



# Menopause

The menopause is a workplace issue:  
guidance and model policy



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# Foreword

This guide is designed to assist branches in ensuring that organisations consider how menopause symptoms can impact on women, trans and non-binary people experiencing the menopause. The aim is for employers to treat the issue with the critical importance it deserves and for policies and procedures to protect all workers and not disadvantage those who are experiencing the menopause.

The guide is arranged so that you can dip in and dip out, focusing on the areas that are relevant to your employer.

For example, you may already have a workplace menopause policy in place and an engaged employer, so you may want to focus more on specific practical actions to support individual members, as listed in the checklist for branches and reps.

Or you may have an uninterested or hostile employer and need to look particularly at the section about putting the case to an employer, as well as using the model workplace survey to gather evidence.

This guide will help branches to:

- Initiate discussions with an employer to highlight how the menopause can impact on workers and make the case for jointly conducting a thorough review of the organisation's policies and procedures
  - Understand the minimum legal requirements that employers must consider in their handling of workers experiencing the menopause
  - Tap into the resources of established menopause information sources to push forward a commitment to raising awareness about the menopause and the impact of menopause symptoms
- Consider how union activists may contribute to raising awareness of menopause symptoms and communicating the workplace adjustments and other support available
  - Set out to employers the key features within a range of core policies that are needed to create a fair and supportive environment for workers experiencing the menopause
  - Press for standard practices and training that enable problems related to menopause symptoms in the workplace to be identified and for suitable adjustments to be offered.



## Why the menopause is a workplace issue

We all recognise that branches and workplace reps have increasing demands on their time. But negotiating for better support for workers struggling with menopause symptoms will have a wide-ranging benefit for your branch and workplace, as well as our members.

As the UK's leading public service trade union for women, UNISON is determined to ensure that working women have all the support they need to be healthy and safe at work.

Around three-quarters of UNISON members and activists are women. In the UK, nearly 16 million women aged 16 and over were in employment in October 2024, according to the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) UK Labour Force Survey](#). And these women will inevitably experience the menopause at some point in their lives, and not necessarily in their late forties or early fifties.

It can affect younger women too through a premature or a medical or surgical menopause.

It can also affect some transgender, intersex and non-binary people.

According to the [Faculty of Occupational Medicine](#), 75-80% of menopause women are in work.

But as the [Fawcett Society found in their survey](#), 44% of women said their ability to work had been affected by menopause symptoms. 77% of women experience one or more symptoms described as 'very difficult'.

Some women may cope well with the physical and emotional changes, but for others they may cause particular difficulties both in work and out of work. And we all know how problems outside of work can also impact on performance at work.

These problems can be made even worse by the fact that there remains considerable ignorance and misunderstanding about the menopause and perimenopause, with it often being treated as an embarrassing or taboo subject, or even a topic to make fun of.

The Fawcett Society's 2022 report and survey '[Menopause and the Workplace](#)' found that "41% of respondents who have been employed during the menopause identified that they had seen menopause or menopause symptoms treated as a joke by people at work. This was consistent across region and social grade. Disabled women were much more likely to say they had experienced this... Faced with menopause being treated as a joke at work, it is no surprise that many women lose confidence and motivation."

Perspectus Global, an international research agency's 2023 study '[Pause for thought: reflecting on menopause and the workplace](#)' found that "only 37% of managers have been offered training around menopause - this results in some unacceptable responses from bosses. When these managers were confronted with people who told them they were suffering menopause symptoms, 27% admitted they were shocked, a quarter didn't know what to do, 16% thought they were being lied to, 9% thought the complainant was making a fuss about nothing and 8% ignored them."

Many women are being driven from the workplace because they find that adapting problematic symptoms around inflexible work expectations is just too difficult. Others may find that managing symptoms mean they miss out on promotions and training, reduce their hours, lose confidence in the workplace and see their pay levels drop, all contributing to a widening gender pay gap.

The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. It should be remembered that this can also be a time of life when women are experiencing difficulties, not least with increasing caring responsibilities, and the onset of age related health conditions. In addition, they may well be feeling that they are already not valued in the workplace.

UNISON says that the impact of menopause symptoms on women workers, on some transgender, intersex and non-binary workers, is an occupational health issue and an equality issue. The menopause is a workplace issue and therefore a trade union issue.



## How branches can benefit from negotiating a workplace menopause policy

*“As a union of a million women in public services, we are no longer prepared to shy away from talking about the menopause and the impact it has on just over half of the UK workforce.*

*The menopause is the definition of a trade union issue. Women must be able to do their jobs in comfort and not feel stigmatised either. There’s no need for women to press pause on their careers because of a natural life event.*

*I stand in solidarity with each and every one of you, our members, as we continue to demand employers provide menopause awareness training, flexible procedures for sickness absence and a menopause policy.”*

Christina McAnea  
UNISON’s general secretary

Most women at some time within their working lives will experience the menopause. This is the same for the members of your branch or workplace – perhaps it even directly affects you!

For some of our members, menopause issues will cause particular difficulties at work and may even lead to discriminatory action by employers, yet it’s not something we usually talk about.

- By agreeing good workplace policies such as health and safety, sickness absence, flexible working and performance management, that take account of the impact of perimenopause and menopause symptoms, the number of cases requiring steward representation could be reduced, freeing up steward time.
- Improving conditions for workers who may be disadvantaged by practices that do not take account of health issues like those related to perimenopause and menopause symptoms, may help in addressing the gender pay gap.
- A good menopause in the workplace policy will highlight how UNISON values its members and recognises the specific problems that women may experience, which could result in an increase in your branch’s activist base.
- Ignoring the needs of women experiencing the menopause can contribute to the continuing gender employment and pay gaps. Developing a good menopause in the workplace policy could be a valuable part of any gender action plan.
- Agreeing successful policies for a wide range of workers can be a useful recruitment and retention tool, advertising the benefits of joining UNISON for all. It can also highlight how UNISON reps have expert negotiation skills when dealing with employers.
- Organising around the menopause and its impact on workers is a great way to increase involvement and participation of UNISON members in your branch.

# What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

In the years leading up to the menopause, called the perimenopause, there can be significant changes for women, with irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding as well as many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause, including anxiety, low mood, hot flushes, brain fog and vaginal dryness, amongst numerous others.

Many women with symptoms have at least two or three years of 'hormonal chaos' as their oestrogen levels decline before the last period, although for some this can go on for five or more years.

Overall, this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years, although for some women it can be much longer.

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

## The menopause affects a wide range of people

Although most women experience this natural change between the ages of 45 and 55, for some women, it can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is known as a premature menopause, or premature ovarian insufficiency. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause before the age of 40.

The permanent cessation of periods between the age of 40 and 45 is known as early menopause.

In addition, there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the woman'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 woman's ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy. This is known as a medical or surgical menopause.

Women who experience an early menopause may also have to cope with the psychological distress of facing infertility at an early age.

Although it may be supportive for **women in same-sex relationships**, if the partners are also experiencing menopause symptoms at the same time, it could increase difficulties if symptoms include anxiety, sleep disturbance and depression for example.

And struggling with menopause symptoms may be additionally difficult for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans plus (LGBT+) people if they already experience discrimination in the workplace.

**Trans workers** – Some people grow up with or develop a strong sense that their gender identity is different to how they were labelled at birth. They have a strong desire to transition and live permanently in the correct gender for them.

**Trans men** identify as male but were assigned female at birth. Trans men may experience natural menopause symptoms if their ovaries remain in place and no hormone therapy is given. They may experience surgical menopause if the ovaries and uterus are removed. If hormone therapy is in place it may complicate the issues for trans men.

**Trans women** identify as female but were assigned male at birth. They may experience pseudo-menopause symptoms if their hormone therapy treatment is interrupted or levels are unstable.

**Non-binary people** are people who are not solely male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither or something entirely different. Non-binary people don't think of themselves as simply male or female. Their gender identity is more complicated. Some non-binary people may also experience menopause symptoms.



**People born with intersex bodies/ variations of sex characteristics** do not always fit society's perception of male or female bodies. They may also experience menopause, depending on a variety of factors including their sex assigned at birth and their medical treatments.

Everyone's experience of the menopause is individual and may differ greatly. But inevitably the symptoms will be exacerbated by negative or discriminatory attitudes in the workplace.

Struggling with menopause symptoms may be additionally difficult for disabled women and Black women if they already experience discrimination in the workplace.

It is reported by **disabled women** and those with pre-existing health conditions, that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Examples reported include women with diabetes who find it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels stable, or conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), mental health conditions, skin conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia etc. being exacerbated. Menopause symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition. The nature of the impairment may also make it more difficult for the disabled woman to get the medical support they require, or to recognise the symptoms as being related to the menopause. The [Fawcett Society found in their survey](#) that disabled women are affected more by menopause symptoms. 22% said they had left a job due to menopause symptoms, compared to 9% of non-disabled women.

