

# Menopause and Perimenopause - UCD Guidance for People Managers



## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to raise awareness of the impact of the menopause on individuals and how you can support them as a people manager. Management has a key role to play in making workplaces inclusive and reducing stigma around menopause. This guide should be read in conjunction with the UCD Menopause (including perimenopause) Policy.

There are currently almost one third of working women/people in the core menopausal age (50-64). With the menopausal and older demographic (50+) increasing, it is crucial for businesses and institutions to step up with policies and procedures to support ageing workforces going into the future. Women are working through perimenopause, menopause and beyond and this can mean managing the demands of work and home life whilst also dealing with sometimes severe symptoms and other issues. Although it is women who experience the physical and psychological symptoms of menopause, it is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home. Some trans and non-binary colleagues also experience menopause. As people managers, we are responsible for our people, their performance and any occupational health and adjustments required. Menopause affects everyone and is not just a women's issue. Getting information about what menopause is, how to respond and how to support our people are critical to break the taboo, retain top talent and create an inclusive, thriving and healthy workplace. It is also important to be aware that whilst it is generally accepted that the menopause affects people between 45 and 60 years of age, it can occur much earlier for some and perimenopausal symptoms can be felt from up to 6 years prior to the onset of menopause.

## 2. Reminder of the Different Types of Menopause

**Menopause** – Menopause is part of the natural ageing process. It refers to the time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. It is triggered by lower levels of oestrogen, which decrease naturally between the ages of 45 and 55. Whilst it is a natural process, it can be brought on earlier by certain things e.g. chemotherapy, hysterectomy. The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of menopausal women experience symptoms, but everyone is different. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees but 99% of women experience at least 1 menopause symptom. Experiencing any of

the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for women as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

On average the menopause lasts 7.4 years. However, others experience symptoms that can last for several years and impact their performance and attendance at work. Some people go through menopause with little impact on their daily life.

**Perimenopause** – the time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen. This typically starts in the age groups of late 30s to early 40s.

**Post-menopause** – this is a biological stage of life when a woman has not had a period for over 12 consecutive months

**Premature menopause** – this occurs before the age of 40 (also known as POI - premature ovarian insufficiency) which may be brought on because of illness or surgery

**Surgical menopause** - follows the removal of one or both ovaries or radiation of the pelvis.

### 3. Some Facts and Stats

#### Ireland

- **570k** menopausal women
- **350k** in the workplace
- One of the faster growing demographics
  
- **50%** of the population will go through menopause and the **other 50%** may be impacted
- **80%** are **unprepared** for menopause
- **66%** know **little or nothing** about menopause
- **79%** rate the information & services for menopause as **very poor / poor**
  
- **90%** said they have symptoms
- **60%** described them as **moderate**
- **30%** described them as **severe**
- Of these women reporting symptoms, **22%** have missed 3+ days from work 'due to their symptoms' with **85%** not feeling they could tell their employer the real reason for time off work.

*12 per cent of women had given up work because of their symptoms, while another 40 per cent had thought about it. Almost 40 per cent had missed work because of their symptoms but felt unable to tell their employer the real reason.*

(Menopause Hub: Employee Survey Oct '21)

### 4. Starting the Conversation

Menopause can affect a person's confidence and it can be very daunting talking to someone. The more supportive and knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms, the less likely that a person will feel embarrassed to approach you and discuss how the menopause is affecting their

health and their work. Awareness about the symptoms and the range of support available in the organisation will also increase your own confidence in discussing the issue.

### Commonly reported (and typically temporary) symptoms of the menopause

- Hot flushes 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. Sweating may be profuse, requiring a wash and change of clothes.
- Heavy and painful periods that can be very tiring and require frequent changes of sanitary wear and need to wash. Some affected may become anaemic.
- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance leading to fatigue.
- Low mood, irritability, anxiety, panic attacks, palpitations (noticeable heartbeats), loss of confidence, tearfulness/feeling emotional, withdrawing.
- Tiredness, poor concentration, and memory problems.
- Frequent or urgent need to pass urine, urinary incontinence or infections such as cystitis.
- Dry and itchy skin, dry eyes.
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
- Weight gain.
- Reduced sex drive.
- Headaches and migraines.
- Hair loss.
- Osteoporosis, where a decrease in strength and density of bones leads to bone thinning.
- Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

There are 40+ symptoms of the menopause - see the Menopause Hub Symptom Checker for a full list <https://www.themenopausehub.ie/useful-resources/symptom-checker>

Some tips for having conversations include:

- ❖ Don't make assumptions about someone's health condition or ask them a direct question as to whether they have menopause symptoms. If you have concerns about someone's wellbeing or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' or 'I've noticed you've been arriving late recently, and I wondered if you're okay?' It's up to the individual to disclose any particular symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.
- ❖ Approach conversations with empathy and try not to be embarrassed by the issue and how the individual is feeling.
- ❖ Regular catch-ups or one-to-ones are an opportunity to start the conversation, which should always be in a private, confidential setting where the employee feels at ease.
- ❖ It's important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issue.
- ❖ Allow adequate time for the discussion to occur; be aware that the employee may feel embarrassed or be noticeably upset and so it may take some time for them to talk openly.
- ❖ If appropriate, explore whether they have attended their GP and if not, recommend the employee takes some professional medical advice via their GP. You can also refer the employee to Occupational Health (OH). Advice can be sought from OH at any time by either party prior to making any workplace adjustments if guidance and medical assistance is required.

