

Policy

Menopause

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1. Scope

This policy applies to all staff (employees, workers, trainees, secondees, volunteers, non-executive Directors and those undertaking research work) of Thanet Health CIC, in line with the organisation's **Equality Inclusion and Diversity Policy**.

This policy must be applied fairly and consistently.

2. Purpose

The emphasis of this policy is on supporting staff who are going through the menopause and helping the organisation understand its legal obligation in relation to offering that support.

The policy aims to assist in creating an open and friendly workplace where menopause is normalised, acknowledged and accepted at all levels and staff experiencing symptoms feel comfortable discussing any associated issues.

This policy further aims to provide guidance and information for all staff on the potential impacts of the menopause in the workplace.

Anyone can be affected by hormonal changes during their lives for a number of reasons including pregnancy, fertility treatment, gender transitioning, conditions requiring hormone

treatment and the menopause. These can bring about symptoms which could affect any of your colleagues.

Menopause is a normal transition of life, and it is not something that should be considered 'taboo' or off-limits as a topic of conversation. All staff should feel comfortable and supported at work. Menopause and perimenopause are very personal experiences and will differ from person to person. Symptoms will fluctuate and may not always be visible.

By having conversations regarding the menopause, its impact at the individual level and the personal challenges it may present in the workplace, progress can be made towards furthering an inclusive organisational culture.

Good menopause care has both direct and indirect impacts on workforce retention, productivity, presenteeism and absenteeism. Ensuring staff receive the support they need is an important part of reducing the impact on their general health and wellbeing, and their effectiveness at work.

3. Responsibilities

The Directors of Thanet Health CIC hold ultimate responsibility and accountability for the health, safety and well-being of all staff, including any risks associated with the menopause.

Line managers must be aware of the contents of this policy and use it to support staff who may be, or are, experiencing menopausal changes or symptoms.

All staff must be aware of this policy and are expected to help and support colleagues going through the menopause.

The HR Department is responsible for signposting managers and other staff, to advice in the management of menopause in the workplace, and the general promoting of positive health and wellbeing.

Menopause Advocates / Champions may be identified to promote menopause awareness throughout the organisation and provide support and advice to staff and line managers.

4. Definitions

Early Menopause: Menopause happening between the ages of 40 up to 45.

Menopause: From the Greek: 'Menos' meaning monthly and 'pause' meaning cessation. Menopause is when periods stop due to lower hormone levels. This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55 (the average age is 51) but for some it can be earlier or later. Family history, surgery, medical conditions and medical treatments can affect the age menopause occurs. Menopause is reached when there has not been a period for 12 consecutive months, except those having a medically induced menopause and those with

hormonal contraception stopping their period. Menopause is a biological stage that can be experienced by a woman, trans-man or non-binary person.

Perimenopause: The time leading up to the menopause when ovulation cycles and periods can be irregular, continuing until 12 months after the final period. Perimenopause usually begins during the mid-40's, although it can start earlier and extends until 12 months after the final period.

Post Menopause: This is the time after menopause (12 consecutive months without a period). Symptoms of menopause may continue and may require ongoing support.

Premature Menopause: When menopause occurs under the age of 40, it is termed premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI).

Menopause Transition: Refers to the stages of perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause.

5. Symptoms

The symptoms of menopause can vary from person to person and to varying degrees of severity. In some cases, individuals can be symptom free.

Everyone is unique and so it is important that consideration is given to each individual without generalisation or bias.

Physical symptoms can include, but are not limited to:

- Hot flushes / night sweats
- Insomnia / poor sleep
- Fatigue
- Poor Concentration
- Headaches
- Skin irritation
- Urinary problems
- Palpitations
- Muscle and joint pain

Psychological symptoms resulting from the above or as an extension of the hormone imbalance, can include, but are not limited to:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Mood swings
- Irritability

- Problems with memory
- Loss of confidence / poor self esteem
- Poor self-image
- Suicidal ideation

It is also commonly acknowledged that Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), medication which is often prescribed for menopause, can have side effects which cause problems at work. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Leg cramps
- Bloating
- Breast tenderness

6. Impact at Work

The impact of these symptoms on self-confidence, mental health and relationships with others will clearly have an impact, not only on life outside of work, but also on working life.

Studies have shown that menopause symptoms have a mostly negative impact on the working lives of people transitioning through the process.

Issues encountered include:

- Being less able to concentrate
- Experiencing more stress
- Becoming less patient with colleagues
- Feeling less physically able to carry out work tasks

7. Employer's Legal Obligations

Under the Equality Act 2010, staff are protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of protected characteristics including disability, age and sex.

While menopause is not a specific characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, if any staff member is disadvantaged and treated less favourably in any way because of their menopause symptoms, this could be viewed as discrimination if related to a protected characteristic such as disability, age, sex or gender reassignment.

If menopause symptoms have a long term and substantial impact on a staff member's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, these symptoms could be considered a disability. If

menopause symptoms amount to a disability, an employer will be under a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments.

Additionally, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that an employer must, where reasonably practical, ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare at work.

8. Reasonable Adjustments

Simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure menopause does not become a barrier to performance. Flexibility is the key.

Certain aspects of a role or workplace can represent a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. Line managers have a responsibility to consider, and put in place, reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible, to enable anyone experiencing symptoms to carry on performing in their role.