**Black women** may face barriers in accessing appropriate medical support or having their symptoms taken seriously, not least because of racism in the workplace. While research has been limited, evidence suggests that there may also be some variations in the average age at which the menopause takes place between women of different ethnic backgrounds. Some studies suggest that symptoms may be more prevalent and more severe for Black women. Differences in biological and hormonal changes in women of different races and ethnicity have also been identified. Black workers are also more likely to be in insecure work on casual or zero hours contracts, making it even more difficult to cope with problematic menopause symptoms.

# What are the possible menopause symptoms and how could they impact on work?

Some women experience almost no menopause symptoms, but at least 80% do experience noticeable changes and of these, 25% find their symptoms severe and debilitating. Without treatment, most menopause symptoms gradually stop naturally.

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if symptoms are caused by the menopause or other factors. Many of those experiencing the menopause may feel confused or powerless if they don't understand why their body is behaving in the way it is.

For many others it is a distressing time psychologically as a result of the physical symptoms impacting on their relationships and self-confidence (such as a reduced sex drive or weight gain), as well as symptoms directly caused by the menopause such as anxiety and reduced concentration.

As the menopause factsheet from ['Women's Health Concern'](#) explains: "For some women this loss of reproductive ability may be deeply felt, and for all women the menopause is a personal experience, not just a medical condition."

All the common menopause symptoms are associated with the fluctuation and depletion of hormone levels.

The impact of these symptoms on a worker's self-confidence, mental and emotional health and relationships with others, will clearly have an impact not only on their life outside work but also their working life, particularly, given the stresses and strains of a busy workplace.

There are many different symptoms that can occur during perimenopause and menopause, each very specific to the person with varying degrees of impact, sometimes varying over time and ranging to mild to severe. Some of the more widely reported include:

- Hot flushes – a very common symptom affecting 3 in every 4 women

experiencing the menopause. They can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward. The woman may sweat, the skin may become red and patchy, and the heart rate can also become quicker or stronger

- Irregular menstrual cycles
- Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving women exhausted, sometimes anaemic as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently
- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and palpitations, when your heartbeats suddenly become more noticeable
- Sleep difficulties, common during the perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause, and sometimes as a result of flushes and sweats
- Low mood, irritability, mood swings, increased anxiety, feeling unsettled, low self-esteem, loss of confidence, reduced sex drive, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, brain fog 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, pain and discomfort during sex
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness
- Weight gain and loss of muscle mass
- Headaches and migraines
- Sensitive teeth, painful gums or other mouth problems
- Menopause hair loss – very commonly, the volume and condition of a woman's hair appears to worsen, with some women noticing that hair does not grow as much as previously. Some



women will go on to experience a more profound hair loss, with thinning at the crown of the head, the sides or more general hair thinning all over the head. This is described as female pattern hair loss (FPHL)

- Osteoporosis – the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis. The first sign that a woman has it is usually the fracture of a bone
- Menopause symptoms may also exacerbate existing impairments and conditions that women may already be struggling to cope with.

Clearly any and all of these symptoms would affect someone in their day-to-day lives, including at work.

It's therefore important for managers and trade union reps to be aware of these symptoms so that they can appreciate the full extent of how some workers experience the menopause and its impact on work.

It's worth remembering that some women, non-binary, intersex and trans people who experience the menopause may get all the symptoms at the same time or at different times throughout menopause. Other workers may only suffer with a few symptoms that are manageable whereas a few others may sail through the menopause and hardly notice any symptoms. Everyone is different!

The [Fawcett Society](#) found in their survey that one in ten women who have been employed during the menopause have left work due to menopause symptoms. Mapped on to the UK population that would represent an estimated 333,000 women leaving their jobs due to the menopause. 14% of women had reduced their hours at work, 14% had gone part-time, and 8% had not applied for promotion.

Key findings from '[The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace](#)' include:

- Only just over a third of respondents said they would feel comfortable talking about their menopause status at work
- Less than 1% said their workplace

had a policy on menopause but almost 90% would welcome one

- Nearly 90% would also welcome training for union reps so that they could support women experiencing the menopause at work.

Comments from respondents included wanting:

“information and training for male and female managers on how to best discuss and support colleagues experiencing menopause. Information that educates colleagues of all ages about menopause and some of the cultural issues that affect the way in which different ethnic groups will experience menopause.....

Maybe a better understanding of the symptoms, particularly for males, so they can understand it's a serious issue and that women aren't just being 'difficult'”

**UNISON says we need to talk about the menopause and we need to support those struggling with difficult menopause symptoms in the workplace.**

# Why do branch officers and reps need to know about menopause symptoms?

The majority of our members are women.

The majority of our members will experience the menopause.

**'The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC'** survey investigating the menopause in the workplace' found that 85% of women asked felt that the menopause had affected their working life.

For many it will be a natural occurrence that is completely manageable. But for many others it can affect them profoundly, leading to emotional and health changes impacting on their work and their relationship with colleagues.

Although symptoms may last a comparatively short time, they can frequently trigger formal monitoring procedures at work. And whilst symptoms may be severely debilitating for some, they are too often written off as 'women's problems' that are trivial or an embarrassing joke.

Unfortunately, there is often very little understanding of the issues and very little support for members who are going through the menopause. For too long it has been seen as a private matter and so, rarely discussed with managers who may not have awareness of the issues involved. This means many women as well as some non-binary and intersex people feel that they have to hide their symptoms and will be less likely to ask for the adjustments that may help them.

Trans people too may be particularly reluctant to discuss difficult menopause symptoms that impact on their work, and health and wellbeing, if doing so would disclose their trans status.

But the issues are growing in importance.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) November 2024 figures<sup>1</sup>, there are approximately 4.56 million

women aged 50 to 64 currently in work in the UK. That number will rise as the retirement age for women increases over the coming years.

Therefore, it is crucial for branches and stewards to raise the issue so that employers are aware of their responsibilities and ensure that conditions in the workplace do not make menopause symptoms worse. This means being certain that employers fulfil their duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act, undertaking specific risk assessments to assess conditions for workers experiencing the menopause in the workplace.

Workers who are experiencing the menopause also need to know that there is someone they can go to and discuss any difficulties they are having, someone who is able to provide support within the workplace, to signpost to trusted medical support and information, and who will treat the matter empathetically and confidentially.

UNISON reps support members through capability procedures or when they ask for reasonable adjustments to enable them to work. However many managers can be ignorant of or unsympathetic about conditions that affect women. Workplace sickness absence policies often use inflexible trigger levels that don't take account of these issues, setting off formal procedures that could ultimately lead to an unfair dismissal.

Not fairly addressing the workplace issues caused by the menopause could potentially be discriminatory. Branches and reps have a key role in supporting workers facing discrimination, disadvantage and harassment because of menopause symptoms.

UNISON says that the menopause is an equality issue of importance to all branch officers and workplace reps. It undoubtedly contributes to the gender pay gap.

<sup>1</sup> Employment data covering employment rates, hours of work and earnings.  
[ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork](https://ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork)



## Women's experience at work

*“The emotional and physical changes of the menopause can be overwhelming. As can their effect on women's ability to do their jobs.*

*All good employers must ensure the best possible working environment for all their staff. Women should be able to do their jobs in comfort and not made to feel ashamed or embarrassed.*

*A clothing workplace policy that helps stop women from overheating, including suitable uniforms, is a must.*

*And flexible working can make a real difference too. Employers shouldn't penalise women who have to take time off if it's down to the menopause.”*

Josie Irwin,  
UNISON head of equality

However, the Fawcett Society's report and survey '[Menopause and the Workplace](#)' found that employers are not taking action to support most menopausal women.

They found consistent evidence that a mix of appropriate interventions by employers can support women: culture change, training, advice on menopause, adapting absence policies, flexible work, and environmental changes. But for each of these, eight out of ten women in their survey said their employer had not put them in place. When they do, women say that they are helpful.

The Fawcett Society's survey also found that the taboo around menopause extends to sick notes.

26% of women who have been employed during the menopause had taken time off work due to their symptoms, but just 30% of them gave menopause as the main reason on their sick note.

Working class women were even less likely to cite the real reason.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) report '[Menopause in the workplace: Employee experiences in 2023](#)', based on a survey of over 2,000 women, found that workplace support makes a considerable difference for those going through the menopause. However, only a quarter say their organisation has a menopause policy or other support.

Written policies and support networks are the most common forms of workplace support provided but flexible working and an ability to control the temperature are seen as most helpful to manage menopause symptoms at work.

A high proportion feel that the move to more organisations supporting home and hybrid working will make dealing with menopause symptoms easier.

In Perspectus Global's 2023 study '[Pause for thought: reflecting on menopause and the workplace](#)', 50% of respondents agreed to the statement: "I think companies need to have a menopause policy in place to support women who need it" And 47% agreed: "I think women going through the menopause should be given time off at work when needed."