- ❖ Agree actions and how to implement them including setting time to review how the arrangement is working in practice once implemented (and follow this up in writing e.g. by email).
- ❖ Agree if other employees should/are required to be informed of the adjustments and by who.
- ❖ Signpost the individuals to supports.

### Examples of Supports and Adjustments

#### Flexible Working Options

- Allowing time to rest and make the time up later
- Permitting occasional home working when symptoms are severe
- Adjusting start and finish times
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks or increased breaks during the working day
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments. Medical appointments are covered under sick leave, however local arrangements, approved by Head of School/Unit, are also accepted. Managers are encouraged to be flexible when approached by individuals who need to attend appointments related to the menopause. Please consult with the HR Partner for guidance on how to respond to requests for time-off.
- Expect to allow regular breaks during meetings, especially longer meetings.

#### Working Environment

- Easy access to adequate toilet and washing facilities, and to chilled drinking water
- Improvements in workplace temperature/humidity and ventilation
- Provision of desk fans
- Review of working locations to enable employees to be near windows (with blinds) or open doors or away from radiators.
- Temporary changes to duties, such as fewer high visibility activities such as presentations, meetings or reception duties (where hot flushes can be harder to manage).
- Supporting employees experiencing challenges with concentration and memory through various means such as recording of meetings (in line with GDPR requirements) and reviewing required tasks and activities.

#### Dress Code Flexibility

- Consideration of clothing and protective equipment required in certain settings e.g. laboratories.
- Use natural fibres where possible, and to offer additional spare sets to support frequent changes.

#### Confidential Support service

- Employee Assistance Service - this is a 24/7 free and confidential support service designed to assist you in dealing more effectively with any personal or work-related problems you might be facing and provides access to mental health and wellbeing supports. The service is operated confidentially by Spectrum.Life, the largest provider of employee health and wellness services in Ireland. can provide employees with 24/7 access to. They empower people to take control of their own mental health and give them the knowledge, tools and support they need to look after it on an ongoing basis.

## 5. Why is it important to address?

- Menopause affects everyone – it is not just an issue for women. Whether experiencing the menopause first hand, or second hand as a colleague or partner, education and information help to break the taboo.
- Supportive empathetic conversations make the difference – managers need to ensure they are equipped to have conversations with their team members and providing an effective framework allows people experiencing menopause to feel supported and valued in the workplace.
- A healthy and inclusive environment and culture is better for everyone. A wide-ranging physical and psychological symptom can feel seriously inhibiting to someone in their career. By providing the right support and communicating openly enables all people – and teams – to perform at their best. Creating an open, honest environment means we can all achieve our full potential at work.
- Mental wellbeing in the workplace depends on many factors. Significant loss in confidence (29%) and motivation at work (40%) can be experienced during the menopause leading to poorly affecting overall wellbeing.
- Retaining our talent – 40% of menopausal women have considered leaving work because of their symptoms further contributing to the overall skills shortage and talent retention crisis. Providing the right support can retain experienced and knowledgeable employees.
- Reduce absenteeism and increase productivity – supporting employees by making simple adjustments can enable them to continue to work thereby reduce absenteeism levels and allowing them to achieve their full potential. A study by Worklife found a potential productivity loss of up to 14 million working days due to menopause.
- It is important that every employee feels valued in the workplace which will help to attract and retain talent including those experiencing the menopause.
- The Law - Statutory equality law does not expressly provide protection for menopause or perimenopause as such. However, women who suffer discrimination in employment that is related directly or indirectly to them having menopausal symptoms may, depending on the specific facts of their cases, be able to seek legal remedies if a tribunal determines that they have suffered unlawful discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sex, disability or age. There have been a number of successful tribunal cases in the UK which provide employers with important lessons in how to support women affected by menopause. A failure to respond to the needs of employees affected by menopausal symptoms could be viewed as direct/indirect sex discrimination and/or a failure to make a reasonable adjustments.

***The University want to ensure that it continues to provide the best supports that it can to employees on their menopause journey and to people managers and as such these documents are iterative. If you have suggestions around further supports that may be of assistance or raising awareness around this topic please contact [edi@ucd.ie](mailto:edi@ucd.ie)***

## 6. Resources and Supports

**Internal**

- HR Partners
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Colleagues
- Employee Assistance Service

### **External**

*The following are links to some external sites that you may find useful. We are aware there is a lot of guidance available, and everyone is different so please use this as a guide only and advise if there are any links that should be added to this list.*

- The Menopause Hub, Ireland's only multidisciplinary menopause clinic  
<https://www.themenopausehub.ie/>
- Symptom Checker – menopause symptoms  
<https://www.themenopausehub.ie/symptom-checker>
- The HSE, Ireland <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/menopause/>
- Newson Health, UK <https://www.newsonhealth.co.uk/resources/>
- The Women's health Concern UK – the consumer arm of The British Menopause Society  
<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>
- The Daisy Network charity, which provides support for women experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency  
<https://www.daisynetwork.org/>