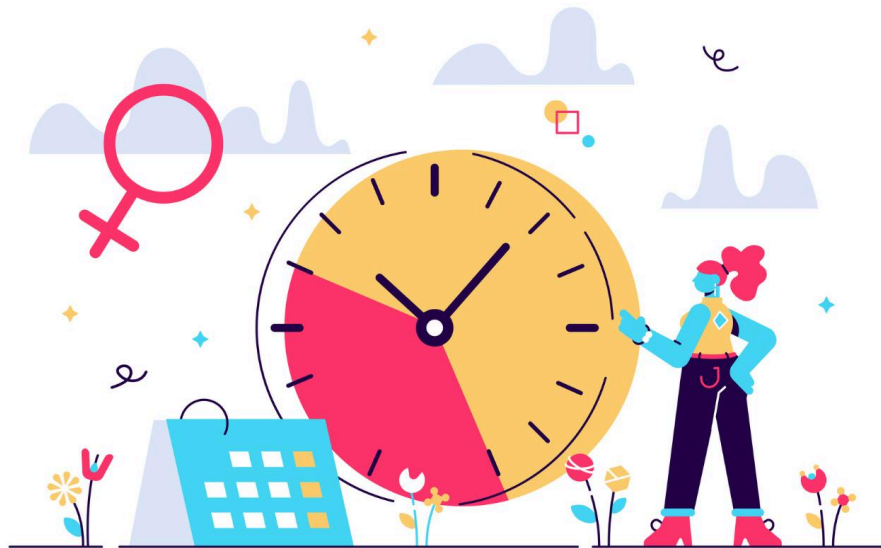




Menopause Policy



The Stour Federation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Stour Federation is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. All staff should be aware.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% - 88% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.

This policy sets out the guidelines for members of staff and managers on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. It is not contractual, and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment.

Any information staff provide the school about their health will be processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy. We recognise that this data is sensitive and will handle it in a confidential manner.

2. AIMS

- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidentially have good conversations, and are clear on the Trust's policy and practices, supported by Human Resources and Occupational Health.
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work.
- Ensure that women suffering with 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.
- Assure women that we are a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.

3. DEFINITIONS

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating, and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons. Menopause can also impact trans and non-binary people who may not identify as female.

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

Symptoms of Menopause

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, skin changes and loss of confidence. Some women also experience difficulty sleeping.

4. THE 'MALE MENOPAUSE'

Some men develop depression, loss of sex drive, erectile dysfunction, and other physical and emotional symptoms when they reach their late 40s to early 50s.

Other symptoms common in men this age are:

- Mood swings and irritability.
- Loss of muscle mass and reduced ability to exercise.
- Fat redistribution, such as developing a large belly or 'man boobs' (gynaecomastia).
- A general lack of enthusiasm or energy.
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia) or increased tiredness.
- Poor concentration and short-term memory.

These symptoms can interfere with everyday life and happiness so it is important to find the underlying cause and work out what can be done to resolve it.

This policy relates to all staff.

5. REIMBURSEMENT OF COST OF DOCTORS' STATEMENTS

Where the Headteacher requires a medical certificate ('Fit Note') from an employee, the employer shall, on provision of a receipt, reimburse the employee if a charge is made for the Fit Note.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health.
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health. (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 HR or their Union rep or Employee Assistance Programme.)
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment.
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues.

- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

The CEO has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. The Headteacher has delegated responsibility for overseeing its implementation in their Trust schools. You should refer any questions you may have about the day-to-day application of this policy to the Headteacher in the first instance.

Headteachers and all line managers should:

- Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Policy and guidance.
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally.
- Use the guidance in the Appendices, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing 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 Headteacher may:

- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice.
- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical.
- Update the action plan and continue to review.
- Speak to the lead person for mental health in the school (e.g. Mental Health First Aider).

Any request for a medical report will be dealt with as set out in the Sickness Absence Policy.

7. SUPPORT AND ADJUSTMENTS

While many who experience menopause are able to carry on their working lives as normal, we recognise that others may benefit from adjustments to their working conditions to mitigate the impact of menopause symptoms on their work.

If you believe that you would benefit from adjustments or other support, you should speak to your Headteacher in the first instance.

Physical adjustments could include temperature control, provision of electric fans or access to rest facilities. Depending on individual and business needs, adjustments such as flexible working may be considered. We may also consider more frequent rest breaks or changes to work allocation. These are examples only and not an exhaustive list.

We may refer you to Occupational Health or seek medical advice from your GP to better understand any adjustments and other support that may help alleviate symptoms affecting you at work. Any request for a medical report or examination will be dealt with as set out in our Sickness Absence Policy.