# UNISON members' experiences

One UNISON member and activist reports:

*“My experience with dealing with the menopause issues was awful. At the time I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I was struggling to concentrate and work was all getting too much.*

*My line manager at the time was a very young man who I had to try and talk to. At first I made up a reason for going sick but soon realised I needed to tell him the real reason why I was off work. I sat in his office sweating and feeling like I was old enough to be his mother! He was struggling to understand what I was talking about so I suggested that he go home and speak to his own Mum and ask her about the menopause!*

*I eventually went to my GP who was happy to prescribe HRT which has helped a great deal.*

*We need to be raising awareness and sharing information on the issues and how they impact on women with our line managers.”*

Another activist explains:

*“Currently I’m not menopause, I’m perimenopause and some time ago when I worked in a school as a teaching assistant I would describe myself as very perimenopause! So the hot flushes, severe anemia, palpitations meant that I was exhausted, the lack of sleep, I was physically weak, I had no stamina and I got breathless just by walking down the corridor in the school. I was struggling to work.*

*What I like about our workplace menopause policy is the self-help part. I did see my GP.. and with the support of my colleagues at work, I was able to manage the symptoms until they got better.”*

Her colleague had a different experience:

*“I underwent surgery at the age of 36 for health reasons so entered an immediate menopause... What I didn’t expect, what I wasn’t prepared for was the psychological symptoms and their effect on me. I literally did not recognise myself. Almost overnight I went from a confident 30-something to feeling lost, numb and anxious and that is something I’ve never experienced before. I’m lucky, after a couple of months, some HRT, some self-help, I started to feel like my old self again. That’s not to say all the symptoms disappear but you learn to manage them.*

*But what made the world of difference for me was the support of my then line manager but also of my colleagues, my friends and my family. With their understanding I felt confident and free, particularly in the workplace to tell people how I felt, to tell them I felt a little out of sorts, or I’m popping outside just to cool down, I didn’t need to look for an excuse, I was able to be open and honest to have that 5 minutes, then come back and get on with my working day.”*



## Further sources of information to support women and raise awareness

### **NHS information**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause)

### **NICE guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment'**

NICE guidelines provide advice on the care and support that should be offered to people who use health and care services.

[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23)

### **Menopause Matters**

An award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopause symptoms and treatment options.

[www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)

### **Women's Health Concern**

A charitable organisation – the patient arm of the British Menopause Society – that aims to help educate and support women with their healthcare by providing unbiased, accurate information.

[www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)

### **Daisy Network**

Daisy Network is dedicated to providing information and support to women diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency, also known as Premature Menopause.

[www.daisynetwork.org](http://www.daisynetwork.org)

### **The Menopause Exchange**

The Menopause Exchange provides free independent and practical advice about the perimenopause, menopause, midlife and post-menopausal health, based on expertise and evidence.

[www.menopause-exchange.co.uk](http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk)

### **Henpicked**

One of the UK's fastest growing website for women over 40, sharing helpful information, top tips and wisdom: happiness, health, wealth, and menopause.

#### Menopause hub

[www.henpicked.net/menopause-hub](http://www.henpicked.net/menopause-hub)

#### Menopause in the workplace

[www.menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk](http://www.menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk)

### **Menopause cafés**

At a menopause café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss menopause. The website includes guidance on how to set up your own menopause café.

[www.menopausecafe.net](http://www.menopausecafe.net)

# Changing workplace policies and practices

Key to changing workplace policies and practices is providing a genuine opportunity for women, as well as some transgender, intersex and non-binary workers to be heard on the issue. Simply asking the question, ‘what type of support might be helpful for those experiencing the menopause?’ will be a positive start towards changing culture and practice.

“Everyone should be supported to thrive at work. But all too often, women going through the menopause are being let down.

This is bad for women, bad for business and bad for our economy. I know from working with many incredible women how hard it is to get on at work every day whilst battling severe symptoms including depression, joint pain and extreme fatigue. It happens in every workplace, but too often women suffer in silence”.

**Angela Rayner,**  
Deputy Prime Minister

## Educating for a changing workplace culture

Employers should ensure that all line managers and HR staff have been trained to be aware of how the menopause can affect work, the implications for both equality and health and safety, and what adjustments may be necessary to support workers who are experiencing the menopause.

In addition, all staff would benefit from training to raise awareness and understanding, and to share experiences.

## Gender specific risk assessments

Being aware of issues relating to gender in occupational health and safety ensures that workplaces are safer and healthier for everyone. Where the differences between men and women (such as with the menopause) are acknowledged, there is a greater chance of ensuring that the health, safety and welfare of all workers are protected.

The British Standards Institute (BSI) is the UK’s National Standards Body appointed by the UK government. In 2023, it produced the [Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace standard \(BS 30416\)](#) with input from major employers, as well as unions including UNISON, health and safety bodies and charities.

The standard aims to support all staff and experts believe it could be used as a blueprint to support workers globally. UNISON Cymru/Wales regional organiser, Darron Dupre spent almost a year helping write the British standard. Darron said: “The standard, created by experts from across the UK, can be used by trade unions and employers in every type of workplace and, like the National Minimum Wage, it can support workers in companies and organisations with no trade unions organising workers. It is free to download so there is now absolutely no excuse for employers to not put menopause and the menstrual health of their workforce at the top of their agenda. And trade unions, who have a long and proud history of speaking up for employees at work, will be there every step of the way to support them.”

## Sickness absence

Increasingly in workplaces, long-term health conditions are dealt with outside the absence or sickness policies. Similarly menopause symptoms should not be recorded in the same way as any other sickness absence.

Difficult symptoms related to the menopause leading to absence should be recorded as an ongoing issue, rather than as individual absences. As with any long-term health condition or impairment, adjustments should be offered to resolve any barriers that the employee experiencing the menopause encounters.

However, many employers use sickness absence policies with arbitrary triggers for instigating processes. The Bradford Factor is one example used to evaluate sickness absence, which penalises frequent short-term absences by assigning a negative score to the employee, whilst making allowances



for a few periods of long-term absence. Clearly this could disadvantage workers facing difficult menopause symptoms.

### Equality-proofing all policies and procedures

Sickness absence policies are not the only policies and procedures that could impact negatively on women and some transgender, intersex and non-binary people. It is important for all workplace practices to be reviewed in case they create potential disadvantages for workers experiencing the menopause.

For example, inflexible performance management may even lead to the unfair implementation of capability and disciplinary procedures and even to dismissal. The employer should take into account the impact menopause symptoms may temporarily have on a person's workplace performance with possible memory loss, poor concentration, fatigue, lack of confidence and other symptoms.

Capability, disciplinary, redundancy, and recruitment and training are some of the key policies and procedures alongside sickness absence, performance management and health and safety, that should be checked in case they could disadvantage those workers experiencing the menopause.

But all policies and procedures should be equality-proofed as a matter of course in the workplace, and this exercise should include consideration of workers experiencing the menopause.

### Flexible working

Working time arrangements should be flexible enough to ensure that they meet the needs of workers experiencing the menopause who may require leave suddenly at short notice. They may also need more or lengthier 'comfort' breaks during the day.

### Line management support

Workers who are experiencing the menopause need support from line management. With any longstanding health-related condition this is crucial and can make a major difference to how a

worker will deal with the issues arising from the menopause. The workplace can affect those working through the menopause in various ways, especially if they cannot make healthy choices at work.

One concerning finding from a Wales TUC survey highlighted in '[The menopause in the workplace](#)' toolkit was that a number of women reported encountering sexist and ageist attitudes and practices towards women, the menopause and female ageing in their workplaces.

In some cases women reported unwanted comments or witnessing sexist bullying and harassment related to the menopause.

Because of the way that society treats the menopause, many women will feel uncomfortable going to their line manager, especially if they are a man, and other options should be available. This may be through human resources, or a welfare officer. Many employers have employer assistance programmes that can act as a go-between.

### Workplace environment

CIPD<sup>2</sup> highlight how "simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance.

Adjustments can be physical, such as providing a fan, but they can also involve changes such as offering a more flexible working arrangement.

Remember that menopause symptoms can fluctuate, so take a flexible approach and check in regularly with the individual."

In the workplace, some factors may not normally be seen as an issue, but become more problematic for someone experiencing the menopause, such as

- poor ventilation and air quality
- inadequate access to drinking water
- inadequate or non-existent toilet and washing facilities
- lack of control over the temperature or light
- lack of appropriate uniforms or personal protective equipment.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Menopause at work: Guide for people managers'  
[cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/menopause-people-manager-guidance](https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/menopause-people-manager-guidance)

Just as every person's experience of the menopause is different, it is also important to remember that every workplace is different. For instance in some workplaces it is not possible to open windows to improve ventilation, or workers who have to wear a uniform are not able to change the type of clothing they are wearing when they are having flushes or sweating.

