

Oxford Brookes University

Menopause in the Workplace: Good Practice Guidance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Menopause will affect many people at Oxford Brookes either because they experience it themselves or are supporting colleagues. For staff experiencing symptoms it can be a difficult and stressful time as well as a sensitive and personal matter. For the employer it is an employee health and wellbeing issue. This good practice guidance is for employees and managers and focusses on providing support in order to manage menopausal symptoms at work.
- 1.2 Every person's experience of the menopause is different, and therefore we should avoid making generalisations or assumptions. Symptoms can start months or years before periods stop (this time being referred to as perimenopause), and they can persist afterwards. Not everyone will experience the symptoms of menopause but these symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work. Brookes has a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees and therefore commits to ensuring that adjustments and additional support are available to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.
- 1.3 Employees may not initially wish to share details of their menopausal symptoms at work. In addition, those who take time off work because of the menopause may not tell their employer the real reason for their absence. This can be because they feel their symptoms are a private and personal matter or they are wary because they believe that their line manager may not understand or that their disclosure could impact their job security or career development.
- 1.4 We recognise that menopause may be experienced by people of diverse gender identities and occur at different life stages, depending on individual circumstances, health issues and life events. In adopting an inclusive approach this document/guidance uses gender-neutral language to refer to all people who experience menopause.

2. Purpose of this Guidance

- 2.1 To ensure everyone is clear on the University's policy and practices, and support available.
- 2.2 To ensure that staff experiencing menopause symptoms feel confident to discuss it, and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles.
- 2.3 To assure staff that we are a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during this stage in their life.

3. Legislation

3.1 Menopause at work is covered by certain pieces of legislation to protect employees including:

3.2 The **Equality Act 2010** - menopause is largely covered under three protected characteristics: age, sex and disability discrimination.

3.3 The **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** - which provides for safe working, and extends to the working conditions when experiencing menopausal symptoms.

4. Scope of this Guidance

4.1 This guidance is intended for all employees and their managers and is intended to support employees experiencing the symptoms associated with menopause.

5. Guidelines for Good Practice

5.1 Responsibilities

5.1.1 Employees

All staff are responsible for:

- Taking personal responsibility to look after their health;
- Being honest in conversations with line managers/people managers and Occupational Health;
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment;
- Respecting confidentiality and being supportive of any adjustments their colleague is receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

5.1.2 Line Managers

All Line Managers should:

- Familiarise themselves with these guidelines for good practice;
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, treating the discussion sensitively and professionally;
- Agree with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required;
- Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented;
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates;
- Ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager may:

- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice (see below); or
- Refer the employee to Brookes Employee Assistance Programme (see below);
- Review Occupational Health advice and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical;
- Discuss further with the link People Manager and the employee if necessary.

6. Medical Support

6.1 We recommend that staff experiencing menopausal symptoms that are impacting their home/work life speak with their GP to ensure that they are being supported. There is good advice on when and how staff can discuss any symptoms they are feeling with their GP on henpicked.net in the menopause advice sheet. It may also be helpful to read the [NICE guidelines](#) for people experiencing the menopause. These guidelines summarise what treatment and support are available through the NHS. For information on how to take time off for doctors' appointments please see [Special Leave and Other Leave Policy](#).

7. Workplace Advice and Reasonable Adjustments

7.1 Workplace Advice

Staff currently experiencing menopause may wish to consider guidance from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians which suggests the following:

- Find out more about the menopause from available sources of information;
- See your GP for advice on available treatment options;
- Discuss practical needs with line managers, people managers, or another senior person;
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note-taking;
- Talk about symptoms and solutions with colleagues to work out your preferred coping strategies and working patterns;
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drinks), especially before presentations or meetings;
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and other potentially helpful techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy to reduce the impact of some symptoms;
- Consider lifestyle changes such as nutrition, smoking cessation and exercise.

7.2 Reasonable Adjustments

These will depend on what support the individual is looking for, which in turn usually depends on what symptoms they are experiencing. It is important to bear in mind that symptoms can change over time - and so the required support will also change. Therefore, follow-up meetings are recommended to regularly reassess adjustments. It is also worth pointing out that these adjustments are often only needed in the short term.

These could include:

- Providing temperature control for the work area, such as a fan on the person's desk, enabling them to move near to a window, or away from a heat source;
- Adapting prescribed clothing, such as permitting the removal of a lab coat when not needed;
- Ensuring easy access to washroom/shower/changing facilities;
- Ensuring storage space is available for a change of clothing;
- Offering noise-reducing headphones to wear in open-plan offices and workspaces;
- Allowing short breaks in long meetings and ensuring regular breaks from workstations;

- Agreeing to [flexible working](#).

7.3 Employees should discuss any adjustments with their line manager. If a member of staff is unable to speak to their line manager, or if their line manager is not supporting them, they can speak to their link People Manager or a Trade Union representative.

8. **Brookes Support**

8.1 [Occupational Health](#): If adjustments to the working environment or practices may be necessary, a referral to the Occupational Health Service might be appropriate. Staff are able to self-refer to Occupational Health.

When staff are referred to Occupational Health they will carry out a holistic assessment in order to determine whether or not menopause may be contributing to symptoms or impacting on wellbeing. Advice and guidance will be given in line with up-to-date research. They will provide support and advice to link People Managers and line managers in determining and agreeing on reasonable adjustments if required. They will signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice where appropriate.

8.2 Staff may also ask their managers to refer them to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) for support or access the programme directly.

8.3 Individuals can visit the [Menopause at Oxford Brookes googlesite](#) and may wish to join the **Staff Connect Menopause Google Space** (Menopause Talk Point), a self-run Chat forum sharing experiences, information and offering support for each other. Please contact Maxine Fletcher to join (mfletcher@brookes.ac.uk).

8.4 Individuals might also wish to participate in one of the network of **Menopause Cafes**. Oxford Brookes hosts a monthly online Cafe, details of which can be found via [Menopausecafe.net](#).

8.5 Staff may wish to consider other support such as the mindfulness sessions offered by the [Chaplaincy](#) or consider [Brookes sports](#) for various exercise activities. Skill Boosters offer a number of videos discussing the menopause which Brookes staff can find on the [Athena Swan Menopause page](#) and an e-learning course within the [Brookes EDI Course Suite](#) on Moodle.

9. **Other Policies and External Resources**

[Flexible working](#) - It might be relevant to consider an adjustment to working patterns on a temporary basis. Please note that staff in professional service roles may already have access to flexi-time which can be used.

[Buying additional annual leave](#) – if additional leave might provide a short-term measure to support managing work/life balance, staff can request extra time.

[Career break](#) – some staff might want to consider a break from the work environment for a period of time.

Resources for further help and support for employees and managers

- [Menopause at Oxford Brookes University](#) - google site developed and curated by HLS Athena Swan Menopause Group
- [Menopause Matters](#) - provides information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options
- [The Daisy Network](#) - which provides support for women experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency
- [The British Menopause Society](#)
- [British Menopause Society recognised menopause specialists](#) (NHS and Private)
- [British Menopause Society videos](#)
- [Menopause in the Workplace](#)
- [Menopause Support Network](#) (on Facebook)
- [NICE Guidelines on Menopause Care](#)
- [Forget 'menopause' and recognise your prime at mid-life](#)
- [Advance HE Menopause Awareness Guidance](#)
- [ACAS: Menopause at Work](#)
- [CIPD Menopause at Work Guidance for Line Managers](#)
- [Black Women in Menopause](#)
- [Rock My Menopause - Transgender Health page](#)
- [Queer Menopause - Resources](#)

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