Employee Assistance Programme

The Stour Federation provides all employees with access to an Employee Assistance Programme. Vita Health Group is The Stour Federation's Employee Wellbeing Support Service.

This is in place to support any emotional and financial challenges and demands on employees. They provide access to information, support, and guidance on a wide range of topics including work/career, relationship/family, money management and debt and health and wellbeing.

There is also a 24/7, easy to access, confidential and free of charge helpline for practical and emotional support. All staff can access this service directly and confidentially without manager involvement.

- Employees can call 0800 1116 387
- Managers can call 0800 1116 385 (for specific management support)

The helpline (only) is also available to dependants. An eligible dependent is:

- Your spouse or domestic partner.
- Unmarried dependants, under 21 years of age, who are dependent upon you for maintenance and support - this includes legally adopted children, stepchildren and children who are dependent upon you by reason of legal guardianship.
- Unmarried dependent child under 25 who is in full-time education (they may live away from home).
- Unmarried dependent child who is incapable of self-sustaining employment because of physical or mental disability, who became disabled prior to age 21.

Go online at www.my-eap.com or the Vita Health Group tile on the staff landing page. The username/organisation code is available from the Headteacher or in weekly email updates.

8. EXTERNAL LINKS

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. You can find out more information by using the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>

News on Health works to improve women's and healthcare professionals' understanding of the menopause:

www.menopausedoctor.co.uk

The **National Health Service** provides an overview of menopause. You can find more at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Menopause Matters provides up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options:

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

The **Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at:

<https://thebms.org.uk/publications/consensus-statements/premature-ovarian-insufficiency/>

Henpicked provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories:

<https://henpicked.net/menopause/>

Appendix 1: Managers' Guidance for Colleague Discussions

We recognise that every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

All advice is given, and written, in accordance with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) recommendations and best practice.

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a male employee wishes to speak about a family member, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation.
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality.
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below) - hand out the Menopause Advice Sheet (Appendix 2).
- Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use the template at Appendix 3 to record the meeting, so that all parties agree what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential, and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom.
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or staff room.

Symptoms Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively; support for women should be considered as detailed below:

Hot Flashes

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source.
- Easy access to drinking water.
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

Heavy/light Periods

- Have permanent access to washroom facilities.
- Ensure sanitary products are available in washrooms in order to obtain personal protection.
- Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.

Headaches

- Have ease of access to fresh drinking water.
- Offer a quiet space to work.
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices.
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Ask to be considered for flexible working, particularly suffering from a lack of sleep.

Low Mood

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.

- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to - outside of the work area.
- Identify a 'time out space' to be able to go to 'clear their head'.

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure there are regular discussions with line managers or access to mental health first aid members of staff.

Poor Concentration

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly.
- Review task allocation and workload.
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment.
- Offer quiet space to work.
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices.
- Reduce interruptions.
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having 'protected time', so that they are not disturbed.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

Anxiety

- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to in work
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk.

Panic Attacks

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' at work.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk.

Discuss whether the member of staff has visited their GP or a Menopause specialist practice nurse. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

If they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make an Occupational Health referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace.

Appendix 2: Menopause Advice Sheet - How to talk to your GP about menopause

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they're getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. But, sometimes, that's easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's often only ten minutes. And talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We've put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait. It is all too common for women to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are really useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.

Prepare for your appointment. It's easier for your doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren't always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, and any changes you've noticed. Write them down, and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it's more likely that together, you'll find the right solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. They are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery, and can help you find the best person to speak to – it might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

Ask for a longer appointment. If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling, and how it's affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. Occasionally, there are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or a friend with you. The chances are, you spend your life supporting others and, during menopause, it's your turn to ask them for support. Your partner, or a friend, will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment, and also find out how they can continue supporting you.

What to expect from your doctor

There are certain things a GP should - and should not - do during your appointment.

They should:

- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms, and your longer-term health.
- Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options.
- Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment.

They should not:

- Tell you that it's just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don't feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help.
- Tell you they don't prescribe HRT. It's up to you what you want to try, and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history.
- Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them.

Remember, your GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.

You can also access counselling from our employee assistance programme.

Appendix 3: Confidential Colleague Discussion - Optional Template

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Employee | Date of Meeting |
| | |
| Present at the meeting (line manager name and position) | |
| | |
| Summary of Discussion | |
| | |
| Agreed Actions/Adjustments and Support | |
| | |
| Date of the next review meeting | |
| | |
| Signed (Member of staff) | |
| | |
| Signed (Manager) | |
| | |