Risk assessments should consider the specific needs of women, and also some non-binary, intersex and trans people experiencing the menopause and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. Issues that should be looked at include temperature and ventilation and the materials used in any uniform or corporate clothing provided to women workers.

The assessments should also address welfare issues such as toilet facilities and access to cold water, as well as allowing for more frequent breaks, additional time to carry out a task, and even temporary changes to an employee's job description or duties.

### Occupational health awareness

Employers can ensure that, as part of a wider occupational health awareness campaign, the menopause is highlighted so all staff know that the employer has a positive attitude to the issue. It is not something that women should feel embarrassed about.

Guidance on how to deal with the menopause should be freely available in the workplace. All workers should be given information of how they can get support for any difficulties that arise as a result of the menopause.

### Stress

Employers need to be aware that workplace stress can worsen menopause symptoms and in some cases has been shown to bring on an earlier menopause. Stress should be risk assessed alongside concerns like temperature and access to facilities.

One key cause of stress for all workers in modern UK, is the increased precarious nature of employment with more agency working, casualisation and use of zero hours contracts. As well as exacerbating symptoms, the working arrangements may also discourage workers from disclosing

problems as they may fear that their jobs could be at a risk.

### A specific menopause policy

Development of a workplace policy on the menopause could go a long way to help ensure that women, as well as some transgender, non-binary and intersex people, are not disadvantaged and that experienced talent is not lost from the workforce. But policies are only useful if they are implemented and regularly reviewed.

### Why is a policy important?

*"I joined UNISON 12 years ago after the success of an equal pay campaign in Bridgend. I decided to apply to become a women's officer position.*

*Nearly all my colleagues (99.5%) are women of menopausal age. I saw them suffering on their own, quiet, being ashamed to discuss their issues with management and other colleagues.*

*I wanted to change the situation for my fellow colleagues and help as much as possible."*

Iryna Rose,  
Women's officer for UNISON's  
Bridgend branch

*"Back in early 2019 I began to raise the issue of establishing a menopause policy for staff at our regular joint trade union and HR meetings. This was based partly on my own experience and that of the many members who I believed were currently having symptoms of perimenopause and consequentially had suffered issues at work...*

*After badgering HR for many months both by emails and keeping it on our monthly agenda, I was finally contacted by a HR advisor on developing such a policy.*

*The policy was to be a joint effort by HR and UNISON and my input was valued into making this a workable document."*

Sonya Howard,  
UNISON's Kensington and Chelsea branch



In 2022, Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, announced a new menopause policy created in conjunction with UNISON, to practically support women and all workers going through the menopause at City Hall.

*“Working alongside UNISON, the mayor and Greater London Assembly have created a bold, supportive policy that leads the way.*

*Other employers should follow suit by fostering a safer, fairer workplace for women experiencing the menopause. That’s the way to encourage experienced and skilled staff to stay in work.”*

Christina McAnea,  
UNISON’s general secretary

But importantly, organisations should also seek to equality-proof existing policies first and practices to ensure they do not disadvantage workers experiencing the menopause, as well as ensuring that line managers receive appropriate training and guidance, and there is awareness-raising amongst all staff.

*“It is vital that women going through the menopause are given necessary support at work and easy access to this support. This will help to improve their well-being in the workplace and encourage more women experiencing the menopause to stay on at work, and also help towards closing the gender pay gap.”*

Bukky Akinwale,  
UNISON’s national women’s officer

### Recognition that there is no ‘one size fits all’

Whatever the approach in the workplace there needs to be a range of adjustments and practices on offer for women experiencing the menopause. Every person experiencing the menopause will have different symptoms for different lengths of time and different levels of severity. So, assumptions made on how to deal with those experiencing the menopause may be counter-productive when supporting the individual.

**The CIPD highlight** how it’s important “that support is tailored to the individual because symptoms fluctuate and are experienced by people very differently.

Small changes can often make a big difference, but the best approach is to have a sensitive and supportive conversation to find out what would be most helpful. Therefore, it’s essential that employers educate line managers about menopause transition. They need to be comfortable and confident to talk about it and know what policies and support are available.”

# The role of the trade union

## Being aware

Safety representatives and stewards have a key role to play in challenging attitudes to the menopause, ensuring that their employer has procedures in place, and in offering support to workers who are experiencing problems.

Getting the issue raised at branch meetings will help ensure that the problems will not get ignored in the workplace.

UNISON believes all stewards – men, women, non-binary – should be aware of the issues.

Key to any successful approach to supporting women experiencing the menopause is to make sure that women are directly involved in decision-making. Branches could particularly encourage more women to become stewards, branch equality officers and health and safety officers so that these issues never get overlooked.

## Finding out

It's important to find out what the actual issues are and what specific support is needed in the workplace. The best way to do this is with surveys or mapping exercises. One example of a workplace survey to use in your workplace can be found on page 30.

The results may even lead to an awareness-raising campaign, with activities such as lunch-and-learn in the workplace, posters, leaflets, and ultimately to negotiating a workplace policy.

For more information on carrying out gender-sensitive risk assessments and using body mapping, hazard mapping and thermal mapping activities, check out UNISON's '[Gender, safety and health: a guide for safety reps](#)' and the Wales TUC's '[The menopause in the workplace: a toolkit for trade unionists](#)'

## Raising the issue

Representatives should raise the issue with their employer perhaps using the checklist on page 28, and ensure that the workplace meets the needs of workers experiencing the menopause.

It could also be included as part of an action plan to address the gender pay gap.

Employers should be made aware that under the Employment Rights Bill, the [UK government has announced](#) that "large employers will also be required to produce action plans on how to address their gender pay gaps and on how they will support employees through the menopause."

For more information about the gender pay gap and how UNISON members can work with employers to bridge it, check out UNISON's campaign page and resources at [www.unison.org.uk/bridgethegap](http://www.unison.org.uk/bridgethegap)

As well as reviewing all current workplace policies and risk assessments to consider if they may disadvantage workers experiencing the menopause, negotiations may move to the development of a specific menopause policy.

Raising women's health issues within the workplace will show that women can come to UNISON when they have difficulties.

## Helping women feel supported

Some workplaces such as at Devon and Cornwall Police, have set up workplace menopause single point of contacts (SPOCs) or menopause champions. This is a specially trained contact from within the staff who aims to ensure that any employee suffering from any type of mental or physical distress due to the menopause, are treated with fairness, respect and understanding in order that they feel fully supported.

## Using appropriate language and being sensitive

It's really important for women's health issues, such as those related to the menopause, to be discussed sensitively and confidentially in the workplace, not only with management but with trade union reps and within branches.



Empathy and sympathy is needed, not a patronising or dismissive approach. Responding respectfully is required, not jokey banter that many might find offensive.

Workers experiencing the menopause may themselves feel embarrassed, ashamed, scared – they need someone willing to listen with sympathy and who is able to signpost to practical support.

Some branches have run a women's health day which highlights a range of issues that can affect women in the workplace, not only the menopause. You can also put up leaflets on the issue on the UNISON notice-board.

Having more women safety representatives or stewards also helps. Safety representatives also have a role in ensuring that risk assessments take into account any potential health needs of workers who are experiencing the menopause.

Norfolk and Suffolk Police are an example of a workplace that uses a '**Menopause Passport**'. This one-page document can be used by a member of staff to identify their own symptoms/experiences with the menopause, in order to help them to feel more comfortable at work, request reasonable adjustments or to inform their line manager of the symptoms. It is presented as an option for workers who find it difficult or embarrassing to talk about their menopause symptoms with their line manager. The document can be emailed or brought to a meeting, and is particularly useful if 'hot-desking'.

### More case studies

**UNISON North Wales Health branch** invited a range of public service workers and managers to a conference in 2019, to learn about and discuss how to better support female workers going through the menopause. UNISON convened this special event to bring together employers, trade union representatives and employees. Jan Tomlinson, UNISON North Wales Health branch secretary said, "At some stage every woman will go through the menopause and at such a difficult time in our lives, we need the support of family, friends and our employer.

We are as valuable as men in the workplace and there is a duty on employers to recognise what women

are going through and for reasonable adjustments to working conditions to be made. The conference is about challenging taboos, better educating people about the symptoms and properly supporting women going through the menopause at work."

Members in local government, health, schools and elsewhere across Cambridgeshire and beyond have been expanding their knowledge of all aspects of menopause through an online menopause café run by the **Cambridgeshire County branch**. Launched in January 2022, the café has covered a broad spectrum of menopause issues, including employment rights, exercise, diet, overcoming stereotyping, sex life, HRT and alternative therapies.

"Most training sessions are open to all, including managers and colleagues and relatives or friends wishing to offer support – we believe that menopause is an issue for everyone," says branch education co-ordinator and union learning rep (ULR) Bess Sayers, who facilitates the café. "But some discussion sessions are only open to people experiencing menopause and menopausal symptoms, including trans people, to allow participants to share stories and offer each other mutual support in a confidential space."