A confidential two-way discussion should be held with the person experiencing the symptoms, to identify any specific issues.

It may be necessary to involve a relevant expert, such as an Occupational Health practitioner, to help identify appropriate adjustments that can be implemented.

If the person experiencing symptoms is under the care of their General Practitioner (GP) or healthcare professional, they may be able to suggest potential adjustments to them, for discussion in the workplace.

However, there are a range of simple adjustments that can be made. See **Appendix 1** for a list of common symptoms and suggested adjustments.

Adjustments made for an individual must be agreed, recorded and reviewed at least annually, but regular discussions with the person are recommended as symptoms can fluctuate.

9. Conversations About Menopause

It is understood that many people experiencing menopause symptoms may feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss them due to their sensitive, personal and intimate nature.

The easier you make it for someone to open up, the easier it is to identify the support they need.

In developing a positive work environment, Thanet Health CIC aims to assure staff that menopause is not an issue that needs to be hidden. All staff should feel able to discuss it without hesitancy or fear of embarrassment.

Staff members are under no obligation to disclose that they are experiencing symptoms of menopause, but should they choose to do so, they can be confident they will be listened to, understood and supported.

If someone wishes to discuss their symptoms and any concerns they have but does not feel comfortable talking with their line manager, for any reason, they should be given the option of talking with someone else, for example the HR Department or a Menopause Advocate if they are in place.

All such conversations will be carried out with empathy in a private and confidential setting where the staff member feels at ease.

As the issues being discussed are of a sensitive nature, the following guidelines may help line managers set the right tone:

- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues cannot walk in and interrupt.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- Speak calmly.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Listen actively and carefully to understand.
- Encourage the staff member to talk.
- Give the staff member ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Be prepared for some silences – be patient.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.

These conversations must be treated as strictly confidential. If the staff member wishes any information about their condition to be shared, their consent must be explicit.

10. Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Staff and the Menopause

Thanet Health CIC recognises that menopausal symptoms identified within this policy can be experienced by transgender, non-binary and intersex staff members.

Transgender, non-binary and intersex staff may experience the menopause either due to age-related hormonal changes or hormone treatments and surgeries.

It is important to acknowledge that some transgender, non-binary and intersex staff may not wish to disclose their menopause symptoms as this may mean disclosing their

transgender or intersex status. It can, therefore, be particularly difficult for these staff members to access support and / or ask for adjustments.

Within each of these groups, people's needs will be different, so it is crucial to listen to people on an individual basis and allow them to take the lead on their conversations and required adjustments.

11. Training

There is no mandatory training in force covering this topic.

However, it is highly recommended that all line managers complete the Menopause Awareness module available via the e-Learning for Healthcare platform:

<https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Component/Details/826366>

12. Supporting Resources

All staff should be aware that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP - run by Health Assured) offers confidential counselling that may be helpful in providing advice and guidance during the menopause.

Details of the EAP are available from the HR Department.

The organisation also has access to a Menopause Champion who can offer support and advice.

There are a number of websites providing information and support, a selection of which are detailed below:

[NHS Menopause Guidance](#)

[NHS Employers Menopause and the Workplace](#)

[The Menopause Explained - Videos by the British Menopause Society](#)

[Menopause Support Pack \(Free Download\)](#)

[Menopause in the Workplace](#)

[Menopause Fact Sheet \(Downloadable and Printable\)](#)

[Menopause at Work: Guide for People Managers \(CIPD\)](#)

Appendix 1 – Common Symptoms and Adjustments

Symptom	Potential Adjustment
Sleep disruption and / or night sweats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise someone may take more short-term absence if they have had a difficult night. • Consider a change to shift patterns or the ability to swap shifts on a temporary basis. • Offer a flexible working arrangement, for example a later start and finish time. • Where possible, ensure employees know they can work from home on an ad hoc basis if they have had a rough night.
Hot flushes and / or daytime sweats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at ways to cool the working environment, for example provide a fan, move a desk close to a window or adjust the air conditioning. • Provide easy access to cold drinking water and washrooms. • Adapt uniforms to improve comfort. • Limit the time wearing personal protective equipment (PPE).
Heavy or irregular periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide easy access to washroom and toilet facilities. • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet. • Be understanding about someone working from home if they have very heavy bleeding. • Make sanitary products available in washrooms. • Make it easy to request extra uniform if needed.
Headaches and fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider temporary adjustment to someone's work duties. • Provide a quiet area to work. • Provide access to a rest room. • Offer easy access to drinking water. • Allow regular breaks and opportunities to take medication.
Muscular aches and bone joint pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules. • Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps.

<p>Psychological issue, for example loss of confidence, poor concentration, anxiety, etc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage staff to discuss concerns at one-to-one meetings with you and / or occupational health. • Discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge. • Address work-related stress by carrying out a stress risk assessment recommended by the HSE. • Signpost to an employee assistance programme or counselling services if available. • Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the office or work area, such as a wellbeing champion. • Allow time, when needed, to have some quiet time or undertake relaxation or mindfulness activities. • Provide access to a quiet space to work or the opportunity to work from home. • Have agreed protected time to catch up with work. • Discuss whether it would be helpful for the staff member to see their GP, if they haven't already, or a menopause specialist.
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