

MENOPAUSE POLICY

Purpose and scope

The company recognises that a proportion of colleagues will be working through and well beyond the menopause. In the UK, it is estimated that around one in three women are either currently going through or have reached the menopause. The menopause affects all women, and it can often indirectly affect their partners, friends, families and colleagues as well.

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women, although it can be brought on as a result of other medical conditions or certain surgical interventions. The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. In the UK, the average age is 51, but it can happen much earlier. Many women experience the menopause before 45 (early menopause), and a significant number of women experience the menopause before the age of 40 (premature menopause).

The purpose of this policy is to inform managers about the menopause, whilst setting out the rights of colleagues experiencing menopausal symptoms and the support available to them.

While symptoms of the menopause vary greatly, they commonly include:

- Psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- Hot flushes – brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest
- Sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- Night sweats – hot flushes that happen during the night
- Irregular periods and/or periods that can become light or heavy
- Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), including cystitis
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Palpitations – heartbeats that become more noticeable
- Skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)

Each of these symptoms can affect your comfort, performance and confidence at work, and as such we have a duty of care to provide a safe, comfortable, supportive and dignified working environment. We are therefore committed to ensuring that adjustments wherever possible and additional support are available to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Advice for managers

If a manager believes, or is informed that, a colleague is experiencing symptoms of the menopause, they should speak to the colleague as soon as possible to discuss what support and adjustments they may need.

Like any health condition, the menopause can be a sensitive and personal issue. Some colleagues may feel able to talk about their experience, but often colleagues might not feel confident talking about it, so a manager starting a conversation may help.

If the colleague has regular one-to-ones, this may be a good time to start a conversation about any concerns. If the colleague does not have regular one-to-ones, the manager should approach the colleague for a wellbeing conversation to gain an understanding of how they are feeling and how they can be supported. It should always be in a private and confidential setting where the colleague feels at ease. Questions should be simple, open and non-judgmental to give the colleague opportunity to explain how they feel in their own words. A good starting point for a manager is the following guide:

- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones and ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt
- Listen actively and carefully
- Actively use playback
- Encourage the colleague to talk
- Show empathy and understanding
- Focus on the person, not the condition
- Avoid trying to guess what symptoms someone might have and how these might affect their ability to do their job
- Ensure the colleague is signposted to where they can get the right help and support

Reasonable adjustments

The company strives to achieve a comfortable working environment and therefore adjustments may be made in relation to your work area and working practices depending on your specific role. The aim is to make you more comfortable at work whilst going through the menopause and removing any barriers and issues you may be experiencing by putting adjustments in place to resolve them, to support you in remaining in work whilst experiencing symptoms.

Line managers should support you wherever possible and should consider that reasonable adjustments can include, but are not limited to:

- more frequent breaks
- providing chilled water
- considering lowering workplace temperatures where possible
- considering office space/locations (e.g. whether you can be seated next to a window)
- providing a desk fan
- flexibility in the company's dress code
- reducing workload at key times
- ensuring you are not working excessively long hours
- rearranging formal meetings or presentations if necessary
- allowing you to switch to different tasks on bad days
- allowing you to work flexible hours, less hours, later starts and/or to work at home, especially on bad days or if sleep is poor
- allowing time off in the day to attend medical appointments

Available support

The company recognises that you may need additional consideration, support and adjustments pre, during and after the menopause and wants to ensure that you feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms.

It is important that if you are asking for support and adjustments in order to continue with your role, that this is treated confidentially, fairly and with dignity and respect. The company aims to facilitate an open, understanding working environment and encourages you to inform your line manager that you are experiencing menopausal symptoms at the earliest stage to ensure that line managers are able to best determine the most appropriate support to give.

If you do not wish to discuss the issue with your direct line manager, you may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with a trusted colleague, another manager or a member of the Human Resources team instead. You can also raise the issue with an occupational health advisor and can request an appointment through the HR team by either emailing sharedservices@afblakemore.co.uk or calling 0121 568 2905.

Support is also available from a Mental Health First Aider, who can be contacted by emailing reachout@afblakemore.co.uk.

The company also offers an Employee Assistance Programme (confidential counselling service) through GroceryAid, which is a national charity that helps people across the whole of the grocery industry – from depot, through the supply chain, to retail store. You can ask for support, regardless of your length of service or where you work. Support is available to colleagues currently working in the business as well as those who have retired.

Contact GroceryAid's free helpline, which is totally confidential and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year round. Helpline phone number: 08088 021 122. Email: welfare@groceryaid.org.uk

If you would like further information about the menopause, you may wish to look at the following websites, using the links provided below.

- [Menopause Matters](#) – which provides information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options
- [The Daisy Network charity](#) – which provides support for women experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency
- [Simply Hormones](#) – Menopause: **A Guide for Men** – information to help men understand more about the menopause, including some “helpful hints”
- [NICE Guidelines](#) – information about menopause, diagnosis and management