To build on the success of the café, Bess helped draw up a menopause policy for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, where she works as a public transport manager.

With the policy now in place, the authority has paid for Bess and two colleagues to undertake Menopause Champion Training with leading provider Henpicked. The three have already delivered awareness sessions across the CPCA and are planning more this year.

In 2022, Scotland's colleges launched a national menopause policy in a bid to improve the support offered to colleagues. The policy, which has been adopted by all 26 colleges in **Scotland**, was drafted by the National Joint Negotiating Committee which includes representatives from colleges, trade unions and College Employers Scotland.

Grace Hepburn, Women's Officer of the **UNISON Scotland Further Education branch** and a department administrator at Forth Valley College, produced the

first draft of the policy. "I'm extremely happy that colleges across Scotland are implementing this policy. We worked hard to ensure it reflects the individual needs of everyone who is impacted by menopause.

Only by raising awareness of the challenges menopause brings – physical, mental and emotional - can we put in place the support structures people need.

Feedback from staff members has shown us that many previously felt unsupported through an incredibly difficult period in their lives.

By ensuring every college is now focused on supporting those who need it most, we can create a more protective and caring working environment which is absolutely what our staff deserve."



## Further information for branches and union reps

### UNISON

'Gender, safety and health: a guide for safety reps'

[www.shop.unison.site/product/gender-safety-and-health-guide-reprint](http://www.shop.unison.site/product/gender-safety-and-health-guide-reprint)

'Women's health and safety: a UNISON guide'

[www.shop.unison.site/product/womens-health-and-safetya-unison-guide](http://www.shop.unison.site/product/womens-health-and-safetya-unison-guide)

#BridgeTheGap gender pay gap campaign page and resources

[www.unison.org.uk/bridgethegap](http://www.unison.org.uk/bridgethegap)

### UNISON Learning and Organising Services (LAOS)

UNISON e-learning – 'Menopause and the Workplace'. A pathway for UNISON stewards, health and safety reps, learning reps and others who want to help people in their workplace who are going through the menopause.

<https://e-learning.unison.org.uk/course/index.php?categoryid=11>

Contact your regional education teams and/or LAOS to find out what training and resources are available to assist you with negotiating with your employer or promoting the issues in this guide with your members.

<https://learning.unison.org.uk>

### Wales TUC Cymru

'The menopause in the workplace: a toolkit for trade unionists'

[www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-workplace-toolkit-trade-unionists-wales-tuc-cymru](http://www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-workplace-toolkit-trade-unionists-wales-tuc-cymru)

'The menopause: a workplace issue – a report of a Wales TUC survey investigating the menopause in the workplace'

[www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc](http://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/menopause-workplace-issue-wales-tuc)

'Menopause awareness in the workplace' course

[www.tuc.org.uk/courses-reps-wales-tuc](http://www.tuc.org.uk/courses-reps-wales-tuc)

'Why is menopause a workplace issue' (interactive guide)

[www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-work](http://www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-work)

### Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)

STUC women's committee 'Menopause & the Workplace' survey, January 2018

[www.stuc.org.uk/resources/menopausereport.pdf](http://www.stuc.org.uk/resources/menopausereport.pdf)

### TUC

Menopause at work

[www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-work](http://www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-work)

'Menopause Support in the Workplace': interactive learning

[www.tuc.org.uk/resource/menopause-support-workplace](http://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/menopause-support-workplace)

### Equality and Human Rights Commission

'Menopause in the workplace: Guidance for employers'

[www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/menopause-workplace-guidance-employers](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/menopause-workplace-guidance-employers)

### Acas

'Menopause at work'

[www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work](http://www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work)

### Labour Relations Agency

'Promoting Equality in Employment for Women Affected by Menopause' developed in partnership with the Equality Commission and Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

[www.lra.org.uk/resources](http://www.lra.org.uk/resources)

### Labour Research Department (LRD)

'Women's health and safety at work: a guide for union reps'

[www.lrdpublications.org.uk](http://www.lrdpublications.org.uk)

### British Standards Institute (BSI)

BS 30416 - Menstruation, Menstrual Health and Menopause in the Workplace  
[www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/insights-and-media/insights/brochures/bs-30416-menstruation-menstrual-health-and-menopause-in-the-workplace](http://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/insights-and-media/insights/brochures/bs-30416-menstruation-menstrual-health-and-menopause-in-the-workplace)

### CIPD

Menopause in the workplace

[www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/menopause-workplace-experiences](http://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/menopause-workplace-experiences)

## **Faculty of Occupational Medicine**

Guidance on menopause and the workplace

[www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause](http://www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause)

## **The NHS**

In the health service sector, trade unions in Wales have worked to implement a workplace menopause policy for use across the NHS in Wales.

[www.nhsconfed.org/publications/nhs-wales-menopause-policy](http://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/nhs-wales-menopause-policy)

In 2022, NHS England signed the Menopause Workplace Pledge.

[www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/menopause-workplace-pledge](http://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/menopause-workplace-pledge)

[www.nhsemployers.org/articles/menopause-and-workplace](http://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/menopause-and-workplace)

[www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/supporting-our-nhs-people-through-menopause-guidance-for-line-managers-and-colleagues](http://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/supporting-our-nhs-people-through-menopause-guidance-for-line-managers-and-colleagues)

NHS Scotland launched their national Menopause and Menstrual Health Workplace Policy in 2023.

[www.wellbeinghub.scot/resource/mmhp](http://www.wellbeinghub.scot/resource/mmhp)

Belfast HSC Trust organised three 'Café Menopause' events in partnership with HR, Ulster University, Regional Menopause Clinic and TU colleagues, to enable staff to come together and discuss the menopause openly and share their experiences. A Menopause Toolkit was developed in 2019, in partnership with Business in the Community (NI), for staff and managers to provide additional support.

[www.bitcni.org.uk/programmes/the-menopause-me-digital-toolkit](http://www.bitcni.org.uk/programmes/the-menopause-me-digital-toolkit)



# Putting the case to an employer for a workplace menopause policy

## Do you understand your workforce?

How much does this issue potentially impact on the employees?

Show the breakdown of employees in age and gender and get in touch with Occupational Health if used in the workplace to get their feedback on how widespread they have found the issue.

For negotiations, Jo Gauden (Admin/Caseworker at **UNISON Newport City**, Borough Councillor in Torfaen and UNISON activist) recommends a data crunching exercise, looking at how many women are in the workforce and the age groups. This may help provide the evidence to show how large a proportion of the workforce is potentially affected, not only now but in the long-term. Introducing a workplace menopause policy is one way that employers can show they not only support current employees but also aim to “future-proof the workforce’s wellbeing.”

Confidential staff surveys can help to bolster any data crunching exercise. An example workplace survey is provided on page 30.

## You have a social responsibility

All employers are expected to promote and support diversity in the workplace – that’s a given. But how is it achieved in practice? Valuing and supporting individuals in the workplace should also take account of women experiencing the menopause.

Employers could lead the way in removing any old-fashioned stigmas about the menopause and treat it sympathetically as they would any other illness, condition or impairment.

The BS 30416 Menstruation, Menstrual Health and Menopause in the Workplace standard suggests “creating an inclusive culture that takes into account menstruation, menstrual health conditions and peri/menopause not only involves celebrating diversity of experience, but also openly challenging cultural prejudice and stigma that can negatively impact or undermine the value and contribution of

employees. Shaming, bullying, blaming, joking, dismissing, problematizing, disbelieving or pathologizing menstrual or peri/menopause experiences should not be tolerated in the workplace.”

## You should address the gender pay gap

Every woman of working age will experience some health related, physical and/or psychological, implications of being a woman. This occurs across the life-cycle from periods to menopause. It is important that women’s specific health concerns such as the menopause are understood and supported during their working life to avoid them also feeding into women’s lack of progression.

Reviewing all current policies as well as developing a workplace menopause policy could help to close the gender pay gap, by ensuring women don’t feel they have to reduce their hours or leave their jobs because of their symptoms.

Under the Employment Rights Bill, [the UK government has announced](#) that “large employers will also be required to produce action plans on how to address their gender pay gaps and on how they will support employees through the menopause.”

## You could lose an experienced workforce

Evidence shows that some workers experiencing the menopause who are unable to agree changes in working practice, or to work flexibly, or reduce their hours might struggle – hence the number of experienced workers who feel they have no alternative but to leave their jobs purely as a consequence of their menopause symptoms.

As identified by the [House of Commons Library](#) in 2024, the proportion of women in public sector roles has increased in the past decades. For example, the most recent statistics show that 76% of NHS workers were women. And the [Local Government Association \(LGA\)](#) states that women make up three-quarters of the local government workforce in England and Wales.

However, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) report '[Menopause in the workplace: Employee experiences in 2023](#)', based on a survey of over 2,000 women, found that around one in six people (17%) have considered leaving work due to a lack of support in relation to their menopause symptoms, and a further 6% have left work (Table 1). Having a disability or long-term health condition makes a significant difference, with around one in 12 (8%) women in this situation having left work and a further one in four (24%) considering it (compared with 5% and 14%, respectively, of those without a disability or long-term health condition).

