

Workplace Menopause Policy

Version: 1

14th May 2019

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Torfaen County Borough Council recognises that female employees may need support during the menopause, particularly as the menopause is not a widely discussed subject and can be misunderstood. The Council has a positive attitude to the issue and will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments where necessary to support women experiencing the menopause. It also wants to develop a culture where the menopause is openly recognised and discussed by both male and female colleagues in a respectful and supportive manner.

Some women may find it difficult to discuss the menopause with their Line Manager and may feel that they need to take time off work to deal with their symptoms without disclosing the reason to their Line Manager. This procedure aims to raise awareness about the menopause amongst employees and provides additional guidance to enable employees to understand more about the menopause.

Alongside this policy, the Council will provide training for employees 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. The training will be supported by awareness campaigns also aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture.

Most women go through the menopause, or 'the change' between 48 and 55. The average age of menopause in the UK is 51, but it can happen much earlier. More women, not just older women, are now working through and beyond the menopause.

Menopause, often referred to as 'the change', is not usually associated with the workplace or with workers' health and safety. Although many experience few or no problems around this time, others do. These problems can sometimes arise from the way work and working conditions affect women's health around the menopause.

The particular changes involved only happen to women and affect different women in different ways. Some experience few or no symptoms, others experience mild to severe symptoms. Recognising these changes can help in making the links between workplace health and safety and the problems some women experience working through the menopause.

The effects of the menopause will be considered in any relevant performance and capability performance and capability issues as it is recognised that the physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause and side effects of hormone replacement therapy may have a detrimental impact on women's work performance.

2.0 THE MENOPAUSE

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women. It refers to the time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. This occurs naturally between the ages of 48 and 55. Overall, this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years. When menopause occurs before age 40, it is considered early. Early menopause can be caused by medical treatments, or it can just happen on its own.

The menopause occurs in all women and begins when the ovaries spontaneously fail to produce the hormones oestrogen and progesterone. The resulting low and changing levels of hormones, particularly oestrogen, are thought to be the cause of menopausal symptoms in many women.

Menopause is usually a natural process involving gradual change, sometimes it can be sudden and acute resulting from medical intervention e.g. following a hysterectomy involving removal of a woman's ovaries, or certain cancer treatments.

Some symptoms associated with the menopause include hot flushes, heavy periods, urinary problems, palpitations, night sweats and sleep disturbance, fatigue, poor concentration, poor memory, irritability, mood disturbance, skin irritation, anxiety attacks, aches, pains and dryness of the skin and eyes. Not every woman will experience all of these symptoms and they may not occur continuously.

Menopause is not an illness, but changes in oestrogen levels can result in intermittent symptoms around this time including hot flushes, sweating, increased susceptibility to anxiety, fatigue and stress and sometimes short-term memory problems.

Hormonal changes associated with the menopause can affect a woman's future health as well as her experience of menopausal symptoms. Some women require medical advice and treatment such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). Seeking medical advice about menopause-related symptoms may mean the requirement for time off work to attend medical appointments and/or treatment. HRT can benefit some women (e.g. by helping to reduce risks of osteoporosis in high-risk groups). HRT is not suitable for everyone – medical advice and supervision is essential.

Normally menopause is a natural process involving gradual change, but it can be sudden and acute if it results from medical intervention – for example, hysterectomy or certain cancer treatments. Women who have sudden menopause following serious illness or surgery tend to experience more severe problems than others, and may require treatment and/or post-operative care afterwards to prevent further problems.

Women experiencing the menopause may encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms. Some women find themselves feeling less confident as a result of significant and embarrassing symptoms. Tiredness and night sweats can make women more susceptible to fatigue and stress at work.

Women can be affected in different ways but workplace factors that can make working life difficult for women experiencing the menopause include:

- Lack of suitable risk assessments;
- Lack of awareness of the menopause;
- Lack of management training on women's health issues;
- Poor ventilation and air quality;
- Inadequate access to drinking water;
- Inadequate toilet access and inflexible break times;
- Negative attitudes;
- Unsympathetic line management/colleagues.

3.0 ACCESSING SUPPORT

It is recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and different levels of support may be needed. As with all longstanding health-related conditions, the Council is aware that sympathetic and appropriate support is required from line management to help women deal with the issues arising from the menopause.

Female employees may feel uncomfortable going to their Line Manager if they are experiencing problems, especially if the Line Manager is male. There are other options available such as approaching the Human Resources Department, Occupational Health, or another trusted manager.

The organisation is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make symptoms worse. Adjustments may be necessary to support women who are experiencing the menopause.

1. A risk assessment should be undertaken in order to consider the particular requirements of menopausal women and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments which may be required.
2. Working time arrangements should be flexible enough to ensure they meet the needs of menopausal women, who may at times require access to more flexible working in order to deal with their symptoms, including starting later after difficulties sleeping, needing to leave work suddenly or take more breaks during the day.
3. Consideration should be given to environmental factors. Issues that have been highlighted as useful among the general working population include temperature and ventilation controls, such as the use of fans. Office seating plans could also be reviewed to enable the employee to sit near the window in order for the employee to adjust the temperature of the room accordingly.
4. Consideration should be given regarding access to chilled drinking water and access to adequate workplace sanitary facilities.

5. Uniform may exacerbate symptoms in terms of hot flushes and sweating therefore flexibility may be required to enable employees to cope with these symptoms.
6. Adjustments may be required to the employee's duties as hot flushes can be more difficult to cope with when undertaking high visibility work such as formal presentations and formal meetings for example.

4.0 SELF HELP

Current health promotion advice to women highlights the importance of lifestyle choices before during and after the menopause and the benefits of:

- Eating healthily – research has shown that a balanced diet can help alleviate some symptoms;
- Eating regularly;
- Wearing natural fibres;
- Exercising regularly to maintain aerobic fitness levels;
- Consulting with their GP on the management of the menopause and to ensure that any symptoms are not due to any other causes;
- Contacting Occupational Health about their symptoms in order to obtain advice and support;
- Obtaining support and discussing their symptoms with a trusted manager;
- Drinking plenty of water;
- Not smoking;
- Ensuring alcohol intake is at, or below, recommended levels.
- Having access to natural light
- Getting adequate rest and relaxation

These can help with some symptoms of menopause and may also help reduce the risks of other conditions in later life.

5.0 REVIEW OF THE POLICY

This policy shall be reviewed: -

- (i) annually, or
- (ii) following receipt of new information
- (iii) upon implementation of new agreements which may affect the procedure.

6.0 SOURCES OF FURTHER ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Wales TUC Menopause Toolkit

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-workplace-toolkit-trade-unionists-wales-tuc-cymru>

Menopause Matters

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>

NHS Menopause Guidance

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

The Daisy Network (supporting women who experience premature menopause)

<https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/>

The Hysterectomy Association

<https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk/>