need. Sharing your own life experiences may encourage others to do the same.

► EMPATHIZE.

Acknowledge your biases and be curious. Ask questions sensitively and actively listen to the responses so that you can better understand other people's experiences and how they make them feel.

► EDUCATE.

Be an ally and advocate to promote change. Sharing resources and increasing awareness of inclusive policies can help women navigate menopause challenges in the workplace.

To learn more about the **EMPACT Menopause Study** or **SWHR Menopause Workplace Resource Guides**, visit www.swhr.org



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