### **A minimal change is required for a positive effect**

Some changes to the workplace might be so minimal as to not place any significant burden on the employer, such as providing a USB desk fan or allowing a flexible working arrangement, especially when bearing in mind that menopause symptoms will eventually go away!

### **It's the law!**

Sex discrimination, age discrimination, disability discrimination and neglecting health and safety requirements by employers are against the law. Ignoring or penalising employees struggling with menopause symptoms at work could mean that employers are breaching legislation and they might end up facing costly tribunal claims.



## The law and the menopause

*“Employers should make sure they have steps, procedures and support in place to help staff affected by the menopause.*

*Having regular conversations with staff and listening to their concerns might help resolve issues early on before any potential legal action is taken.*

*Employers should make sure they know how the menopause relates to the law, including the:*

- *Equality Act 2010, which protects workers against discrimination*
- *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which says an employer must, where reasonably practical, ensure everyone’s health, safety and welfare at work.”*

Acas guidance on [‘Menopause and the law’](#)

### The Equality Act

Under the Equality Act 2010 it is unlawful to discriminate against people at work because of a protected characteristic. The protected characteristics include age, disability and sex.

The Equality Act does not apply in Northern Ireland because the implementation of employment and equality laws is devolved. In Northern Ireland, protected characteristics are similarly defined by its anti-discrimination laws, more information at [www.equalityni.org/Legislation](http://www.equalityni.org/Legislation)

Age discrimination is when you are treated differently because of your age. Indirect age discrimination may be the result of a rule or policy which puts people within a certain age group at a disadvantage.

Sex discrimination is when you are treated differently because of your sex. Indirect sex discrimination may happen when an organisation has a particular policy or way of working that applies in the same way to both sexes but which puts a woman at a disadvantage because of her sex unless it can be objectively justified.

Therefore if a woman experiencing the menopause is treated detrimentally because of menopause symptoms and

these are not taken into account within policies or practices, it could potentially give rise to sex and age discrimination.

### Case law

In the case of *Merchant v BT PLC* 2012, the employee was found to have suffered from direct sex discrimination and an unfair dismissal. Ms Merchant was dismissed for poor performance but her manager failed to take into account her menopause symptoms, even though she had given the manager a letter from her GP outlining her impaired concentration. The manager should have investigated her health problems linked to her menopause further but instead he made stereotypical assumptions based on his knowledge of the experience of his wife and a colleague.

The tribunal decided that the manager would never have adopted “this bizarre and irrational approach with other non-female-related conditions” or treated a man suffering from ill-health with comparable symptoms in this way.

In the case of *A v Bonmarche Ltd* 2020 the employee alleged that her store manager discriminated against her for being a woman of menopausal age, frequently making disparaging comments about her and treating her less favourably than other staff. The Tribunal held that Ms A had been subject to a lengthy course of harassment and abuse by her line manager in relation to being menopausal.

Under the Equality Act, a disabled person is defined as someone who has a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers, where failure to do so would place the disabled worker at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled workers. They must not treat employees less favourably than others as a result of a disability.

In some circumstances, menopause symptoms may meet the Equality Act definition of disability.

## Case law

In the case of *Davies v Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service*, the employee was found to be unfairly dismissed and to have suffered from disability discrimination. The tribunal considered that Ms Davies was disabled as defined by the Equality Act because of the substantial and long-term menopause symptoms which caused memory loss and confusion.

A mix-up occurred at work about whether her medication had been added to a jug of water or not. The workplace disciplinary panel decided that she had deliberately misled them and she was dismissed for gross misconduct. This dismissal meant that the employee was treated unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of her disability i.e. the menopause symptoms. The employment tribunal found that the action of dismissal was not justified.

## The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Duty was also created by the Equality Act 2010 covering public sector employers (similar obligations are in force in Northern Ireland under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998). The general equality duty means that public sector employers must give 'due regard' to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, which involves:
  - removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
  - taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
  - encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The protected groups are those as defined within the Equality Act, so clearly the issue of women experiencing the menopause is included within the duty.

One of the ways in which an organisation can show that it has given 'due regard' to these issues, is to carry out an equality impact assessment (EIA) of both external policies affecting service users, customers and clients and internal policies affecting the employees.

## Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Act requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. The Regulations require employers to assess the risks of ill health (including stress-related conditions) arising from work-related activities, ensuring that the hazards are removed or proper control measures are put in place to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practical.

Therefore, employers should include the consideration of specific risks for workers experiencing the menopause.



## Checklist for branches and reps

- Does the employer appreciate the potential scale of the issue within their particular workforce? Have the trade union reps undertaken a workplace survey?
- Is the employer aware of the potential gender pay gap implications through practices that do not take account of health issues caused by menopause symptoms?
- Do both the employer and trade union reps encourage an environment of openness and transparency where everyone can talk about gender-specific conditions such as the menopause?
- Do managers promote the use of appropriate language, sensitivity and confidentiality when referring to women's health issues such as related to the menopause, and are offensive banter and ridicule clearly outlawed in the workplace?
- Do managers understand how the menopause can also affect some younger women? Some transgender, non-binary and intersex people?
- Do UNISON branch and workplace reps help raise awareness and a sympathetic understanding about the menopause and the potential impact of symptoms in the workplace?
- Do they create an environment where workers experiencing the menopause feel comfortable to discuss the issues?
- Are staff encouraged to raise issues of concern about difficult symptoms related to the menopause with their line managers, and do the line managers feel informed and confident enough to have supportive conversations with the employees?
- Do line managers receive training to be aware of menopause symptoms and other gender-specific health conditions and the type of adjustments that may be necessary to support women at work?
- Similarly, do UNISON branch officers and workplace reps receive awareness training?
- Is there a wider occupational health awareness campaign so that everyone knows that the employer has a positive attitude to the issues?
- If staff are unable to speak to their line manager is there someone else who is appropriately trained, able to support them in the workplace empathetically and practically?
- Are all existing policies and practices fully equality-proofed, taking into account the issues and potential barriers affecting workers experiencing the menopause?
- Does this also include consideration of the additional barriers encountered by disabled women, Black women and LGBT+ workers experiencing the menopause?
- Do performance management processes fully take into account that the menopause is an occupational health issue and do not unfairly penalise workers experiencing the menopause?
- Are sickness absence procedures sufficiently flexible so as not to penalise women taking time off for gender-specific health conditions?
- Do sickness absence procedures specifically highlight the menopause as a potential long-term fluctuating health condition?
- Do return to work interviews consider if a range of symptoms could be related to the menopause and are managers trained to deal with this in a supportive and sympathetic way?
- Does the employer provide paid time off for on-going treatments and check-up appointments (such as for HRT treatment) to manage conditions that are not recorded as sick leave?
- Does the flexible working policy clearly state that the symptoms of menopause may require flexible working adjustments and allows for temporary changes in work patterns?
- Are employees reassured that they will not be penalised or suffer a detriment because they request and are granted workplace adjustments or flexible working to deal with symptoms that are not manageable?

- Do health and safety risk assessments consider the specific needs of women as well as some transgender, non-binary and intersex people experiencing the menopause?
- Have stress risk assessments been undertaken and actions to address work related stress implemented?
- Is there a specific workplace menopause policy?
- Does the policy recognise that options for potential adjustments and support in the workplace should be discussed sensitively with individual employees so that adjustments can be specific to the individual and their role?
- Are women and non-binary people as well as men involved in relevant decision-making bodies and in monitoring and reviewing of related processes?
- Are staff allowed opportunities to meet up informally with colleagues experiencing similar issues such as through a menopause café?
- Does the organisation have access to occupational health services and are these used effectively to support with menopause symptoms?
- Is there easy access to washroom, showers and toilet facilities including when travelling or working in temporary locations?
- Are sanitary products easily available within the workplace?
- Are uniforms made of natural fabrics, ideally with options for layering that can be adjusted, as well as the provision of changing facilities?
- Are workers experiencing the menopause able to easily request extra uniforms if needed?
- Is any time wearing personal protective equipment such as face masks limited?
- Do any dress codes exacerbate certain symptoms for workers experiencing the menopause and if so, can these be adjusted?
- Does the employer make truly flexible working hours and practices available to address periods of time where symptoms are difficult to manage, including opportunities to temporarily adjust shift patterns or hours, ability for home working, options for alternative tasks and duties?
- Does the employer provide quiet areas to work and opportunities for time out from others?

### Practical issues to consider

- Are workers experiencing the menopause able to adjust the temperature or increase ventilation to help with their symptoms e.g. the provision of small desk fans, able to sit near a window or door that opens, able to pop outside as and when needed to cool off, access to well-maintained toilets and rest areas, shower facilities?
- Is there easy access to cold drinking water including off-site venues?
- Is there access to natural light and an ability to adjust artificial light?
- Are there enough breaks during the working day or a flexibility allowed about taking additional breaks?
- Are workers experiencing the menopause able to leave their posts to deal with symptoms at times other than allocated breaks and is there cover available if needed?
- Is there access to a rest room particularly where work requires constant standing or prolonged sitting, or is there access to space to move about for those workers in sedentary roles?
- Are workplace stress and excessive workloads properly addressed?
- Does the employer provide access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes?
- Is there a knowledgeable and confidential workplace point of contact that a woman or non-binary person can go to particularly if their line manager is male?
- Is there a wellbeing champion or menopause champion identified in the workplace that staff can talk to in private?



## Model workplace survey on the menopause

By completing this survey, you will assist your trade union representatives in providing information to the employer about the issue of how the menopause symptoms of some members of staff can impact on their health and wellbeing in the workplace.

UNISON recognises that the transitional time before, during and after the menopause can affect some trans, non-binary and intersex people as well as women.

The survey is completely confidential. All information will be kept anonymous and any details collected that could identify individuals will be treated as confidential and securely stored.

1. Are you experiencing or have you experienced the menopause or perimenopause (the period of time leading up to the menopause)?

YES  NO

If 'NO' please skip straight to question 11.

2. One of the most common symptoms reported during the menopause is fluctuations in body temperature or 'hot flushes', which can be made worse by the workplace environment.

Have you had difficulty regarding an uncomfortable working temperature or poor ventilation in your place of work?

YES  NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES  NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES  NO

3. If your job has a strict policy on breaks, having adequate access to suitable washing and toilet facilities may not always be possible when needed. Have you ever had any difficulty?

YES  NO

NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES  NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES  NO

4. Some people experiencing the menopause have interrupted sleep patterns which result in tiredness, lack of energy and loss of concentration during the day which may have an impact on work. Have you experienced any of these symptoms that have had an impact on work?

YES  NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES  NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES  NO

5. It is sometime possible to experience mood swings, irritability, tearfulness, lowered confidence, feelings of not being able to cope, anxiety and depression during the menopause.

Have you ever experienced any of these symptoms or feelings while at work?

YES  NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES  NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES  NO

6. There are sometimes more physical symptoms associated with the menopause, such as an increase in headaches and/or migraines, aches and joint pains, dry or sore eyes and menstrual problems such as flooding.

Have you ever experienced such symptoms while at work?

YES  NO

If yes, did you make your line manager aware?

YES  NO

If yes, were any solutions recommended?

YES  NO

7. Please tick all things below you have access to in your place of work

a) Unlimited toilet breaks

b) Sanitary bins

c) Sanitary products

d) Access to fans, windows or air conditioning

e) Menopause time off included in workplace sickness policy

f) Women's health policy or a menopause policy

g) Ability to make changes to your working patterns due to the menopause

h) None of the above

8. Would you find it difficult to approach your line manager to discuss your problems at work because of symptoms relating to the menopause?

YES  NO

If YES, what reason would you give for not discussing it with your manager?

a) Opposite sex/male

b) Embarrassment

c) Not sympathetic

d) Ineffective

e) Unapproachable

f) Lack of understanding

g) Other (please describe)

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9. If you have approached a line manager to discuss difficulties at work because of symptoms relating to the menopause, did you receive a positive response?

YES  NO

10. Has your line manager made reasonable adjustments for you, when you have explained you are suffering with a health issue related to the menopause?

YES  NO

NOT APPLICABLE

11. It can be difficult even embarrassing to discuss some personal matters with a manager or supervisor. Do you believe an appropriate designated person should be appointed for women and others experiencing the menopause to talk to at work?

YES  NO

12. Would you support the introduction of (please tick all that apply):

a. a workplace awareness-raising campaign on the issues?

b. a workplace policy on the menopause (if not already in place)?

c. a menopause support group for staff members experiencing the menopause?

d. a menopause support group open to all staff?



# Menopause and the workplace policy

The following policy can be used in the workplace to help support workers experiencing the menopause. Please note that the text in square brackets [...] indicates where you need to complete information specific to your workplace, or else are notes for you to consider in relation to your negotiations.

Please do adapt and develop this policy as appropriate to your workplace.

## Policy Statement

**[Name of employer]** is committed to the wellbeing of staff and in providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.

**[Name of employer]** has a positive attitude to the menopause and recognises that women experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments.

**[Name of employer]** recognises that the menopause symptoms can also affect transgender, non-binary and intersex people. While there is use of the words woman and women in this policy, it is intended for all workers regardless of their gender identity.

This policy does not include specific information for employees who are experiencing symptoms because of hormone treatment whilst undertaking gender transition or affirmation or for intersex and non-binary people. However, this policy will be helpful in considering what support and flexibilities could be given in these circumstances and the further information list, found at the end of this policy, provides links to more details.

**[Name of employer]** is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports workers experiencing the menopause in order 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 managers aware of their responsibility to understand how the perimenopause and 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 greater understanding among all employees about the perimenopause and menopause
- enable workers experiencing the menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs, recognising that this transitional time before, during and after the menopause is a very individual experience and that people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees
- outline support and reasonable adjustments available for staff during this transitional time before, during and after the menopause and ensure that staff are treated according to their circumstances and needs
- help us recruit and retain employees experiencing this transitional time before, during and after the menopause.

This policy is part of **[name of employer]'s** commitment to ensuring the health and safety and wellbeing of all the workforce, and will ensure the workplace does not make the menopause symptoms of employees worse.

This policy is part of **[name of employer]'s** commitment to equality and diversity. We are committed to creating a workplace that respects and values each other's differences, that promotes dignity and combats prejudice, discrimination and harassment. This policy seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance and enhance the reputation of **[name of employer]** as an employer of choice.

*[Name of employer]* 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 is agreed between *[name of employer]* and *[UNISON branch]*. It applies to all full- and part-time employees and workers (including agency and temporary workers) and covers *[all sites/specific sites/ bargaining units as appropriate]*.

This policy is supported by and developed with the trade unions representing the employees.

## Definition of the menopause

(See also the section headed 'Glossary')

The period of time leading up to menopause called perimenopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. For some it will be medically induced. It is when the hormone balance will start to change and the ovaries will gradually begin to produce less oestrogen. Perimenopause can last a number of years.

Women may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms whilst experiencing this transitional time before, during and after the menopause and may often encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms.

Each woman will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and perimenopause and menopause symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well. For example, if the employee is experiencing insomnia and night sweats, their partner may also experience disrupted sleep and fatigue. Employees may also experience relationship or other difficulties at home during this time, as well as having a potential impact on relationships with managers and colleagues.

Some studies suggest that Black women may have more prevalent and severe symptoms.

Disabled women and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions

or even trigger new ones. Menopause symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition.

Some trans men may experience natural menopause symptoms.

Some trans women may experience pseudo-menopause symptoms related to their hormone therapy treatment.

Some non-binary people may experience menopause symptoms.

Some intersex people may also experience menopause, depending on a variety of factors including their sex assigned at birth and their medical treatments.

*[Name of employer]* recognises that for many reasons, peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly.

Menopause 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
- Irregular menstrual cycles
- 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 palpitations, when your heartbeats suddenly become more noticeable
- Sleep difficulties, common during the perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause, and sometimes, as a result of flushes and sweats
- Low mood, irritability, mood swings, increased anxiety, feeling unsettled, low self-esteem, reduced sex drive, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, brain fog, 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, pain and discomfort that can impact on sitting down and driving
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness
- Weight gain and loss of muscle mass
- Headaches and migraines
- Sensitive teeth, painful gums or other mouth problems
- Menopause 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 menopause symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).

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

### Support for employees experiencing the menopause

*[Name of employer]* is committed to a programme of action to make this policy effective and will work with the trade unions to take **positive action** 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.

All staff training will be supported by **awareness campaigns** aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture.

**All policies and procedures should take account of the effects of perimenopause and menopause symptoms and hormone replacement therapy (HRT)** to ensure that employees are not disadvantaged or unfairly penalised as a result of their symptoms, in particular in the implementation of sickness absence, capability, disciplinary and

performance policies.

*[Name of employer]* recognises that some employees experiencing the menopause may find that related symptoms may impact on their health and wellbeing, and we aim to provide as much support as is reasonably practicable for individuals.

*[Name of employer]* recognises that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

*[Name of employer]* recognises that the menopause can greatly impact upon confidence and even bring feelings of loss that may be similar to grief (dependent upon the situation). A person's perceptions around their own value, due to diminished confidence, may also have an impact upon their own future career choices around whether they actively seek to develop, look for progression or promotion.

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 *[name of employer]*'s data protection policy.

**An alternative confidential contact** is available to employees experiencing the menopause should they not feel comfortable discussing their problems with their line manager, (particularly if they are male). This is ..... **[complete as appropriate]**. Employees may also prefer to discuss their problems with an alternative manager, Occupational Health **[if appropriate to your organisation]** and/or a trade union rep.

Managers should make allowances should there be an additional need for sickness absence by employees experiencing the menopause in order to manage their menopause symptoms. Absence will be recorded as related to menopause symptoms and managers will consider such absence as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in absence procedure triggers. Further details can be found in the **'Sickness absence policy and procedure'** **[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]**.

**[Name of employer]** recognises the potential impact of menopause symptoms on performance by employees experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures. Further details can be found in the '**Performance management, capability and disciplinary procedures**' *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policies]*.

**[Name of employer]** will ensure that **gender sensitive risk assessments** are undertaken to consider the specific needs of employees experiencing the menopause and to ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments that may be required.

Common areas in particular to consider are:

- workplace temperature and ventilation
- access to adequate toilet and washing facilities
- access to drinking water
- uniforms and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- working times and break times
- workplace stress
- excessive workload
- unsympathetic line management/colleagues
- bullying and harassment.

Further details can be found in the '**Health and safety policy and procedure**' *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]*.

**[Name of employer]**, working with the trade unions, will develop a **menopause action and support group in the workplace** where employees affected by this transitional time before, during and after the menopause directly or indirectly, can share knowledge and information, gain peer support and review workplace policies and procedures that may have an impact on staff experiencing the menopause. The group is organised by ..... *[complete as appropriate, and signpost to further information.]*

Employees who are experiencing this transitional time before, during and after the menopause can apply for 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
- Where uniforms are provided, to use natural fibres wherever possible
- Flexibility over uniform and dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating, and provision of additional spare uniforms
- Changing/washing facilities for staff to change clothes during the working day
- For employees who are required to drive as part of their usual work pattern, duration of travel to be reduced and increased rest breaks provided
- Flexible working arrangements including options for flexitime (to work around symptoms or adjusting start and finish times for example), shift-swapping, and homeworking etc., more details to be found in the '**Flexible working policy and procedure**' at *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]*
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day, and if required providing cover as necessary for these breaks
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments, more details to be found in the '**Time off for medical appointments policy**' at *[include a link or signpost to the appropriate policy]*
- Flexibility to remain allocated to one task or switch to different tasks on days when the employee is struggling with difficult symptoms
- Temporary changes to the employee's duties, such as undertaking fewer high-visibility work like formal presentations or meetings or on reception 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 particular points of the day

- Temporary changes to work allocation in consultation with the employee, to ensure that the type and volume of work is appropriate
- Provision of private spaces for women to rest temporarily, to talk with a colleague or to phone for personal or professional support.

(For further advice on adjustments available contact HR).

This is not a definitive list of adjustments. **[Name of employer]**, working with the trade unions, will consider additional suggestions put forward by members of staff, union reps and the menopause support group.

**[Name of employer]** will provide temporary staff cover wherever possible, where there is a lengthy absence related to menopause symptoms.

Confidential support is available for individual employees from the **employee assistance programme** and this may include counselling if appropriate, in addition to practical information and advice. **[include a link or signpost to further information.]**

### Responsibilities of managers

Managers should ensure that all employees are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer's responsibilities. Training on women's health issues including the perimenopause and menopause will be provided to all managers. This will also include any specific issues for Black women, disabled women and trans, non-binary and intersex employees.

Managers (with the support of HR where requested) should encourage employees to discuss the impact of their menopause symptoms on their work-life and encourage them to access the support and adjustments offered. They should promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues.

Managers should be ready and willing to have open discussions about the menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treat the discussion sensitively, confidentially

and professionally. However, they should respect an employee's right not to discuss personal issues. The employee may be more comfortable talking to an alternative confidential contact (see above), a colleague, another manager, Occupational Health **[if appropriate to your organisation]** and/or trade union representative.

Managers are encouraged to be aware of the potential impact of the menopause on employees' self-esteem within the workplace and consider how, like every member of their team, they can support a person's confidence in order to fulfil their potential.

Managers should recognise that employees going through early menopause may also be dealing with different challenges such as fertility treatment or not being able to have children, which may mean it is more difficult to talk about their experiences.

Managers are not expected to be an expert when discussing the menopause but they should have an understanding of what the menopause is, the symptoms and what support can be provided to employees.

Managers will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing the menopause. Managers will put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner, including addressing any work-related stress caused by managing symptoms, and carry out follow up meetings to review all adjustments that have been made. All employees must be treated fairly and consistently. Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they take up any support available to employees experiencing the menopause.

**[Name of employer]** will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality.

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

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

## Responsibilities of employees

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

Employees are encouraged to inform their manager (or the alternative contact, should they not feel comfortable speaking to their manager) if they are struggling with perimenopause and menopause symptoms and need any support, so that they can continue to be effective in their jobs.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to seek support through their GP, the employee assistance programme and other external organisations (see sections below headed 'Self-management for staff experiencing the menopause' and 'Further Information') as well as participating in the menopause action and support group.

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

Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause.

If an employee is found to have harassed, victimised or discriminated against another employee in relation to the menopause, then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

## Trade union involvement

Consultation will take place with the recognised trade union on the implementation, development, monitoring and review of this policy.

Union reps will be given training equal to that of managers and supervisors and sufficient time to carry out their duties.

## Review and monitoring

*[Name of employer]* will ensure that all new employees, supervisors and managers will receive induction on the policy.

Adequate resources will be made available to fulfil the aims of this policy. The policy will be widely promoted,

and copies will be freely available and displayed in *[name of employer]'s* offices and through the staff intranet *[amend as appropriate to your workplace]*.

This policy will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

The recommendations of the menopause action and support group on how working conditions, practices and policies may impact on staff experiencing the menopause, will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

The purpose of this monitoring and review is to identify where reasonable adjustments can be made to working conditions, practices and policies in order to make this policy effective.

## Glossary

**Menopause** – a natural transition stage in most women's lives and in some trans, non-binary and intersex people's lives lasting from four to eight years, although for some people, it can be much longer. Most women experience the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

**Early menopause** – the permanent cessation of periods between the age of 40 and 45.

**Premature menopause** – for some people, the menopause can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is sometimes called **premature ovarian insufficiency**. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause before the age of 40, and a smaller number before the age of 30. However, it can affect women who are still in their teens and 20s as well as in their 30s, or early 40s. Sometimes there is no clear cause for premature menopause. In some cases, it can happen as a result of treatment, illness or surgically induced.

**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 woman's ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy.

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

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

**Black person** – here the term is used (with a capital B) in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK with a shared history, who have suffered from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today's society.

**Disabled person** – under the Equality Act, a disabled person has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. In some cases, menopause symptoms may meet the definition of 'impairment'.

**Trans man** – person who identifies as male but was assigned female at birth.

**Trans woman** – person who identifies as female but was assigned male at birth.

**Non-binary** – people who do not think of themselves as simply male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither or something entirely different. Their gender identity is more complicated.

**Intersex** – People born with intersex bodies/variations of sex characteristics do not always fit society's perception of male or female bodies.

## Self-management for staff experiencing the menopause

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged not to suffer in silence.

Consider:

- Seeking medical advice from your GP
- Discussing symptoms with your manager or with the alternative contact (see above) and with your trade union rep and requesting appropriate workplace adjustments
- Discussing symptoms with Occupational Health *[if appropriate for your organisation]*
- Contacting the employee assistance programme.

Employees are also encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:

- Eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight
- Drinking plenty of water
- Exercising regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels
- Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke
- Ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes
- Having access to natural light
- Staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats
- Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi)
- Trying vaginal lubricant or moisturiser – available from shops and pharmacies for anyone experiencing vaginal dryness.

## Further information

Workplace alternative contact details.....  
*[complete as appropriate]*

Workplace menopause support and  
action group – contact .....  
*[complete as appropriate]*

### NHS information

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause)

### NICE guidelines on ‘Menopause: diagnosis and treatment’

[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23)

### Menopause Matters

[www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)

### Women’s Health Concern

[www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)

### Daisy Network

[www.daisynetwork.org](http://www.daisynetwork.org)

### The Menopause Exchange

[www.menopause-exchange.co.uk](http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk)

### Queer/ LGBTQIA+ Menopause

[www.queermenopause.com](http://www.queermenopause.com)

### Black Women in Menopause

[www.blackhealthandbeyond.co.uk/gallery/  
blackwomeninmenopause](http://www.blackhealthandbeyond.co.uk/gallery/blackwomeninmenopause)

## Signatories

This agreement is made between *[name of  
the employer]* and UNISON, a registered  
trade union.

This agreement comes into force on:

DATE .....

This agreement will be reviewed on:

DATE .....

SIGNED .....  
for *[name of the employer]*

DATE .....

SIGNED ..... for UNISON

DATE .....

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at [joinunison.org](https://joinunison.org), or call **0800 171 2194**.

